

Impact of Performing Arts on Individual Health management - A perspective of classical dancer as a dance practitioner

Shivaram, Nayana

Assistant Professor, Department of Performing Arts (Dance), Sri Satya Sai University for Human
Excellence Navanihal, Kamalapur Tq, Kalaburagi Karnataka

Abstract

Classical dance is both an art form and a holistic practice. It brings about manifold approaches to health and wellness. This paper delves into its deep impact on all aspects of health and wellness, from the physical to the mental, emotional and social, spiritual growth and the ability of classical dance to intervene in many health challenges. Classical dance enhances physical health through improved muscular strength, flexibility, posture, and cardiovascular fitness. Mentally, it sharpens focus, reduces stress, and fosters emotional resilience. Emotionally and socially, it serves as a medium for self-expression and community building, and in a spiritual sense, connects practitioners to their sense of purpose and to divinity. For the practitioner, classical dance is a lifelong journey of discovering self and well-being. Thus, it remains a powerful tool for achieving and sustaining personal and communal transformation.

Keywords: Health, Wellness, Dance, Expression, Spiritual growth, Fitness, Divinity

Introduction

The art form extends far beyond mere physical movements; classical dance is the confluence of all physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual fulfilments found in human life. Positioned firmly in cultural and devotional traditions, classical dance forms like Bharatanatyam, Kathak, or Odissi demand a

long and thorough period of training and dedication. Their intricate movements, narratives, and eloquent expressions not only hold people's attention but also maintain balance in harmony for the practitioners. This paper takes the holistic benefits of classical dance as it relates to its role in the health management and personal growth; it further

shows how it transcends mere performance to become a way of life.

Physical Health

Probably, the most multifaceted and engaging physical activity is classical dance, as its concrete demands on the body have a profound effect on improving general physical health. In specific Bharatanatyam, Kathak, or Odissi, footwork, wide movements, and meticulous gestures activate and strengthen numerous muscular groups in the body. These repeated and regulated movements make the dancer develop muscular strength in the body along the core, legs, and arms, meanwhile improving joint stability and flexibility. For posture and alignment, it improves balance and helps protect common musculoskeletal diseases, such as back pain or spinal misalignment, by teaching the dancer how to hold his or her body correctly. In addition to this, classical dance also provides excellent cardiovascular exercise. Maintained energy and exertion in performing intricate moves improve cardiovascular health, increase blood flow, and thus enhance lung capacity that manifests itself in general stamina and endurance. This is particularly important during long rehearsals and performances when consistent high levels of energy accompanied by accurate

performance are required. The penetration of controlled breathing while performing movements also caters to the respiratory system where correct oxygenation is ensured, and the body performs at maximum efficiency. Moreover, flexibility that an individual acquires from repeated stretching as well as performance of demanding movements maximizes the scope of movements, reduces stiffness, and minimizes the risk of injuries.

Classical dance can also lead to optimal body composition with time, thus aiding weight loss even as it promotes metabolic health. Apart from functionality, the physical control developed through constant practice helps develop stamina in dancers, propelling them toward greater challenges within a healthy context. It is for this reason that classical dance becomes a wholesome workout routine, cultivating not only fitness but also vital energy, and therefore a valuable resource in health management.

Mental Health

Classically, the benefits for mental well-being are significant, as this is a therapeutic and transformative exercise of mindfulness, emotional expression, and cognitive engagement. The practice itself involves intense focus because dancers should

coordinate easily all such intricate movements, rhythms, and expressions in harmony with one another. Their cognitive abilities in terms of memory, concentration, and problem-solving are sharpened over time through mental agility and neural connectivity. Mastery of choreography and storytelling improves not only short-term memory but also aids in long-term planning and adjustment, making it an excellent exercise for the health of the brain. In addition, the metaphorical quality of classical dance—the intensity with which one becomes lost in the music, rhythm, and text—incites a sense of mindfulness. The meditative quality of this demeanour helps dancers keep their thoughts in the present, clear their minds about daily worries, and thus decreases anxiety and cultivates a state of serenity. Calibrating the nervous system and relieving it from stress and mental activation, rhythmic breathing and repetition of movements are advisable for a dancer. Abhinaya or the art of expression is the most important factor in classical dance, by which a dancer can portray an emotional gamut. It is a process of safe and controlled emotional discharge through which practitioners can confront complex feelings of loss, anger, or elation, amongst others. Dancers also gain new perceptions of their lives from

assuming dramatic personas and drama since the activity will evoke empathy emotionally and strengthen dancers. As they connect human practitioners to themes that transcend human existence, such as love, devotion, struggle, and triumph, classical dance nurtures a deep feeling of catharsis and emotional exchange. For those suffering mental health issues through depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress, dance can offer a way of healing without verbal communication, increase expression, improve one's self-esteem, and enhance the development of a healthy body-mind relationship. The strict and organized discipline attributed to classical dance further adds to mental health through the accomplishment of routine.

Regular practice helps build confidence and the feeling of mastery, as dancers see tangible progress in the skills and artistry that they develop. The possibility of performing in front of an audience or for a group also builds a sense of community and shared purpose, offsetting feelings of isolation or loneliness. Over time, together these elements form a holistic framework within which mental wellbeing is maintained. Hence, classical dance becomes more than a mere art form: it comes to be a potent medium to augment the

phenomenon of mental strength, emotional balance, and inner harmony.

3. Emotional and Social Well-being

Classically, dance will substantially contribute to the improvement of emotional well-being since it is a powerful medium of self-expression and emotion expression and catharsis. Unlike most forms of verbal communication, a classical dancer will delve further into feelings and express an entire gamut of emotions---from joy, love, and adoration to sadness, sorrow, anger, and desperation-through bodily postures, facial expressions, and movements. The process of “Abhinaya” (expression) is more central to this process because it allows the dancers to form and project these emotions authentically, developing profound feelings within. Such deep engagements with feelings allow someone to work through inner conflicts in a different way compared to suppression of emotions and getting psychological balance. In addition, classical dance is often associated with rich mythological narratives, literary or real-life stories that help practitioners make sense of their common experiences in life. Such reflections will enable practitioners to develop emotional intelligence, resilience, and a deeper sense of their feelings and the feelings

of others. Classical dance condition’s identity and purpose-more-important parts of emotional stability-through discipline and creativity.

No one needs to be told that mastering a dance, telling a story, or communicating something to an audience can bring about a wonderful feeling of accomplishment and confidence. This helps foster self-esteem and provides a healthy outlet to deal with some of the other challenges of life. Moreover, the silent moments of classical dance and the involvement in it gradually calm down the thoughts and results in reducing the intensity of stress, anxiety, and frustration. Gradually, repeated practice of dance builds a positive framework of emotions for the practitioners to take on life with a balanced and composed approach towards everything. This sense of social well-being the classical dance provides helps the dancers feel connected at a very personal and collective level. Sessions in dance classes, rehearsals, and performances could unite people and even assist in learning to collaborate, cooperate, and share ideas.

This communal element makes it possible for dancers to have meaningful relationships with each other, teachers, and audiences around them, and eventually forms a network of

relationships between them sharing the same goal. Dancing in groups or as part of an ensemble teaches values such as cooperation, mutual respect, and collective harmony in achieving artistic excellence because dancers must blend in unison to achieve excellence. For those feeling detached or isolated, the sense of belonging that has been developed by dancing might have a transforming impact on their lives socially, which reduces the senses of loneliness and fosters acceptance. Moreover, classical dance serves as a bridge between individuals and their cultural heritage, strengthening ties to tradition and fostering pride in one's identity. By performing or engaging with themes rooted in mythology, history, or spirituality, dancers develop a greater appreciation for their cultural roots and pass on this legacy to future generations. It further develops a feeling of identity and commonality and contributes to forming a sense of community among people belonging to similar backgrounds.

Further, the presentation of their arts before other diverse audience makes it possible for the dancers to be connected cross-culturally thereby opening avenues for inclusiveness and mutual respect. In the final run, classical dance presents an intricate mixture of emotional

expression and social contact, thus promoting a holistic approach in self-wellness. It equips individuals to know how to navigate their inner emotional worlds and build bridges with others toward a more connected and emotionally enriching life.

Spiritual growth

Being intrinsically religious, the classical dance offers its practitioners a very special pathway through their inner selves to connect with something even bigger than themselves. Most of the classical forms, such as Bharatanatyam, Odissi, and Kathak, have originated from devotional practices and temple traditions wherein dance formed a medium for worship as well as expressing reverence for the divine. The natural connection to the spiritual side allows the dancer to make strides past the physical and emotional aspects of dance and embark on a profound sense of inner peace and fulfilment. In the deliberate actions of movement, dancers often enter a meditative state as they move through rhythms that are repetitive yet soothing, graceful gestures, and controlled breathing. This isolation allows practitioners to withdraw from worldly distractions and achieve an awareness of the inner self, which brings about spiritual growth. Spiritual growth

in classical dance is partly facilitated by the themes or stories that it tells.

Many of the classical performances are themes that are founded by following the lives and deeds of the deities, saints, or holy people found in myths, scriptures, and epics. By assuming the divine characters and playing out their tales, the dancers interact with philosophical-spiritual elements of bhakti or surrender to eternity, good vs. evil. It is a reminder to reflect inwardly and get closer to reality, making the dance interpret life itself in terms of the broader principles and values. For instance, the famous longings of Radha for Krishna in Bharatanatyam or the cosmic play of Shiva as Nataraja in Odissi put such themes of love and surrender and maintenance of cosmic balance that nurtures the spirit of the dancer to a higher view of existence and interconnection with the cosmos. Of course, there are two major anchors in any spiritual practice: discipline and dedication. Classical dance provides for these very tenets. This rigorous training and constant refining in the classical dance education aspect teaches patience, perseverance, and humility in a practitioner.

This is also another characteristic of spiritual pursuits, where consistent effort and focus are

key to personal growth and enlightenment. It is not unusual for the practice of offering a dance performance as a mode of seva, or service, to the divine or as a thanksgiving act that elevates the practice above mere artistry into a spiritual rite. Every movement takes on a sense of purpose, creating a holy connection between the dancer, the art, and the divine. For many, classical dance is a means to self-discovery and transformation. Introspectiveness of the practice enables them to face their inner fears, desires, and restrictions, thus eventually bringing them to a deeper realization of themselves and their nature in relation to the world. Such a journey is so often aligned with growth in the sense of interconnectedness: they come to recognize unity between self and cosmos.

Such experiences cultivate gratitude, humility, and reverence, which deepen the spiritual life of the dancer. Lastly, the social dimension of classical dance contributes to spiritual growth. Above everything else, performing during festivals, rituals, or cultural events is associated with communal devotion and collective spiritual energy. Indeed, this collective involvement reinforces the dancer's connection with their roots-culture and spirituality and impresses the unity and

harmony aspect of the community. In a broad sense, classical dance is much more than a performing art, for it is a journey towards spiritual awakening and self-realization; it gives its practitioners a very deep sense of peace, purpose, and connection with the divine.

Health challenges addressed

As a holistic discipline, dealing with the physical and mental aspects of a person, classical dance proves effective in dealing with innumerable health issues. There are considerable prospects for classical dance improving health and well-being, especially on the physical aspect, such as the management of chronic pains and mobility impairments. The controlled and repetitive movements involved in forms like Bharatanatyam, Kathak, or Kuchipudi improve joint flexibility, muscle strength, and blood circulation. This is why classical dance is such a healing practice in arthritis or any other joint condition as it washes away stiffness and accustoms the body to movements. Moreover, since classical dance emphasizes proper posture and alignment, it can ease backache, neck pains, or any other posture-related ailments which are a product of non-physically active lifestyles. Through strengthening the core muscles and improving

balance, classical dance also enhances the prevention of falls and even rehabilitation for those who suffered an injury. In terms of cardiovascular exercises, classical dance serves well to those with cardiovascular problems, improving overall heart health and circulation.

The rhythmic footwork and maintained energy associated with performances also resemble the benefits provided by running or cycling in terms of cardiovascular endurance as well as metabolic function. The limited and structured movements also improve coordination and body awareness, which can be particularly helpful for people with neurological disorders like Parkinson's. There are studies that have shown that through dance activities, movement skills are improved, tremors reduced, and gait stability enhanced in those with such disorders. At the cognitive level, learning and memorizing the complex choreographies usually activates neuroplasticity, which is believed to eventually delay cognitive decline in old age and can be beneficial in treating diseases like dementia. In general, classical dance fights mental health issues: stress, anxiety, and depression. The meditative quality of dance—achieved through rhythmic movements, controlled breathing, and deep

focus—will regulate the autonomic nervous system, will reduce stress levels, and will help to create a relaxation response.

Dance can offer immersion that re-grounds anxious individuals away from intruding thoughts of anxiety by putting their attention on the rhythm and flow. For depressive persons, one's sense of accomplishment at mastering a dance piece or performing before the audience may bolster self-esteem and cultivate new goals. The telling story capability of classical dance also provides the dancers with an avenue to process and purify complex emotions while producing healthy sentiments in the course of healing the pent-up feelings. Classical dance also acts to bridge social and emotional isolation, which, in turn, has recently been identified as a risk for health. Opportunities for social engagement and community building arise through participation in classes, rehearsals, and performances. It is particularly helpful for older adults or for people in recovery from trauma or with disabilities, in that it provokes a sense of belonging and reduction in feelings of loneliness.

The group nature of the rehearsals encourages teamwork, compassion, and teamwork, which collectively promote better mental health and

social well-being. In addition, the spiritual dimension of classical dance helps a person overcome existential and psychological challenges by linking dancers into their cultural heritage and providing a venue to explore themes of devotion and transcendence and hence gives meaning and purpose. In spiritual levels, it can actually help people cope with or heal from the situation better when dealing with grief, chronic illness, or terminal conditions. Indeed, in essence, classical dance touches upon not only purely physical and mental issues of health but also social and existential crises within society, offering a holistic approach to healing and well-being.

As a practitioner

Classical dance may be an art form, but as a way of life, it actually goes quite beyond this: incredibly broad and deep, it impacts on every aspect of physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. A dancer's path is thus one of dedication, discipline, and continued self-discovery. Every level of the practice—from heavy training sessions to powerful emotional storytelling and the act of performance—is unique windows into a dancer's health and personal development. For practitioners, dance becomes an instrument powerfully used in the control of one's own well-being. They are able

to personally see how the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of the art connote and conjoin harmony within the self. Physically, a practitioner comes to understand the demands and rewards of classical dance on the body.

The long hours that master any posture, movement, or gesture result in an intimate connection with their physical form. Consistency in practice enables dancers to be sensitive of their bodies and to identify their limits. Gradually, the pressure put on the limits increases, which encourages tolerance and adaptability. These practices enable practitioners to overcome the physical pressures, recover from injuries, and keep good health for a very long period. Concentration on accuracy and alignment enhances musculoskeletal health and infuses elegance and confidence in movement beyond everyday life. To a practitioner, dance physically is not exercise alone but a dynamic expression of life and strength that continually improves well-being. Mentally and emotionally, classical dance gives a strong sense of purpose and self-expression to participants.

Internalization of complex rhythms, learning intricate choreography, or incipient characterization and embodiment require great

attention and mental involvement. This high-degree involvement is a form of meditation, honing the thinking skills of a person while helping him or her elope from daily stresses. Dance is a sanctuary platform where one can channel his emotions, confront internal conflicts, and find clarity. Every performance is not just an artistic pursuit but a deeply personal journey, wherein the individual performs and communicates this inner sensation to the audience. Such a reaction creates a fulfilling sense of emotional liberation cherished by practitioners as part of their holistic health journey.

Collaborative rehearsals and group performances emphasize teamwork, patience, and support and learning from others. For most dancers, these relations go a lot further than the studio's walls, leading to lifetime friendships and strong support systems. They become teachers or performers, content in the wealth of knowledge and the passing of it to others, yet more importantly sinking them deeper into a community connected by the art. The spirituality that surrounds traditional dance is most important to a practitioner. There are deeply located spiritual and cultural elements in classical dance that turn the activity from mere physical or creative endeavour. Because

they engage and respond with stories and themes that are basically reflections of universal truths, practitioners often feel connected to something much bigger than themselves.

Practitioners find peace and a purpose to their art through devotional pieces dedicated to deities or abstract expressions of cosmic harmony. This spiritual bonding somehow strengthens them even more in terms of their mental and emotional stamina so that they can face the challenges of life easily and gracefully. In other words, classical dance encompasses a holistic self-care and self-actualization process from a practitioner's point of view. This journey for practitioners allows them to stay fit, think clearly, work out and express themselves emotionally, form rich relationships, and find spirituality. The technique learned in a studio or on a stage typically transcends that to other life aspects and, therefore, serves as a lifelong reservoir for strength, balance, and inspiration through classical dancing.

Indeed, to practitioners, the art form is not a tool of health management but a profoundly enriching practice which moulds a person's identity and complements their overall existence.

Conclusion

Classical dance epitomizes transformative power, shaping a holistic health and well-being system by enhancing physical fitness, mental clarity, emotional balance, and spiritual growth, thus becoming a strong tool for the development of both individual and communal resources. While experience comes with practice in the pursuit of a lifetime, the practitioner of classical dance is one who combines discipline, creativity, and devotion. It provides a haven for expression, a way to spiritual connection, and a base for meaningful relationships. Classical dance is not just the art form but also a way of life. It offers deep-seated purpose, harmony, and a sense of strength in the face of challenge. A tradition as well as a personal practice, it supports itself as an enduring source of inspiration and as a contributing factor in our well-being.

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