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## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN TEACHING – LEARNING BHARATHANATYAM

**Dr.K.Sahayaraani**

Assistant Professor of Bharatanatyam

KalaiKaviri College of Fine Arts

Tiruchirappalli

Tamil Nadu.

India.

### Abstract:

“Bharathanatyam” has carved a niche for itself among the traditional Indian Performing art forms. The word Bharatham has imbibed within it the four dance components Bh- Bhava, Ra- Raga, Tha – Thala and M – Shruti, a significance feature of Bharathanatyam. The challenges in teaching this divine art form is higher today as it includes students from various cultures and nations. Students have different calibers and hence the teacher should adopt the right pedagogy to deliver the lesson effectively. Shri J. Krishnamurthi has rightly said the teacher should be able to help each individual to observe and understand his own self-projected values. Dance also has therapeutic effects, health benefits and hence there is a significant change in the opportunities of teaching – learning bharathanatyam.

**Key words:** Bharathanatyam, culture, challenges, opportunities, pedagogy etc.

### I. INTRODUCTION

“Bharathanatyam” has carved a niche for itself among the traditional Indian Performing art forms. It is an ancient classical Indian dance form and signifies the contribution of Tamil culture to the world. Though in olden days Bharathanatyam was referred by various nomenclature like Koothu, Dance, Natyam, Dasiattam, Chinamelam and Sadirattam for the past 70 years, it is referred to as “Bharathanatyam”, as it stems from the epic Natyashastra, written by sage Bharata Muni. The word Bharatham has imbibed within it the four dance components Bh- Bhava, Ra- Raga, Tha – Thala and M – Shruti, a significance feature of Bharathanatyam.

Teaching and learning this traditional dance form has been a challenging task and the innovation of pedagogy for transmission of this art form has been the reason for its glorious existence today. This article explains the challenges and opportunities in teaching Bharathanatyam.

### II. CHALLENGES IN TEACHING – LEARNING.

According to J. Krishnamurti in his speech on “The Real Role of Teacher” has said that “The teacher should study and understand each student, using love and patience. First, of course, the teacher should have understood his/her conditioning and be free from it. Love and goodness could flower only in individual freedom, hence the teacher should be able to help each individual to observe and understand his own self-projected values, to understand himself in relation to all things, and to realize that it was his craving for self-fulfillment that brought conflict and sorrow.”

As pointed out by Shri J. Krishnamurthi, [11 May 1895 -17 February 1986] Philosopher – Author said “ A teacher should motivate the students to understand themselves, motivate them on individual freedom and ignite their creative thoughts”. Here orderliness and happiness will set in without any external force. Having identified their real passion, students will perform with real love and learning will be a happy task. What qualities are required for teachers for achieving such a transformation in teaching pedagogy?

A person who is involved in lifelong learning only can excel in teaching also. One who is spirited to expand his/her knowledge and abilities only will be able to kindle the spirit of students and bring out their innate talents and creativity. Such teachers exist all over the Globe who are not keen to make students repeat what they teach but act as stimulants. Teachers, who have understood that education is not teaching, but igniting students' imaginative thoughts and creative ideas, have overcome the challenges of teaching. (M. Suchitra, (Vetrikodi, Hindu Tamil Thisai, 10.09.2019)

Students who desire to learn bharatanatyam render different body postures and styles as they are from various cultures and languages. Hence the pedagogy to teach bharathanatyam has to be planned and customized according to the learning styles and knowledge of each student. A uniform method cannot be adopted here. Some students are slow learners and some are quick to learn and it is important for a teacher to provide more resources and individualized modules with more focus on the basic lessons, imparting the essence of the fine art form.

Unique teaching pedagogy have to adopted for teaching this traditional art form for students from abroad, which differs from the traditional teaching methodology of the guru – sishtyalineage. It is simpler for Indian students to follow the teacher's sequences of movement and express it accurately through their bodily postures and expressions. The same cannot happen easier with foreign students as they are not able to coordinate the movements, as it does not synchronize with their culture and tradition. Their language, pattern of thought, gestures and body language are not in line with the postures, movements and expressions of bharathanatyam. They come from western culture and their habits and social patterns are different from Indian culture. Hence the foremost responsibility of a bharathanatyam teacher is to make the foreign students comprehend the tradition and value of this noble art form.

For instance, teaching the cultural symbols of Indian tradition and practice to students from other countries, like wearing bindi, ornaments like earrings (Jhumkas), anklets (Salangai or Ghunghru), waist belts (Ottiyanam), braiding of hair, expression of shyness and other intricate hand gestures (Hasta bhedas), body movements, leg movements (Padhabhedas) is a great challenge faced by bharathanatyam teachers.

Mrs. Bindu Rajendran who teaches Bharathanatyam in Australia, has shared the new techniques she has adopted in her teaching pedagogy and curriculum based on her experience in Indian Linga.

“I remember once I had choreographed a dance movement on alankaras, that demonstrates on a women, wearing the costumes and accessories. As a part of the choreography, the dancer should be portrayed wearing an earring, and the traditional earrings of India, have a threaded post at the back to be screwed, which was depicted through hand gestures (viniyogas). This movement was not understood by my student, as they are familiar only with the pressing type earrings. She raised a question, why should we screw it, can't we press it? Then I had to demonstrate how an Traditional Indian Jhumka has to be screwed at back.” Mrs. Bindu questions whether other teachers also face such challenges and situations, while teaching students from other culture.

Hence the dance pedagogy should be designed to facilitate multicultural classrooms, and such a curriculum and delivery system only can overcome the challenges in the present scenario.

### III. OPPORTUNITIES IN TEACHING LEARNING BHARANATYAM

Drenched in Indian Culture, Bharathanatyam students from India are familiar and have developed an interest to learn the Traditional Indian Dance forms as they are accustomed to the epics portraying the rich heritage of India. They also get insight into the dance forms through newspapers and media and seek to learn bharathanatyam with interest.

Students who have devotedly learnt this art form, have excelled as eminent Artistes and teachers. Today where there is a surge in unemployment, students who have learnt bharathanatyam are excelling as teachers in various dance schools or owning their own dance institutes. Professionally trained students, while offering employment opportunities for many through their own establishments they also perform at various concerts in many countries thus glorifying and taking bharathanatyam to a wider audience.

Today any student, wherever he/she is can learn this traditional art form from his/her favourite Guru through the electronic innovations in teaching learning techniques. Online classes are offered through skype, various applications have been developed to teach bharathanatyam and this is an opportunity as well a challenge for teachers.

How many recognize that their body and brain are rejuvenated when they dance? It harmonizes their minds and relieves them of stress, and has a positive effect on their bodies. It is true that dance provides many beneficial effects on the brain. In an article titled “Dancing and the Brain” by Harvard's Mahoney Neuroscience Institute that confirms that dance improves both mood and cognitive function. Hence dance is used as a treatment therapy at Harvard's Mahoney Neuroscience Institute.

Dance, in fact, has such beneficial effects on the brain that it is now being used to treat people with Parkinson's disease, a progressive neurological movement disorder. “There's no question, anecdotally at least, that music has a very stimulating effect

on physical activity,” says Daniel Tarsy, MD, an HMS professor of neurology and director of the Parkinson’s Disease and Movement Disorders Center at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center (BIDMC). “And I think that applies to dance, as well.”

The study, “ ‘Dance Therapy’ as a psychotherapeutic movement intervention in Parkinson’s disease,” was published in Complementary Therapies in Medicine.

Dance is an amalgamation of emotion, music, rhythm and expression. Bharatanatyam is mudra oriented and gives importance to padarthaabhinaya, each word interpreted through mudras. In navarasa parts (nine sentiments) the dancers expresses their inner feelings and it helps to release their emotions. This practice can be well used for emotional wellbeing and psycho-therapy. This dance form strengthens the hamstring muscles including semitendinosus, semimembranosus, bicepsfemoris, etc.(Kilger)

#### IV. CONCLUSION:

This research article on the “Challenges and Opportunities in Teaching – Learning Bharathanatyam” has outlined how this divine art form has enabled us to transform the challenges into opportunities and excel in teaching and learning bharathanatyam.

Any art form is not only an art, but aims at reforming the human values, social values and enriches the soul and body of human beings. It transforms the society and a form of social consciousness. The achievement of any artist or dance teacher is to take this traditional art form to everyone on the Globe.

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