

FOREWORD

"Embark on a visual journey through the vibrant tapestry of Indian dance, each movement echoing the cultural symphony within ancient temples—an exquisite fusion of tradition and rhythm captured in this captivating dance coffee table book."

Qu in our life stories, dance is a crucial link to our culture. It's not just about moving – it's a way for us to remember and celebrate where we're from. Dancing becomes a strong and meaningful way to hold onto our traditions, values, and stories. Dance is like a special connection that keeps our cultural roots alive and vibrant.

On a mission to reintegrate the vibrant cultural tapestry of Indian dance into the fabric of our lives, Ram has embarked on a journey that immerses us into the enchanting realms of Bharatanatyam, and various classical dance forms. This endeavor unfolds as an interesting adventure of rediscovery, where each intentional step and graceful gesture in the realm of dance became a narrative thread weaving tales deeply rooted in the intricate cultural canvas of India.

Immersing oneself in these classical dance forms goes beyond mere physical activity; it evolves into a profound exploration of identity and connection. Every dance session transforms into a cultural journey, providing insights into the intricate details of the art and its profound cultural significance. Each swirl and twirl become a step closer to rediscovering not just the art of dance but also one's roots, echoing the stories of past and present generations.

In this dance-driven rediscovery, Ram demonstrates a deeper appreciation for the intricate storytelling abilities of these classical forms. Choreographed sequences serve as portals, transporting individuals into the heart of India's cultural narratives. The reintroduction of Indian dance into one's life is more than a physical practice; it becomes a soulful connection to the rich traditions, emotions, and stories that define the cultural landscape of India.

Each step and gesture became a dance of narratives, allowing the historical and contemporary facets of Indian culture to mix in a mesmerizing choreography. It was not merely a physical engagement; it was a touching dialogue between tradition and the ever-evolving dynamics of modern life.

Focusing into this dance-driven exploration, one senses the layers of history unfolding with every movement. The classical grace of Bharatanatyam became a vessel carrying tales from bygone eras, narrating stories of devotion, love, and cultural evolution. The dance floor became a time capsule, transporting me to times where traditions flourished, and artistic expressions bloomed.

Moreover, this immersive experience went beyond a mere spectacle; it became a profound means of understanding and connecting with the cultural distinction that define India. As one continues to navigate this expressive journey through dance, you find yourself not only appreciating the aesthetic allure

of the art but also forging a personal connection to the cultural heritage it included.

Beyond the act of reconnecting, Indian dance unfolded as a healing balm, extending a relaxing embrace that provided solace to the soul amid the hustle and bustle of life in the fast-paced environment of the States. The profound and deliberate postures of Bharatanatyam became more than just artistic expressions – It evolves into a form of meditation in motion, carving out a sanctuary of peace firmly rooted in the fertile soil of Indian culture.

Within the intricate movements of Bharatanatyam, a tranquil refuge emerges, where deep stances anchor me to inner calm. Deliberate and precise gestures become a meditative exploration, offering respite from the relentless pace of everyday life. Each pose possesses the power to transport me to a serene mental space, where external chaos fades away, fostering reflection and relaxation. The dynamics of Bharatanatyam unfold as rhythmic meditation, transforming each rotation into a therapeutic ritual.

Circular patterns untangle the complexities of the mind, providing clarity and balance. In these whirling movements, a dance-induced mindfulness emerges, enabling me to navigate daily challenges with renewed focus and peace.

These forms of Indian dance went beyond their artistic boundaries to become a source of mental and emotional well-being. They transformed into an internal practice, where the body, mind, and spirit came together in a dance of healing and rejuvenation. The dance floor, once a stage for artistic expression, evolved into a sacred space where the rhythms of Indian culture became a healing melody, echoing the profound therapeutic potential inherent in the graceful movements and expressions of Bharatanatyam.

In contemplating the diversity of a global community, the realization dawned that the universal language of art has the potential to go beyond geographical boundaries and cultural differences. The book as expressively narrated by Ram, therefore, emerges as a bridge between cultures, inviting readers from various corners of the world to immerse themselves in the mesmerizing world of the dance, fostering a shared appreciation that transcends borders.

Moreover, the decision of Ram to pen this book was not merely an intellectual pursuit but a heartfelt endeavor to contribute to the global dialogue on cultural diversity and interconnectedness. Through the pages of this work, Ram has aimed to weave a narrative that not only talks about the technical details of the dance but also brings to life the cultural narratives embedded within its movements. It became a mission to offer readers a deeper understanding, not only of the dance form itself but of the cultural heritage and the technicalities that breathes life into its every gesture.

In spirit, this literary venture evolved into a passionate endeavor to celebrate the universality of art, using the medium of words to invite individuals from various walks of life to appreciate, learn from, and connect with the profound beauty of Bharatanatyam. The book stands as a testament to the belief that, in sharing the richness of cultural expressions, we foster a collective understanding that enriches the global community and cultivates a shared appreciation for the diverse and captivating forms of artistic expression that contribute to the rich mosaic of human civilization.



His literary work stands as both a heartfelt homage and a captivating exploration—a voyage through the seamless fusion of rhythm, space, and emotion encapsulated in the art of Bharatanatyam. Rooted in the historical, spiritual, and ritualistic foundations articulated in texts such as *Natya Shastra* and *Abhinaya Darpana*, the book ventures beyond mere documentation. It embarks on a narrative journey that not only pays tribute to the dance form's origins but also delves into dynamic realms where tradition undergoes adaptation, innovation, and harmonious resonance with the evolving paradigms of the contemporary world.

The narrative within this book beckons readers to delve into the rich culture behind Bharatanatyam, unraveling its historical roots while acknowledging its capacity to adapt to the evolving currents of contemporary society. In this exploration, the book pays homage to the sacred foundations of the art form, celebrating its ability to transcend temporal boundaries. As the story progresses, readers are led through the corridors of time, tracing Bharatanatyam's evolution



from ancient origins to its present-day expressions. It serves as a reminder that beyond its traditional roots, this dance form possesses the resilience to evolve and resonate with the ethos of the contemporary world. The exploration within these pages is not a mere historical documentation but a dynamic engagement with the living principle of Bharatanatyam, recognizing its capacity to breathe and pulse with the spirit of the times. This book encapsulates more than a scholarly pursuit; it is an evocative journey that invites readers to partake in the rhythmic, spatial, and emotional richness of Bharatanatyam. Top of Form

In the meticulous creation of Ram's literary work, his approach has been multidimensional, aiming to capture the heart of Bharatanatyam in its entirety. This endeavor spans across the intricate technicalities, the captivating rhythmic brilliance, and the profound emotional depth inherent in this classical dance form. The aspiration is to construct a comprehensive repository brimming with insights tailored for students, teachers, and enthusiasts, fostering a nuanced understanding and a profound appreciation for the richness embedded within Bharatanatyam.

Designed as a companion, the volume caters to both the seasoned artist and the inquisitive observer. It strives to serve as a resource for students, offering insights into the intricacies of mudras and other technical aspects. Simultaneously, it aims to engage teachers by providing a source of inspiration and a tool for imparting the rich cultural and artistic dimensions of Bharatanatyam to their students. For the curious onlooker, the book is a window into the enchanting world of this dance form, offering a glimpse into its beauty, intricacies, and cultural significance.

Through meticulous definition of the intricate hand gestures (mudras) and detailed explanations of the narratives woven into the fabric of Bharatanatyam, this volume aspires to be more than just a book—it aims to be a comprehensive guide, a source of inspiration, and a reservoir of knowledge that bridges the gap between theoretical understanding and the experiential beauty of the art.

The roots of Bharatanatyam are deeply embedded in the cultural soil of Southern India, and our exploration will begin there, tracing the origins and early manifestations of this expressive art form. From

the temples to the royal courts, Bharatanatyam has evolved and adapted, reflecting the dynamic cultural landscape of its birthplace.

We will encounter the diverse influences that have left an indelible mark on Bharatanatyam's identity. The dance form has absorbed elements from various traditions that reflects the cultural diversity of India. The interplay of religious, social, and artistic influences has shaped Bharatanatyam into a unique and significant cultural expression.

The exploration is a delicate understanding of how Bharatanatyam has responded to societal changes, artistic innovations, and the evolving tastes of its patrons. The evolution of this dance form is a testament to its adaptability, resilience, and enduring appeal.

We discover the historical evolution of Bharatanatyam and gain insights into the socio-cultural dynamics that have influenced its transformation. This comprehensive exploration sets the stage for a deeper appreciation of the enchanting world we are about to uncover—one where tradition meets innovation, and history converges with artistry.

Journeying through the pages of this exploration, we embark on an adventure to unravel the profound core of Bharatanatyam. Beyond being a mere physical expression, Bharatanatyam emerges as a language of the soul, a captivating fusion of rhythm, movement, and expression that is beyond the boundaries of conventional communication.

At its core, Bharatanatyam is a unique art form that communicates emotions, narratives, and spiritual themes. Its beauty lies not just in the precision of elaborate footwork, the eloquence of hand gestures (mudras), or the emotive facial expressions; rather, it's in their seamless integration to convey stories. These stories unfold in a captivating dance that delves into the mythological realm, narrating tales of gods, goddesses, and the human experience.

As the dancer moves gracefully, every step, gesture, and expression become a brushstroke, painting a vivid canvas of emotions and narratives. Bharatanatyam becomes a medium through which the dancer embodies characters and higher beings, bringing the stories to life with a profound sense of devotion and artistry. The dance, in essence, becomes a living, breathing narrative that communicates not only the external form but also the innermost emotions and philosophical insights.

In this study, one learns to understand not just the physical movements but the underlying philosophy that elevates Bharatanatyam to a level beyond mere entertainment. It is a celebration of the human spirit, a symbolic conversation with the divine, and a testament to the enduring power of art to convey the profound complexities of the human experience.

As we continue our journey of exploration, our path now unfolds into the cosmic realms, guided by the divine dance of Nataraja. Within the intricate movements of this celestial dance, we uncover profound layers of symbolism that extend beyond the physical realm, reaching into the universal and abstract dimensions.

Nataraja, the cosmic dancer, embodies the principle of creation, preservation, and destruction. Each gesture and pose in Nataraja's dance form holds symbolic significance, representing the eternal cycle of





life, death, and rebirth. Our exploration delves into the cosmic symbolism embedded in every detail of this divine dance.

A central aspect of this cosmic narrative involves Apasmara, the demon of ignorance, subdued beneath Nataraja's feet. This symbolic act not only represents the triumph of knowledge over ignorance but also emphasizes the transformative power of dance to drive away the darkness of unawareness.

Furthermore, our journey into the cosmic dimensions of Bharatanatyam extends to Astronomy. Nataraja's dance is often interpreted as a cosmic dance, where the rhythmic movements synchronize with the celestial bodies. This connection emphasizes the inseparable link between the earthly and cosmic realms, illustrating how the dance mirrors the peaceful order of the universe.

The intricate interplay of Nataraja's dance, Apasmara's defeat, and the cosmic symbolism within this art form invites us to contemplate the profound mysteries of the cosmos, uniting spirituality, philosophy, and the celestial dance in a

harmonious understanding.

Delving into the intricacies of Bharatanatyam, the focus shifts to the captivating study of Karanas—dynamic and graceful sequences that form the bedrock of this classical dance form. The exploration of Karanas becomes integral in unraveling the crux of Bharatanatyam, offering a profound understanding of the meticulous building blocks that underlie its inherent elegance and flexibility. Originating from the ancient Natya Shastra, these Karanas transcend mere physical postures; that compose a seamless movement.

Each Karana represents a fragment of a larger artistic puzzle, incorporating a unique blend of gestures, poses, and transitions. As a dancer navigates these sequences, the audience sees a harmonious interplay of form and expression that transcends mere physicality. Studying Karanas becomes a journey into the roots of Bharatanatyam, linking the modern practitioner with a heritage spanning centuries.

It fosters a deeper appreciation for the artistic lineage, where each movement carries the weight of tradition while allowing space for individual interpretation and innovation. These meticulously preserved ancient movements, handed down through generations, stand as a testament to the enduring legacy of Bharatanatyam. Exploring Karanas unveils not only the technical intricacies but also the artistic philosophy supporting each movement. Mastery of Karanas transforms a dancer into a storyteller, weaving narratives that bridge the contemporary with the ancient, contributing to the ongoing evolution of this timeless art form.

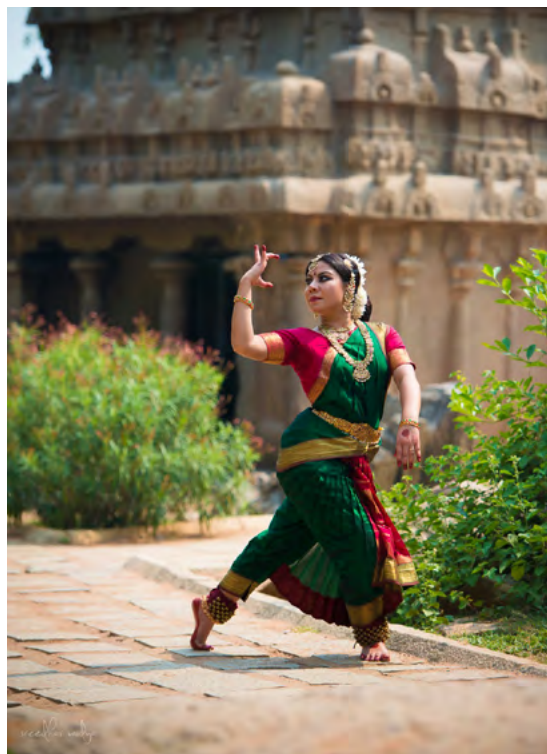
As our exploration deepens, we venture further into the heart of Bharatanatyam, where we unravel the profound meaning and components of Natya. Natya, an all-encompassing term that combines dance, music, and drama, becomes a sacred bridge connecting the spiritual and artistic realms. It exceeds the boundaries of mere entertainment, evolving into a transformative medium for spiritual experience.

Within Natya, each element plays a vital role in creating an internal experience. Dance, with its expressive movements and intricate choreography, becomes a visual language that communicates emotions, stories, and divine narratives. Music, with its melodic and rhythmic intricacies, serves as the soulful backdrop, enhancing the emotional depth of the performance. Drama, through storytelling and character

portrayal, adds a theatrical dimension, bringing narratives to life on the stage.

The union of these components within Natya is not a mere artistic endeavor but a sacred expression. It elevates the dance from a mere physical act to a spiritual journey, creating a space where both performer and audience can experience a profound connection with the divine. The rhythms, melodies, and stories go together to form a combination that is above the physical world, inviting participants to explore the deeper dimensions of their own spirituality.

In delving into the profound meaning of Natya, we see the collaboration of artistic expression and spiritual exploration. It becomes a channel through which practitioners can connect with the sacred, breaking the boundaries of the stage to enter a realm where the physical and abstract converge. Natya, in its truest form, becomes a transformative experience, inviting participants to embark on a spiritual journey through the expressive and artistic dimensions of Bharatanatyam.



Embarking on the journey to unravel the intricacies of Bharatanatyam, we must delve into the captivating realm of Navarasa—an indispensable element that infuses vitality into every performance. A comprehensive understanding of Bharatanatyam needs an exploration of these nine fundamental emotions, serving as the core foundation for each enchanting dance and empowering the dancer to create a series of sentiments, establishing a profound emotional connection with the audience. Navarasa, encompassing joy, sorrow, anger, fear, disgust, astonishment, heroism, compassion, and tranquility, offers a spectrum from which the dancer draws, enriching the performance with a nuanced emotional landscape.

As the dancer embodies these emotions with grace, a deep connection is forged with the audience, transcending mere physical movements. Spectators are invited not only to see a performance but to partake in a shared emotional journey. The dancer, serving as a conduit, communicates the importance of each emotion through expressive gestures, facial expressions, and rhythmic movements. The exploration of Navarasa mirrors the human experience itself, adding layers of depth and relatability to Bharatanatyam, transforming it into a profoundly moving and resonant art form. Through the evocation of Navarasa, the dancer appears as a storyteller, communicating not just through the body but through the very heart of human emotion, establishing a profound and enduring connection that transcends the boundaries and cultures.

In our dedicated pursuit of unraveling the intricacies of Bharatanatyam, we extend our exploration to the subtleties of costume and design, recognizing that the attire worn by a Bharatanatyam dancer is far more than mere clothing—it is a representation of cultural symbolism and an embodiment of the dance form's aesthetic sensibilities.

Beyond the surface, the costumes in Bharatanatyam serve as visual narratives, each element carefully chosen to convey layers of meaning. We delve into the basics of costume design, peeling back the layers to uncover the profound significance included in every fabric, accessory, and ornament.

The intricate jewelry worn by the dancer, from the expressive pieces adorning the hands and ears to the ornate necklaces and anklets, becomes a language of its own. Each piece carries historical and cultural

weight, often representing deities, stories, or symbolic elements that enhance the narrative being told through movement.

The vibrant fabrics that surround the dancer's form are not merely a splash of color; they are carefully selected to complement the mood and theme of the performance. The intricacy of the costume design contributes to the overall visual poetry, with the folds and drapes becoming an important part of the expressive canvas that the dancer paints with every movement.

The exploration into costume and design transcends the surface, inviting us to appreciate the richness of symbolism in each element. It is a celebration of tradition, a visual storytelling that complements the rhythmic and narrative dimensions of Bharatanatyam. Through understanding the language of attire, we gain a deeper appreciation for the holistic nature of this classical dance form, where every detail, from the smallest ornament to the grandest fabric, contributes to the artistic fullness of the performance.

With these in mind, Ram has ensured that we embark on this enriching journey as we celebrate the cultural significance, and allure of Bharatanatyam. It is more than just a dance; it is a living tradition that is beyond generations, weaving stories that resonate through the ages.

As it is a cultural treasure, its status as a collection of traditions have evolved and grown, carrying the colors of the ancient narratives into the contemporary world. Through the graceful expressions, fluid movements, and emotional storytelling, Bharatanatyam becomes a vessel that preserves and communicates the cultural heritage of a past era.

Continuing its exploration of Indian classical art forms, Ram has brought attention to a novel artistic expression known as Kalbha. Kalbha represents a fresh perspective in delving into both traditional art forms, aiming to convey their fundamental teachings in a manner that resonates with today's youth. It strives to capture the interest of the younger generation while staying true to the inherent principles of these arts and preserving their roots.

By formulating the teachings and methodology for Kalbha, including a syllabus covering beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels of practice, I envisioned establishing Kalbha as an officially recognized Indian art form by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India.

This form of art serves as an excellent educational platform for aspiring Indian contemporary dancers, seamlessly integrating the foundations of Indian dance and martial arts. This integration forms the basis of authentic Indian contemporary dance, a departure from the previous Western influences that have heavily impacted this genre.

This journey is an ode to the timeless allure of Bharatanatyam, where tradition and innovation converge, and where the past and present are composed. Let us take part in the cultural resonance, aesthetic beauty, and profound storytelling that make Bharatanatyam a treasure haul of artistic expression.

Throughout my career journey, I've encountered enthusiasts who play a vital role in spreading knowledge and awareness about our traditional dance form. One such individual is Ram Krishnamani, whom I got to know through my student and now colleague, Mrs. Akshaya Renuka, leading our Nritta Dhyana, The Academy of Performing Arts branch in Bangalore, India. It's inspiring to see someone from a different background actively seeking to understand and appreciate the nuances that make India culturally diverse and rich.

Aspiring Bharatanatyam dancers interested in entering this field will find ample information to kick-start their journey. Preserving cultural dance forms is crucial for maintaining diversity, nurturing community bonds, passing down cultural knowledge, and ensuring the continuation of unique artistic expressions that contribute to the global impact of self-expression through traditional methods.

The book highlights various interesting topics, such as the history of Bharatanatyam, discussing



Natya Shastra as the foundational text for various performing arts, including dance. It serves as a comprehensive guide to the principles and practices of dramatic arts, covering acting, dance, music, and stagecraft. Bharata Muni's work aimed to systemize the rules governing performing arts and establish a framework for their practice, allowing us to draw inspiration from the Natya Shastra's principles, ensuring the preservation and continued evolution of this classical dance form.

Understanding the evolution of Bharatanatyam is significant, and the book beautifully delves into the divine depiction encapsulating profound philosophical and spiritual concepts within Hinduism. Nataraja, celebrated as Shiva, symbolizes the eternal cycle of creation, preservation, and destruction through dynamic and rhythmic movements, reflecting the cyclical nature of the cosmos. The imagery and symbolism associated with Nataraja continue to inspire contemplation and artistic expression, making it a revered and timeless representation of

the divine in Hindu theology.

The book addresses a crucial aspect beyond theory, emphasizing a dancer's need to develop correct intuition and the right attitude behind dancing. It delves into understanding movements expressed not just through words but also through hand and facial expressions. This teaches the importance of performing a pure dance and drama. Historical aspects, including the theory of Hasta Mudras (Hand Gestures) and the Anga (Body Limbs) in Bharatanatyam, are vital for a dancer to narrate a story to the audience without verbal recitation. Mastering the skill of abhinaya is essential for dancers to effectively communicate stories, emotions, and themes to the audience.

The book explores Navarasa, elaborating on how dancers can evoke a powerful experience or "rasa," the emotional flavor of a performance, within the audience. Dancers must maintain a continuous flow, ensuring the audience remains engaged and emotionally connected throughout the performance. Skilled dancers infuse their personal artistic interpretation into traditional elements and gestures in abhinaya, bringing a unique style and emotional depth to their performances, making each rendition distinct and captivating.

The contemporary side of Bharatanatyam has evolved while retaining its core principles. The book explores how contemporary artists infuse innovation into this ancient art form, creating a dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity.

Being recognized in a book is not only a personal achievement but also a testament to the value placed on diverse voices within the dance world. The commitment to highlighting dancers' stories reflects a deep understanding of the art form and its cultural significance. I express gratitude for the effort Ram has invested in researching and portraying the dance community with insight and respect. The dedication to authenticity has created a narrative that I believe will resonate with readers and contribute positively to the appreciation of dance.

Arundhati Singha John

Arundhati Singha John

Artistic director

Nrittadhyana, The Academy of Performing Arts, Kuwait