

## Comparative Study of Dance and Yoga in Ancient India

Shasthrapathi Chandani Kasturi Arachchi  
Research Scholar, Sangeet Bhavana,  
Visva-Bharati University,  
Shantiniketan, W.B.  
E-mail: [chandanidance110@gmail.com](mailto:chandanidance110@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*Yoga is a family of ancient spiritual practices that originated in India. Different forms of dances originated in different parts of India, developed according to the local traditions. The advantages of both yoga and dance are well known therefore an understanding of both the fields is required. Yoga and dance possess striking similarity especially in terms of their aesthetics. The similarity is analyzed using certain bodily movements. As for instance before starting all the classical dance forms the first movement is Bhumi Pranam. Pranam is to bow before or make an offering much like the Surya Namaskar (salutation to honor the Sun) during yoga. The study related to both the movements will impart an important understanding. Moreover the study of their relationship will be enrichment to both the fields. Their culmination will also result in imparting physical, mental, and spiritual well being.*

**Keywords:** Dance, Yoga, Natya Shastra, Asan, Mudra, Meditation

### Introduction:

In Hindu scriptures, dance is believed to have been created by Brahma who inspired the sage Bharata Muni to write the Natya Shastra, a treatise on performing arts, from which a codified practice of dance and drama emerged. The best-known of Hindu deities like Shiva, Kali and Krishna are typically represented in dancing postures. Shiva's tandava dance, Kali's dance of creation and destruction and Krishna's dance with the gopis (cow-herd girls)—*Ras Lila*—are popular motifs in Hindu mythology. The absence of dedicated auditorium halls or theatre during ancient India usually made dance a functional activity dedicated to worship, entertainment or leisure. Dancers usually performed in temples, on festive occasions and seasonal harvests. Dance was performed on a regular basis before deities as a form of worship. Even in modern India, deities are invoked through religious folk dance forms from ancient times. For example classical dance forms such as Bharatanatyam use *mudras* or hand gestures also to retell episodes of mythological tales such as the slaying of Kaliya by Krishna. Gradually dancers, particularly from South India, moved from temples to houses of royal families where they performed exclusively for royalty (Pathirana Senaratne, 2003).

<sup>1</sup>*Yatho Hasta Stato Drishti*  
*Yatho Drishti Stato Mana*  
*Yatho Mana Stato Bhava*  
*Yatho Bhava Stato Rasa'*

‘Where the hand goes, the glance follows

Where the glance leads, the mind follows

Where the mind goes, the mood follows

Where the mood goes, the real flavor is born’ (Pathirana Senaratne, 2003).

Keeping in our mind the essence of this sloka, the Bhava or thought is very important for any concern field. So far yoga is concern this Bhava is very important and significant in the sense that we have three steps of communication that is, Bhava or thought level, speech level and action level.

In Sanskrit this is rightly referred to as *Manasa*, *Vachena* and *Karmena*.

This bhava is common to every system of communication so far yoga is concern.

Yoga is a physical, mental, and spiritual practice which originated in India probably developed around the sixth and fifth centuries BC. Literally Yoga means “to unite” the ultimate goal of which is *moksha* (liberation). Yoga is an analysis of perception and cognition as illustrated in Hindu texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita* and Buddhist Mahayana works. Apart from the spiritual goals, the physical postures of Yoga are used to alleviate health problems, reduce stress (Erika Singh, 2010).

Yoga gained its popularity in the western audience during the 1980s due to the pioneer works by Swami Vivekananda during his tour in Europe and the United States. The modern scientific study of Yoga began with the works of N.C. Paul and Major D. Basu in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and then continued in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with Sri Yogendra (1897-1989) and Swami Kuvalayananda. Western medical researches came to Swami Kuvalayananda’s Kaivalyadhama Health and Yoga Research Centre, starting in 1928, to study Yoga as a science. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century the term “Yoga” associates with *Hatha Yoga* and its *Asanas* (postures) or as a form of exercise. Yoga is therefore used as a complete exercise program and physical therapy routine. Many studies have tried to determine the effectiveness of Yoga as a complementary intervention for diseases (Joseph S. Alter, 2004).

India has thousands of years old tradition of fine arts and classical and folk music and dances. Some of the world famous dance forms that originated and evolved in India are Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Manipuri, Mohiniattam and Oddisi. All these

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<sup>1</sup> Natya Sashtra by Bharata Muni

dance forms use basically the same ‘ Mudras’ or signs of hand as a common language of expression and were originally performed in the temples to entertain various mythological stories from generation to generation while entertaining the audiences (Mohan Khokar, 1984; Leela Samson, 1987).

Yoga and dance possess striking similarity especially in terms of their aesthetics. The similarity is analyzed using certain bodily movements. The aim of the study is outlined as objectives below.

### **Objective**

1. To create awareness of the advantages of yoga and dance.
2. The study aims to find similarity between yoga and various dance movements.
3. The study aims to incorporate various dance movements along with yoga for the enrichment of both the fields.
4. The study aims to provide physical, mental, and spiritual well being.

### **Discussion:**

All forms of Indian classical dance owe allegiance to Natya Shastra regarded as fifth veda. It is said that Brahma, the creator, created Natya.

Clearly a sloka of Natya Shastra speaks about the context of Natya Shastra which is taken from Vedas. To quote the sloka-

<sup>2</sup>*Jagraha Pathyam Rig Vedath*

*Yajur Vedath Abhinayam*

*Sama Vedath Ganam*

*Atharva Vedath Rasam*

Literature from the Rig Veda. Song from the Same Veda, Abhinaya or expression from the Yajur Veda. Rasa or aesthetic experience from the Atharvana Veda (Pathirana Senaratne, 2003).

It also contains deliberations on the different kind of postures, the Mudras or hand formations and their meanings, the kind of emotions and their categorization, not to mention the kind of attire, the stage, the ornaments and even the audience. All dance forms are thus structured around the Nine Rasas.

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<sup>2</sup>Natya Sashtra by Bharata Muni

In our normal life also we are using these Rasas. But in classical dance forms we express nine rasas in dramatical way. All these Rasas are leading to their bhava, that is Sthayi bhava etc. and to certain colour with referring to a deity. Such as –

S. No.	Rasa	Bhava	Colour	Diety
1.	Sringara	love, emotion	green	Vishnu
2.	Hasya	laughter, comedy	white	Pramata
3.	Karuna	sorrow, sympathy	grey	Yama
4.	Roudra	anger	red	Rudra
5.	Veera	energy, bravery	whitish brown	Indra
6.	Bhayanaka	horror, terror	black	Kali
7.	Beebhathsa	disgust, dislike	blue	Shiva
8.	Adbhuta	wonder, surprise	yellow	Brahma.
9.	Santha	peace	saffron	Buddha

According to Natya Shastra dance is divided in to three parts. Nritta, Nritya, Natya.

**Nritta-** This is ‘Pure Dance’ movements without any special meanings or mood and used to show pure techniques, posture and foot work in rhythm.

**Nritya** – Is usually expresses through the eyes, the body, hands, limbs, together with facial expressions and filled with flavor of which may express small stories, just a sentence or a whole drama. Nritya comprises abhinaya, depicting rasa [sentiment] and bhava [mood].

**Natya-** Natya refers to the dramatic presentation of a mythological story combining Abhinaya, dialogues and get up of the concerned character in the drama.

Abhinaya is divided into four parts:-

- Angika Abhinaya-** Angika Abhinaya is the movement through limbs and body. Angas are classified as Anga, Prathyanga and Upanga i.e. head, hands, chest, sides, hip and feet. It is originated from “Yajur Veda” and “Bhava” is stayee.
- Vachika Abhinaya-** When music or recitation in dance and verbal language is used in drama expressed by Bhava is Vachika Abhinaya. It is originated from Rigveda and its Bhava is Sanchari.
- Aharhya Abhinaya-** The make-up and costumes used in dance is Aharya Abhinaya. The different stage crafts also come under this. Its origin is Sham Veda and its Bhava is Bipasthayee. Aharya means artificial beauty. The components of stage crafts under this are Pusta, Alankara, Jewellery and Angarachandra, Sajib or Sanjeev.

- d) **Satvika Abhinaya-** The expression of the different temperaments and involuntary static by different body is known as Satvika Abhinaya. It is originated in Atharva Veda and its Bhava is Bipasthayee. (Shasthrapathi Chandani Kasturi Arachchi, 2014)

<sup>3</sup>*Angikam bhuvanam yasya*

*Vachikam sarva vagmayam*

*Aharyam Chandra tharadi*

*Tam namah satvikam shivam;*

Before starting all the classical dance forms the first movement we do Bhumi pranam, just as Surya Namaskar (sun salutation) honors the Sun. Pranam is to bow before or make an offering to Bhumi Pranam which is done before and after every practices and every performances.

For example surya namaskar in yoga and bhumi pranam or namaskar in different dance forms.

After namaskar we do Anjali mudra to all.

Using the body as a medium of communication the expression of dance is perhaps the most intricate and developed, yet easily understood art form.

### **Conclusion:**

To sum up our study it can be stated that Yoga is considered a disciplined method for attaining a goal which includes techniques of controlling the body and the mind. Similarly dance is selected sequences of human movement which also involves controlled and the mind movement having aesthetic and symbolic value. For example, when we are moving, we do move not only our legs but also our arms, our eyes, our breath, our head, our torso, our heart beats etc. Therefore a close relationship between Yoga and dance has been drawn and observed. This association embodies the intuitive flow of dance and the ancient wisdom of Yoga and has been termed “Shakti Yoga” by others. Transforming dance into a yogic practice has increased the creative vitality and in the west this dance has mostly become a form of entertainment, but historically it served as a way of connection with among us and bringing communities together in celebration. It can be said that it is the perfect exercise for balancing our busy modern lifestyle. Above all the music evokes deep emotion that helps people to feel alive and to rise above the boredom and drudgery of everyday life.

Moreover it can be viewed that every practice be it yoga or dance evolve over the years since time immemorial and prevailed depending on the advantages it has created. Yoga and dance both being a provider of physical, mental, and spiritual well being, the two are inseparable part of

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<sup>3</sup> Natya Sashtra by Bharata Muni

each other as well. The system of yoga and dance can be interrelated. The uses of both the practices being well known I took the opportunity of merging the two. It can be speculated that the existence of the practice depends on the advantage it will create in the coming years.

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