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Dances are a beautiful part of India's cultural heritage and history!

There are eight major dance forms of India—

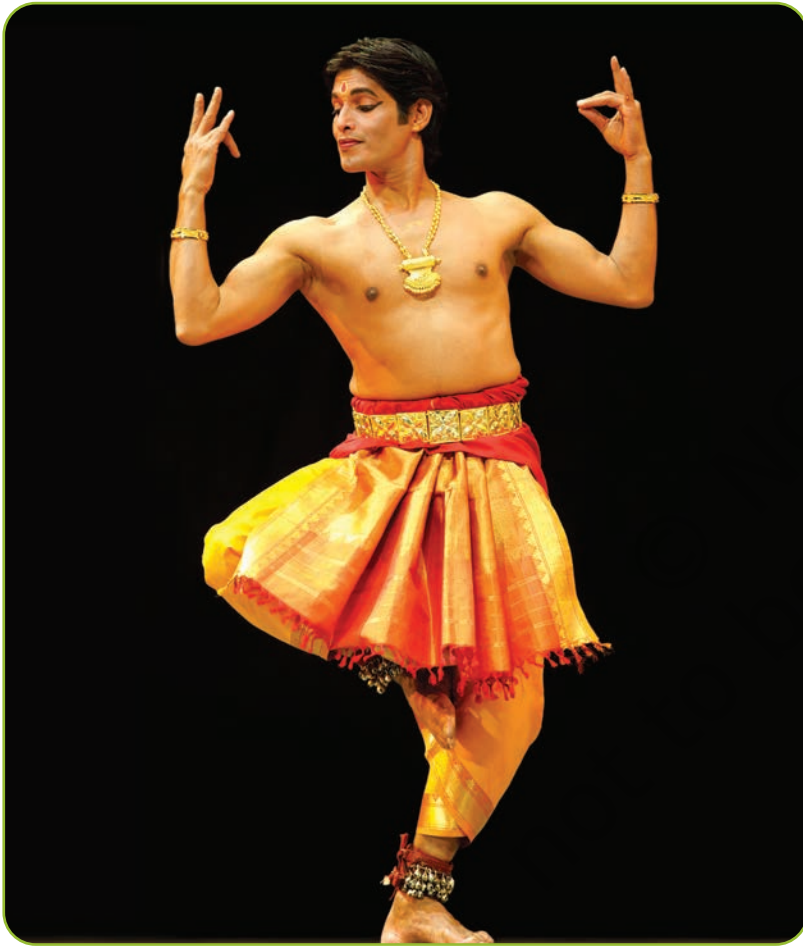


Dancers depicting different styles of major dance forms

1. *Bharatanatyam*
2. *Kathak*
3. *Kathakali*
4. *Kuchipudi*
5. *Manipuri*
6. *Mohiniyattam*
7. *Odissi*
8. *Sattriya*

BHARATANATYAM is a dance from Tamil Nadu, in South India. It is known for its geometric and graceful movements, strong footwork, and beautiful hand gestures and facial expressions. The dancers tell stories using emotions, music and rhythm. Among the many traditions (*bāṇis*) of *Bharatanatyam*, the *Thanjavur*, *Pandanallur*, *Vazhuvoor*, and *Mysuru* styles are especially well-known, though numerous other *bāṇis* also contribute richly to the form. The dancers stand in a special half-sitting position called *aramandi* or *ayatamandala*, shaped like a diamond.

They wear colourful silk sarees with pleats in front that spread out beautifully as they dance, along with traditional temple jewellery.



KATHAK, which means storytelling, is a dance form from northern India, particularly rooted in the regions of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. *Kathak* evolved as a form of storytelling through expressive gestures, intricate footwork and graceful movements. Dancers captivate audiences with swift spins, rhythmic foot stamping, delicate hand gestures, and nuanced facial expressions to bring stories to life. Among the many *gharanas* of *kathak* the Lucknow, Jaipur, Banaras, Raigarh styles are particularly renowned though several other *gharanas* have also shaped and enriched the form. They stand tall in a posture called *sama sthana*, with feet together or in a slight v-shape. The costumes are usually long, flowing dresses like *anarkalis* or *lehengas*, with *dupattas* made from fabrics typical to northern India.

KATHAKALI is a traditional dance from Kerala, primarily performed by men. It is like a colourful play, where dancers act out stories from Indian epics using stylised facial expressions, hand gestures and body movements. There are two styles the northern style known as *vadakkan* and the southern style known as *theakkan*. The basic stance in *kathakali* is *atimandala*—a deep, grounded posture with knees bent outward and feet placed on the side-foot firmly planted apart. The dancers wear bright costumes, big crowns, and heavy makeup. Their faces are painted in colours that match their characters, like green for heroes, red for villains, etc. Every part of the face is used to convey emotion, while the dance is full of powerful poses and eye movements.



KUCHIPUDI, from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, derives its name from the village of Kuchipudi, which remains home to several traditional dance families even today, such as the Vempati, Vedantam, Bhagavatula of Pasumarthi, among others, who have preserved and passed down this rich legacy through generations. It follows a rich dance-drama tradition and is distinctive for its integration of *vachika abhinaya* (spoken word) along with an expressive dance. Often theatrical in nature, it includes elements of acting; and at times, dancers perform intricate sequences on a brass plate, showcasing remarkable balance and skill.

Traditionally, it was performed exclusively by men, who often portrayed both male and female roles in the dance-dramas. The basic stance is similar to *Bharatanatyam's aramandi*, but is less deep. The dance is distinctive for its quick-footedness, hip movements, leaps, sculptural poses and speed. The dancers wear silk fabrics stitched for easy movement, with a special drape called *gochi kattu*. They also wear traditional temple jewellery.



MANIPURI is a classical dance from Manipur in North-East India. This dance form is soft, gentle and flowing. The movements are smooth and round, almost like gliding. The dancers always look calm and peaceful. The dance includes *raas leela* (stories of Krishna) and traditional movements from *Lai Haraoba*. Manipuri dance also includes *Sankirtan*, a devotional music and dance form performed with cymbals and drums, often as part of temple rituals. A special dance called *pung cholom* involves playing a drum while dancing, showing excellent skill and coordination. Dancers usually keep their feet together and move circularly with no hard stamping. The famous costume is the *poloi* dress—a stiff, colourful skirt with a veil and elegant jewellery. The men wear white *dhotis* and turbans, especially during *pung cholom* or *raas* performances.



MOHINIYATTAM is a graceful dance from Kerala that was originally performed only by women. It is soft, flowing, and full of expression and devotion. The dance uses gentle movements of the upper body, and delicate steps to create a graceful and lyrical style. There are two major dance traditions, *kalamandalam* and *kalyanikutty amma*. Dancers change levels between the low and medium positions like *aramandala*, *chaturmandala* and *atimandala*. They wear beautiful white or cream sarees with golden borders called *kasavu*, and traditional jewellery.



ODISSI, dance form originates from Odisha in eastern India. Various sculptural postures from the temples of Odisha are depicted in this dance form. The dance is smooth and flowing, with slow turns and graceful steps. This form has been derived from *Maharis*—*Devadasis* of Odisha and *Gotipua*—group of boy dancers, dressed

as girls who dance for Lord Vishnu. A special feature is the *tribhanga* pose, where the body bends in three places the head, torso, and hip. Dancers often stand in a square-shaped and half-sitting pose called *chauka*. Costumes are made from traditional fabrics called *pattasari* (silk) with step fan-shaped pleats and beautiful silver filigree jewellery and a flower-like headpiece called *tahiya*.



SATTTRIYA comes from Assam and was first performed in monasteries called *sattras*. It combines strong and gentle movements, and tells stories through realistic actions, like eating, fighting or showing love. Dancers use their upper body for expression and the lower body for rhythm. It was originally performed by male monks called *bhokots*, but was later opened to women and the general public. The dance includes group patterns like *sarpa* and performances, such as the *sutradhari* dance and *gopir nach*. Dancers train in sixty-four basic exercises called *mati-akhora*. Costumes are made from Assamese silk called *pat*, with traditional local designs and ornaments often with a *dhoti* or skirt, similar to what monks used to wear. There are two main postures—*purusha* (male) and *prakriti* (female).



Some eminent personalities in India's eight major classical dance forms.

**C. V.
CHANDRASHEKHAR**



*Famous exponent and
Guru of Bharatanatyam*

**SITARA
DEVI**



*Famous exponent
of Kathak*

**KALAMANDALAM
GOPI**



*Famous Guru and
exponent of Kathakali*

**VEMPATI CHINNA
SATYAM**



*Famous exponent and
Guru of Kuchipudi*

**GURU BIPIN
SINGH**



*Famous Guru and
exponent of Manipuri*

**KALAMANDALAM
LEELAMMA**



*Famous Guru
and exponent of
Mohiniyattam*

**KELUCHARAN
MOHAPATRA**



*Famous exponent and
Guru of Odissi*

**RASHESWAR
SAIKIA**



*Famous exponent and
Guru of Bharatanatyam*

Watch live or recorded performances whenever you can



Kathakali



Bharatanatyam



Mohiniattam



Manipuri

ACTIVITY 11.1: THE DANCE MATRIX

Make a comparative chart of the dance forms based on their distinctive features.

DANCE STYLE	WHERE IS IT FROM	BASIC POSTURE	FOOTWORK	SPECIALITIES	COSTUMES	MUSIC
<i>Bharatanatyam</i>						
<i>Kathak</i>						
<i>Kathakali</i>						
<i>Kuchipudi</i>						
<i>Manipuri</i>						
<i>Mohiniyattam</i>						
<i>Odissi</i>						
<i>Sattriya</i>						

OTHER DANCE TRADITIONS

Apart from the eight major dance forms, there are various other folk dance forms across India. Beliefs, rituals, performing arts, and the symbolism of communities take root in specific social contexts and locations. They bring colour into the monotonous activities of daily life. Born and nurtured in a specific socio-cultural context, each artistic form has its own myth and history. Though folk traditions have changed over time, their basic elasticity has helped adapt to industrialisations and urbanisations.

Dance forms from two regions—Nagaland and Chattisgarh, and their important personalities are given below.

FOLK DANCE FROM AO TRIBE, NAGALAND

The Ao Naga tribe from the northeastern part of Nagaland celebrates the Moatsu Mong festival as a time of recreation and joy, after the hard work of clearing fields, burning jungles, and sowing seeds. It is marked by vibrant songs, dances and merrymaking. Another major festival, Tsungrem Mong, is observed on the eve of the harvest to offer gratitude to the Supreme Power, with colourful costumes, songs and dances. The Ao Naga have a rich tradition of clothing that distinguishes between commoners and warriors, with the Ao warrior known as

mangkotepsu. The Sumi tribe performs the energetic Sumi war dance to celebrate victory in battle, while the Lotha women perform the mungyanta, a harvest dance during the Tokhu Emone festival. Nagaland is home to around 30 traditional dances, including the Sangtam War Dance, Hornbill Dance, Chang Lo and Butterfly Dance, each reflecting the cultural richness of its many indigenous communities.

One of the important persons who has contributed a lot to the dances of the community is Sangyusang Pongen of the Ao community. He received the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for his contribution.



Folk dance and music of Ao Tribe, Nagaland

TRADITIONAL DANCES OF CHHATTISGARH

This region of Bharat has a vibrant culture, with diverse dances that reflect its unique heritage and close connection to nature. These dances are typically performed during festivals, harvests and rituals. The *panthi* dance, popular among the Satnami community of Chhattisgarh, features groups of men dancing in formations to the beats of the *mandar drum* and *jhanjh*. The *gaud maria* dance, from the Bison-Horn Maria community in the Bastar plateau, is performed by both men and women, during occasions like births and marriages. Other notable dances include the *Karma* dance, performed to honour Karma Devi during the harvest; the *suwa danda* or parrot dance, performed by women during harvest and Diwali; and the *gedi* dance of the Gond people, performed on bamboo stilts. The region boasts many vibrant dance forms and musical traditions.



Bastar band, Bastar

Mamta Chandrakar, a Sangeet Natak Akademi Awardee, is a prominent figure in preserving and promoting the indigenous dances of Chhattisgarh. She is also the recipient of Padma Shri.

ACTIVITY 11.2: DANCE AS KNOWLEDGE, DANCE AS EXPERIENCE

- ❖ Learn about the important personalities that are mentioned above. Also, find out about some young dancers who are performing professionally.



Bihu from Assam



Rouf from Kashmir

- ❖ Identify a dancer from your region and invite them to share a short performance and conduct a workshop with you. Discuss the *nṛtta* and the *nṛtya* elements that you saw in their performance and also try to learn it.



Phag dance from Haryana



Kaikottakali from Kerala

ASSESSMENT

CHAPTER 11: PAN INDIAN DANCE FORMS

CG	C	Learning Outcomes	Teacher	Self
2	2.2	Identifies and distinguishes between <i>nrtta</i> (pure dance) and <i>nrtya</i> (expressive dance) elements in a performance, demonstrating an understanding of their unique characteristics and purposes.		
4	4.1	Demonstrates eagerness to learn about the eight major dance forms of India, as well as other regional and traditional dance forms.		
4	4.2	Shows curiosity and interest in learning about notable dance personalities and their contributions to the field of dance.		

Teacher's Comments and Student's Observations

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