

# AESTHETICS AND CHOREOGRAPHY OF BHARATANATYAM

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## Abstract

The word “Aesthetic” in the context of Indian Aesthetics means “Science and philosophy of Fine Art” Bharathe muni wrote the theoretical treatise Natyasastra on Indian performing Arts including theatre, dance acting, and Music. Natyasastra is said to explain Indian aesthetics. Natyasastra is the scientific explanation of classical Indian dances. In this context, Bharatanatyam is also grounded in the principles of the Natyashastra. This research highlights how aesthetic aspects permeate Bharathanatya choreography, which involves designing the dance according to the rhythm of the ragas, along with abhinaya, bhava, and rasa. The choreography of Bharatanatyam is based on body parts and body shape( body proposition) by various elements, including positions (sthāna), hand gestures (mudra), neck movements, eye movements, head movements, karanas, mandalas, and charis. In Bharatanatyam, the body and the shape of the body (including the organs) are the basic source. Beauty is associated with interpretation. Deciphering the symbols means interpretation. The purpose of this study is to explore how aesthetic aspects play an important role in the creation of Bharatanatyam choreography, as Bharatanatyam is an art of both design and creativity this study uses the descriptive research method, observational research method, and qualitative research method. It is descriptive in the sense that it explains the aesthetics of Bharatanatyam choreography and observational since it observes the aesthetic aspects of Bharatanatyam choreography which is method-based. Moreover, the study examines the aesthetic expressions of the performers, who also serve as observers of the art form... When Bharatanatyam is designed with aesthetic aspects in mind, it becomes a powerful and valuable dance form. Systematically, organizing and expressing choreography with these aesthetic elements leads to seamless creativity, effective communication with the audience, relevance for future generations, and the preservation of socio-cultural values.

## Keywords

Aesthetics, Bharatanatyam, Choreography, Creativity, Performance

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## Introduction

### Aesthetics and Bharatanatyam Choreography

This study examines how beauty is woven into choreography and how it should be designed to foster creativity in Bharatanatyam, one of the fine arts. Beauty is associated with interpretation. Deciphering the symbols means interpretation. If we examine how this practice is related to Bharatanatya choreography, Bharatanatyam is not only based on bhava, raga, and tala but also the systematic classical dances of South India, consisting of three sub-divisions, namely Nirutha, Nrithyam and Natyam. Bharatanatyam is a dance form which consists of abhinayam, bhavam and rasam along with the rhythmic patterns of tala of and ragas. It is choreographed by movements of sthana (position), mudra, karana, mandala, Chari etc. In Bharatanatyam, the body and the movement of the body are based on these basic elements. This review aims to explore how aesthetic aspects are related to Bharatanatyam design.

### Purpose of the study

This research delves into the creative analysis of Deep science. F.R. Levi (1962) emphasizes that the beauty of work arises from the creator's creativity. Consequently, this study explores the significant role of aesthetic aspects in the creation of Bharatanatya choreography, highlighting Bharatanatyam as an art form rooted in design and creativity.

### Literature Review

Sabha Jeyarasa's works, 'Aadal Alakiyal' (1999) and 'Thamizar Arihayaum Bharathanadanamum' (2002), provide rich aesthetic insights that have significantly influenced this study. However, Sabha Jeyarasa's research primarily focuses on Bharatanatyam and dance in a broader context. In contrast, this research specifically examines Bharatanatya choreography as a form of artistic design. It aims to explore how aesthetic principles should guide Bharatanatya choreography, emphasizing the importance of aesthetics in formatting Bharatanatya choreography design.

### Research Methodology

This study employs a descriptive research method to elucidate the aesthetics of Bharatanatya choreography, an observational research method to observe aesthetic elements within Bharatanatya choreography, and a qualitative research method to explore the expressive nuances conveyed by performers, who serve as both subjects and observers. Specifically, a qualitative research approach was adopted, emphasizing a performativity methodology. This

visual qualitative approach focuses on three primary areas: first, evaluating the theoretical and conceptual foundations within visual fine arts research; second, adapting public databases for theory development and testing; and finally, utilizing observation and reflective analysis to interpret the gathered data. Materials for this study include primary data such as books, general articles, and published documents, which provide foundational knowledge and theoretical frameworks. An observation and reflection study were conducted for an in-depth analysis of Bharatanatya choreography aesthetics. Recording media, including video clips, DVDs, CDs, and audio recordings, were used to capture and analyze performances, preserving visual and auditory data essential for detailed examination. Secondary data sources, including images and translations, were employed to provide supplementary visual and textual support, complementing the primary data sources in this research.

## Significance of the study

The study's significance lies in its exploration of how integrating aesthetic principles enhances the artistry of Bharatanatya choreography. By incorporating aesthetics, Bharatanatyam achieves completeness, creativity, and perfection in its design. This aspect underscores the art form's cultural and educational value, evident in its inclusion not only in Tamil Nadu but also in Sri Lankan schools and universities. When Bharatanatyam is meticulously structured and aesthetically expressed, it becomes a captivating and culturally enriching art form that resonates with audiences, ensuring its preservation and transmission of socio-cultural values to future generations.

## Analysis and Discussion

This study aims to explain how Bharatanatya choreography is related to aesthetics. Bharata Muni's *Natyasastra* (Kanti Chandra Pandey, 1959) is said to explain Indian aesthetics. *Natyashastra* serves as the comprehensive guide to the knowledge and techniques of classical Indian dances, including Bharatanatyam. This study, however, focuses specifically on how aesthetic aspects intricately influence Bharatanatya choreography.

In 1750, the philosopher Baumgarten was the first to write "Aisthetica research" to develop a philosophical research study of art (Sasivalli.V.C, 1995). The Greek word "Aesthetikos" means perception. Baumgarten expanded on this to form the term "Aesthetics," which examines beauty and ugliness in objects (Krishnaraja, 2008). Western scholar Plato says that form is beauty (Jeyarasa.saba, 1989). Aristotle Says that beauty is created by arranging individual objects according to their properties (Sasivalli.V.C, 1995). Each movement in Bharatanatyam

expresses fundamental human actions such as sitting (Araimandi), spinning, jumping, and walking. Arai mandi, depicted in Figure 1 of Bharatanatyam choreography, symbolizes spiritual significance. It forms a mandala with the body divided into two equal triangles meeting at the navel within a square. The mandala represents the cosmos and serves as a sacred space. By focusing deeply on the mandala, the dancer aims to unite the microcosm with the macrocosm (Sreenivasarao, 2012).



**Figure 1**

On the one hand, the Shiva dance symbolizes unbridled emotions and logical thinking. It is a dance of Siva that had gained importance in Bharatanatyam choreography and Siva's dance plays an important role in the choreography of this particular dance form item (Jeryarasa.Sabha, 1999) such as *sabtam*, *keertana*, *padam*, *padavarnam*, and *tillana*, which consist of songs related to Shiva. As such, the Shiva dance plays an important role in the development of dance aesthetics.

The essence of Shiva dance aesthetics lies in the mastery over turbulent emotions. Shiva's dance embodies a practice where both the visual and conceptual aspects of dance transcend distractions from both viewer and object. In Bharatanatyam, Shiva's dynamic postures (depicted in Figure 2) illustrate his active manifestation in Thiruvilayadal, infused with bhava (emotion), vibhava (circumstance), and anubhava (expression). Hand gestures, or hastas, in Bharatanatyam convey the inner meanings of the song through their movements.



**Figure 2**

In dance, being a movement-centric art form, rhythm plays a crucial role in refining movements. The rhythmic elements are skillfully managed to enhance aesthetic quality. In Bharatanatyam choreography, specific rhythmic patterns such as Jati and Korvais are meticulously differentiated using classical movements and programmed rhythms. These patterns are classified according to their rhythmic structures like Vishama, Sama, Gobhuj, Srothoavaka, Mritanga, and Vedamattima, contributing to the intricate design and elegance of Bharatanatyam.

For example, in the items, Kanda Jaati Alarippu set to Kanda chappu Tala, although this item starts with Kanda Jaati, in the third speed, Tamthitha =, Thei, thathei dei, //

Within the word

Tamthitha = Thei, thathei, //

Takataki = dataka takida //

Takataki = da taka takida // (05)

Takathimi = takathimi taka // (04)

Thimithaka = thimi takidata //

Kida taki = da takida taka // (03)

Takathimi = takatakathimi // (06)

Takataka = thimi takataka //

Thimithaka = thimi takathimi // (04)

Thus, the calculation is maintained, and the scales are used according to the calculations that are different and beautifully designed in Bharatanatyam comprising of bhava, raaga, and tala enhancing the aesthetic experience. A stimulus is an element that prompts rhythmic limb

movements. This concept is also applied in contemporary contexts, such as in raga. It represents an aesthetic that is expressed through imagination.

Dance encompasses various physical, mental, and emotional activities. In Bharatanatyam, **ankika abhinaya** represents physical expression, **sattvika abhinaya** embodies mental aspects, **bhava** conveys emotions, and **anubhava** reflects bodily movements. These elements collectively form the fundamental parameters of Bharatanatyam.

A major feature of dance development is that the dancer takes on various roles and plays them. In Bharatanatyam, the design is done by portraying the Lord as a slave, a companion, a bride, or a child. For example, Sri Andal portrays Vishnu as a husband and Krishna as a child in Krishna's Leelas (Krishna's plays) depicted through dance.

Symbols help to visualize abstract static ideas. Symbols are used to represent difficult-to-visualize material (Less perceptible objects). Cassirer (1954) a researcher who studied symbols, mentioned that symbols are the nucleus of all cultures. According to him, the evolutionary process of “codification” was the change process that caused the creation of human nature. Jeyarasa.Saba (2002) stated that Bharatanatyam conveys notional symbols and emotional symbols. In Bharatanatyam, conceptual symbols are conveyed through hand gestures or mudras. For example, the Tripathaka hasta represents trees and vines. These gestures, along with bedhas (movements), are used to express ideas in choreography, making Bharatanatyam a rich, symbolic art form. Aesthetic knowledge is said to be of three types; namely, (1) Form (2) Intangibility and tangibility (3) the divine platform that is said to transcend the initial two. The concept shape of frame or “decoration”, is used to explain this concept further. At its earliest stage, decoration meant landscape-based beautification according to Saba Jeyarasa, (1999) Bharatanatyam is inherently spiritual and theological in nature. In its aesthetic sense, it often depicts divine forms such as Shiva, Nataraja, Shakti, and Murugan. These divine forms are shaped and choreographed to convey spiritual and theological themes through the dance. In Bharatanatyam choreography, the form of Shiva is depicted with the right hand in a turning gesture and the left hand showing a lion's face. This symbolic representation highlights Shiva's divine attributes and power. Similarly, Bharatanatyam serves as a means of worshipping the invisible form of Shiva with the mind's eye. By focusing the mind and swaying with divine thought, dancers connect deeply with the spiritual essence of Shiva through their performance. Shiva dance plays an important role in the Bharatanatyam structure as it expresses the balance that permeates human movements. The essence of Shiva dance lies in the suppression of wandering emotions, creating a seamless connection between the viewer and the visual object

in both visual and conceptual forms. This plays a crucial role in expressing the aesthetic features of Bharatanatyam's choreography. As an art form that embraces body movement, rhythm holds a prominent place in Bharatanatyam design, enhancing its expressive and aesthetic qualities. In this way, rhythm is prioritized in the design items, korvais, and jati systems in Bharatanatyam design by differentiating castes and programming rhythms and designs with the aesthetic system. Moreover, in Bharatanatyam design, aesthetics depends on the activities of body, mind, emotion, and movement, and in dance, the aesthetics are emerged in the acting (chaladana) and characters, to indicate abstract thoughts.

Symbols are used in aesthetics. In the Bharatanatyam pattern, symbols are expressed through hand gestures, eye (Dhristi), head (Siro), neck (Griva), and Foot movements, and beauty are said to be intangible and tangible. These things show that Bharatanatyam, which is one of the means of worshipping through divine thought, should be designed in a God-conscious manner to concentrate the mind and the forms of God in the form of theology, and that harmony, balance, and individual flourishing are explained as elements of beauty in Bharatanatyam design. As such, beauty is understood as a process of perception. Bharatanatyam design is often interpreted as a perceived process associated with an organized landscape aesthetic. Through this study, the importance of aesthetics in Bharatanatyam choreography is highlighted by the structured stages of Bharatanatyam design, the organized concert system of the performance items, and the aesthetic expression of the spectacle. Harmony, balance, symmetry, individual flourishes, etc. have been described as the beauty of art (Jeyarajah.Saba, 1999) and the beauty of harmonious Bharatanatyam lies in its harmony with music and rhythm. In the item of Padavarna, a balance is achieved through the resolution of nirtha (pure dance) and svarakorvais (rhythmic patterns) with bhava (expression) and sahitya (lyrics) for the abhinaya (expressive) part based on nirthya (dramatic dance). This careful balance ensures that Bharatanatyam is harmoniously designed. Thus, Bharatanatyam is designed to be balanced. Figure 3 demonstrates how balance is maintained in the pose depicted.



**Figure 3**

In Bharatanatyam, symmetry (as shown in Figure 4) involves performing limb movements on the right side that mirror those on the left side. This unique flourish is exemplified in items like Alarippu and Jathiswaram, which are primarily nritta (pure dance) in nature among the repertoire. This symmetry not only emphasizes individual grace but also reflects the artistic flourish of the choreographers of these pieces. Therefore, Bharatanatyam designers carefully consider aesthetic aspects such as harmony, balance, symmetry, and distinctive artistic expressions in their choreography.



**Figure 4**

Knowledge is seen as high-level knowledge and low-level knowledge. Gnana, the higher knowledge, is based on knowledge and experience. Beauty is emphasized as a perceived process constituted as knowledge, experience, and object of perception. Natyashastra explains the basic aspects of Bharatanatyam. Bharatanatyam, presented to its audience, is akin to



nourishing food, offering a sensory experience through performances. The evolution towards perfect aesthetics occurs through the audience's engagement with the process, their experiences of watching performances, and their imaginative reflections. This journey is enriched by knowledge gained from dance literature and understanding of the dance's intricacies, culminating in a refined aesthetic experience.

Organized landscape (*luyaemaiyatiya*) is related to aesthetics, i.e. organized landscape is the result of the processes of differentiation, integration, rational synthesis, etc. In Bharatanatyam, the organization includes *Shastriya Nritya*, which encompasses well-structured compositions for concert settings. These compositions are akin to meticulously organized floors, where differentiated elements are integrated and consolidated into cohesive performances. Through careful observation of these techniques, one can discern the systematic arrangement that leads to the refinement and clarity of Bharatanatyam's aesthetic and technical aspects. These grouped resolutions are formatted as items when grouping requests. It is very common in Bharatanatyam design.

At the same time, there are three elements, *Nritta*, *Ntittiya*, and *Natya*, in Bharathanataym. *Nritta* is the rhythmic movement of the body in dance. It does not set out to express a mood or sentiment or tell a story; therefore, it uses no facial expression. It visualizes gestures of the body and hands through extensive and practiced footwork. *Nritya* is the dance element that suggests *rasa* (sentiment) and *bhava*, is conveyed through facial expressions and appropriate gestures. *Natya* is the dramatic element of stage performance.

Form and content are the two essential elements in a work of art. To create a work of art is to transform the material available in nature into a medium to convey something in the artist's mind. The artist articulates his/her ideas and feelings through objects that become immensely meaningful to an observer. The artist imparts form and content to the medium to compose a meaningful object. The ideas, intentions, feelings, emotions, visions, revelations, and values are all aspects of the artist's mind. When these very subjective elements are objectified, i.e., given an aesthetic form, they become the contents for a work of art. The artist needs a rich imagination to represent the elements in the form of content since what the creator does when creating a work of art gives a concrete perceptual appearance to abstract ideas and suggests something close to these ideas. The contents, thus, constitute the work of art; they are just the facts of life comprehended by the human mind devoid of any aesthetic value (Shyamala, 1931).

Songs play a crucial role in enhancing the beauty of Bharatanatyam choreography. They bring aesthetic ideas to life through their structure, expressions, emotional depth, and rich lyrics. When set to appropriate ragas, these songs elevate Bharatanatyam into a sublime art form, shining brightly as a beacon of aesthetic expression within the cultural fabric of the country. Among the Bharatanatyam items, if we take the item "Padham" among the artistic items, it shows the various emotions of the hero and heroine and lovers with a loving heart. When designing the Bharatanatyam item, emotions of separation from the protagonist, memories of being together with the lover, the pleasure of marriage in the imagination, and the sadness of inseparability shaped and expressed through sinful emotions, whereby sin, raja, and rhythm combine to make the feelings stronger. This behavior is associated with depression. Sin causes the appearance of rasa. In this aesthetic, it is shown that *rasakotpadu* is associated with emotions.

Plato started separating the conceptual level of beauty from the physical level, granting priority and metaphysical reality to the concepts or ideas alone. In other words, beauty in nature is derived from the ideas of beauty conceived in abstract figures, shapes, numbers, etc. This trend is reflected in Hegel, who also shows beauty in nature as the manifestation of ideal beauty, which qualifies Absolute Ideas as aesthetic perfection (Shyamala.G, 1931).

The body shape in the Bharatanatyam design, as well as every posture, should be perfect. Beauty emerges therein when the movements are "chaushtavam" with purity. Half sitting (Araimandi) position, defined as this Natyarambam, full kneeling position (Mulumandi), hand mudras holding position, and leg position are the basic positions of Bharatanatyam. Aesthetics flourish only if these conditions are well-designed. In this way, it is favorable to the opinion of Western Aesthetic scholars. Natya Shastra mentions karana/mandalas, a unit of dance that includes postures of the body, and hand and foot movements. There are one hundred and eight of these carved into the four gateways of the great temple of Chidambaram in South India. This act also reflects Indian aesthetics.

Summary of the key points as can be noted, the Shiva dance plays an important role in the Bharatanatyam structure. It expresses the balance that permeates human movements. Suppression of wandering emotions is the essence of Shiva dance. This dance, both visually and conceptually, bridges the gap between the viewer and the visual object, thereby playing a crucial role in expressing the aesthetic features within Bharatanatyam design. This seamless connection enhances the spiritual and artistic dimensions of the dance form, embodying profound aesthetic significance. Since dance is an art that embraces physical movement,

rhythm takes a special place in Bharatanatyam design. In such a way, rhythm is prioritized in the design items, korvais, and jati systems in Bharatanatyam design by differentiating castes and programming rhythms and designing with an aesthetic system. In Bharatanatyam design, aesthetics depends on the activities of body, mind, emotion, and movement, and in dance, the aesthetics are widespread in the roles (chadana) and characters to indicate abstract thoughts.

Symbols are used in aesthetics. In the Bharatanatyam pattern, symbols are expressed through hand gestures, eye (dhristi), head (siro), neck (griva), and foot movements, and beauty is said to be intangible and intangible. These points indicate that Bharatanatyam, which is one of the means of worshipping through divine thought, should be designed in a God-conscious manner to concentrate the mind and the forms of God in the form of theology. Harmony, balance, and individual flourishing are explained as elements of beauty in Bharatanatyam design, and beauty is understood as a process of perception. Bharatanatyam design is often interpreted as a perceived process associated with an organized landscape aesthetic. In Bharatanatyam's design, the aesthetic is revealed through the arranged stages, organized items in the concert system, and the stage show. Therefore, through the above-mentioned aspects, it is possible to decipher through this study how aesthetics has become important in Bharatanatyam design.

## Conclusion

Bharatanatyam, one of the aesthetic subjects, works together with aesthetics to make Bharatanatya choreography appear complete, creative, and perfect. These ethical aspects are why Bharatanatyam is studied not only in Tamil Nadu but also in Sri Lankan schools and universities. The design within Bharatanatyam contributes to the preservation of socio-cultural values, as it is meticulously structured and expressed with aesthetic precision, ensuring its relevance and significance across different cultural contexts.

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