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## Bridging The Gap: Exploring Indian Classical Dances as a source of Dance/Movement Therapy, A Literature Review.

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Bridging the Gap:  
Exploring Indian Classical Dances as a source of Dance/Movement Therapy,  
A Literature Review.  
Capstone Thesis  
Lesley University

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Dance/Movement Therapy

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## ABSTRACT

Indian Classical Dances are a mirror of the traditional culture in India and therefore the people in India find it easy to connect with them. These dances involve a combination of body movements, gestures and facial expressions to portray certain emotions and feelings. There are seven major Indian Classical Dances- Bharatnatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Odissi, Kuchipudi, Manipuri and Mohiniattam. These dances possess three common aspects - Natya, Nritta and, Nritya. These aspects include several other elements which are at the core of these dances. This literature review focuses on three of those primary elements – Abhinaya, Gestures and Navarasas because they are used as a tool for expressing various narratives through movements.

Furthermore, these elements are believed to be therapeutic in nature and have proven to be beneficial for the holistic well-being of an individual who practices these elements.

Dance/Movement therapy (DMT) as defined by the [American Dance Therapy Association](#) (ADTA) is “the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote emotional, social, cognitive, and physical integration of the individual, for the purpose of improving health and well-being” (ADTA, 2014). This literature review synthesizes the common features of Indian Classical Dances and DMT by analyzing their benefits to one’s overall well-being. In addition to this, it attempts to establish a link between the expressive elements of the Indian Classical Dances and the Marian Chace’s framework of DMT. Lastly, it concludes the ways in which these dances can be further studied to be considered as a potential technique of DMT.

**Keywords:** Indian classical dances, body movements, hand gestures, facial expressions, emotions, feelings, nritta, natya, nritya, abhinaya, gestures, navarasas, dance/movement therapy, holistic well-being, therapeutic, expression, marian chace, framework.

Bridging the Gap: Exploring the Indian Classical Dances as a source of Dance/Movement  
Therapy, A Literature Review

## INTRODUCTION

This capstone thesis will explore the potential use of Indian Classical Dances as Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT) by drawing out therapeutic elements from the seven Indian Classical Dance forms. According to Natyashashtra (Muni, Ghosh, 1967), an ancient Sanskrit text about the codification of the Indian performing arts, “dance is a combination of not only the movements of the body, but also of the hands and facial expressions accompanied by music.” Often this is to express a theme or a story from religious or mythological characters from classic literature. Even though the narrated stories are based on mythology, they express the characters or situations which are similar to everyday life events. The dramatic expression of various emotions and movements allows the audience to relate and to experience these narratives as their own rather than just a choreographic performance. Indian Classical Dances are a combination of dances of the mind and soul. They are a form of communication which bring out the innermost feelings, and at the same time depict the cultural aspects of a civilization (Sudhakar, 1994). This approach to therapy has been maintained in India, knowingly or unknowingly for a very long time but has not been studied enough. The project is an attempt to discover ways in which the elements of Indian Classical Dances can be used as a tool of DMT to address the specific physical, psychological and/or emotional needs of the individual rather than simply using them as a tool to elicit good feelings (therapeutic).

The motivation for this project emerged from my personal experiences as an international graduate student of DMT in the United States of America. During the course of my studies at the graduate program, I noticed myself adapting to the movements of my classmates, all of whom

were trained in western classical and modern dances. Their training was very different from my training in the Indian Classical Dance. I soon realized that I was doing movements which were far different from my natural movement preference (Indian Classical Dance movements). To say the least, while doing the western movements, I found myself having to shape into a new mind and even a new self which felt like a disconnection between my body and psyche. My motivation for this project grew even stronger after my experience in using the conventional western form of DMT with a group of elderly with Parkinson's disease in India. In my group sessions with them, I utilized the conventional western DMT practices which failed miserably. These experiences made me realize the cultural incongruity of the western DMT practices and I strongly felt the need to explore the therapeutic elements from the Indian Classical Dances as they are rooted so much in the Indian culture to make the practice of DMT more culturally relevant for the Indian population.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review aims to investigate the therapeutic elements in the Indian Classical Dances. It will also view those therapeutic elements through the lens of DMT. This chapter briefly introduces DMT and Indian Classical Dances. First, brief history of Indian dances along with the main seven Indian Classical Dance forms are discussed. This is followed with an outline of the common expressive elements used in these dances as a tool for communication and expression of feelings. Next, a discussion about the theory and principles of DMT is provided. Then, common areas of focus for both DMT and Indian Classical Dances are identified through an understanding of their benefits on each area of focus. Lastly, Chacian Framework of DMT and its core concepts are discussed briefly followed by a chart illustration of the synthesis of Chacian framework of DMT and Indian Classical Dances.

### **Brief History of Dance in India**

Movement is the most basic form of communication for every human being on the planet. It expresses what a whole bunch of words cannot. It expresses the people, the culture, the place they come from: a moving record of our human existence. India has a rich diversity in cultures, languages, traditions and religions. Each of the 28 states follow different customs, traditions and speak different languages. Despite this, many spoken languages in India are based on or derived from Sanskrit, thus these languages share commonalities. Dance is another cultural staple that creates cohesion, yet diversity, in India. Every state in India has its own folk and/or classical dance style. People in India use dance on a number of occasions such as during social events, religious events or for community engagement. Indian dances are closely linked to emotions and resemble a perfect harmony between classical music and bodily movement. According to Bhavanani (2001), “in India, classical dance and music pervade all aspects of life and bring color, joy and gaiety to a number of festivals and ceremonies. In fact, dance and music in India are tied inextricably to festivity of any kind”.

Indian Classical Dance has seven different styles to boast of. Each of the styles pertain to different geographic regions in India. These different styles all have their own rhythms, grace and costumes, yet they are similar in the primary dance elements that they use such as the facial and hand gestures. Although, all Indian Classical Dance forms originate from specific parts of India, their theory and practice are based in Natyashastra. Therefore, they share a number of commonalities such as the Mudras (hand gestures), certain body postures and the expression of various emotions; all these forms are used primarily for storytelling. Ganapathi (2011) states, “every Indian Classical Dance form draws inspiration from stories depicting the life, ethics and beliefs of the Indian people and therefore, adequately mirrors the Indian culture as well”.

Indian Classical Dances are comprised of three main components: Natya, Nritya, and Nritya. Natya refers to the dancing utilized in dramatic expression of a story or a plot. Nritya uses body movements to portray only the physical aspects of the dance and is void of the emotional aspect. Nritya is that form of dance which is full of emotional expressions. In the Hindu mythology, it is believed that Lord Brahma derived music, gesture, song and moods from the Rug, Yajur, Sama, and Atharva Vedas respectively. He arranged these Laws of Dancing in a way that leads to the fulfillment of the four goals or aims of human life as per the Hindu philosophy, Dharma (righteousness, moral values), Artha (prosperity, economic values), Kama (pleasure, love, psychological values) and Moksha (liberation, spiritual values) (Coomaraswamy, Duggirala 1917). Even today, many people of India, hold values which to some extent revolve around these four goals of human life.

### INDIAN CLASSICAL DANCES

Even in today's modern society, the Indian Classical Dances have managed to retain their unique traditions and have evolved as a psycho-physical system of human body through the use hand gestures, facial expressions, body movements and rhythms (Sarkar, 2015). Blanche Evan also stressed that dance utilizes the most direct and complete connection to the psyche (Evan, 1964)

There are seven major Indian Classical Dance forms –

1. **Bharatanatyam:** This is one of the oldest Indian Classical Dance forms which was originated in the district Tanjore of Tamil Nadu. In this dance form the dancers make significant use of various eye and hand movements to express different emotions (Kilger, 1993). It is an amalgamation of emotion, music, rhythm and expression (Chatterjee,

2013, p.78). The word Bharata from Bharatanatyam is also a mnemonic for Bha, Ra, Ta which in Sanskrit stands for Bhava (emotions & feelings), Rasa (melody), Tala (rhythm) respectively. The first half of Bharatanatyam, Bharata when broken down into two separate words 'Bhar' and 'Rata' means 'Light' and the one who is dedicated to something respectively; the combined meaning of 'Bharata' is also something or someone who is devoted to seeking the light. Bharatanatyam is also viewed as a dance form in which the dancer is believed to fuse his/her identity in moving the body as an instrument to the music and rhythm (Yodh, 1988, p. 676). This form uses music, movement and rhythm as creative outlets for expression.

2. **Kathak:** Kathak is a classical dance form originated from North India. It is a narrative dance form which is characterized mainly by fast footwork (*tatkar*), spins (*chakkar*) and innovative use of *bhav* (expression) in *abhinaya* (acting) (Chatterjee, 2013). Kathak is believed to be derived from the word Katha which literally means "story". Before the evolution of Kathak as a performing arts form, the Kathakars meaning "storytellers" or bards used to go to different places to recite legendary tales and epics accompanied by music, mime and movements due to the lack of means for distance communication (Raut, 2015). They would communicate these stories through hand gestures, rhythmic foot movements and facial expressions (Kathak-Classical Dance-Drama of India, n.d.). In Kathak, the body movements, gestures and facial expressions of the dancer draws the audience to the emotions, moods and actions of the story (Gesture and Rhythm, n.d.).
3. **Kathakali:** Kathakali is a form of Indian Classical Dance originated in the state of Kerala which belongs to the South Indian region. According to Chatterjee (2013), "Kathakali is considered to be a combination of five elements of fine art: expressions (*natya*, the



component with emphasis on facial expressions), dance (*nritha*, the component of dance with emphasis on rhythm and movement of hands, legs and body), enactment (*nrithya*, the element of drama with emphasis on *mudras*, the hand gestures), song or vocal accompaniment (*geet*), instrument accompaniment (*badya*)” (p.78). This dance form mainly puts more emphasis on facial expressions, rhythm and movement of hands, legs, body and the hand gestures. The therapeutic part of this dance forms mainly deals with exercising the various facial muscles which reduces tension in the facial muscles (Chatterjee, 2013). The characters presented in Kathakali are well defined, and divided into three distinct groups: 1. Satvic or virtuous, noble characters, 2. Rajasic or heroic characters, 3. Tamasic or destructive, diabolic ones (Desai, 2009). The embodiment of these characters can be used in one of the widely used psychotherapeutic techniques called Role Play. This technique involves embodying a given or an improvised character. A scripted character in a role play allows the individual to shift in the mindset of the character through embodiment. Embodiment is also one of the techniques used in Dance/Movement Therapy which uses the body to express affects, attitudes, behaviors and their interrelations through movements (Koch, 2006).

4. **Odissi:** Odissi has originated from Orissa state of India and is also known to be a temple dance tradition. This dance form follows the *tribhanga* (three-dimensional body gesture) which includes various forms of sitting, walking, leaping and elevations which can be considered therapeutic (Chatterjee, 2013, p. 79). During a study conducted by Chatterjee (2013), it was noted that the Odissi dancers had excellent lung function, and muscle control of waist, hip and thighs.

- 5. Kuchipudi:** Kuchipudi originated from Andhra Pradesh, a state in South India. This dance form is *vachika abhinaya* (based on dialogues) oriented. It highlights the importance of Abhinaya by giving each of its aspect a detailed expressive description. The therapeutic values of this dance form are found in its graceful and fluid movements (Chatterjee, 2013, p. 79).
- 6. Manipuri:** Manipuri dance has emerged from Manipur, a state in north-eastern part of India. This dance is devotional in nature and essentially portrays the characters of Hindu deities Radha and Krishna. This form embodies delicate, graceful and lyrical movements. Kashyap (2005) states that there is a presence of a tough body control behind this soft impression. Manipuri dancers primarily use rounded movements and avoid any quick, sudden, sharp or directional movements. Therapeutic value of this dance form is in giving the dancer a soft appearance, good body control and peace of mind because of its gentle, soft movements (Chatterjee, 2013, p.78).
- 7. Mohiniattam:** Another classical South Indian dance form is Mohiniattam which emerged in the state of Kerala. This dance form is usually performed by women as a solo recital. The word Mohiniattam literally translates into dance of enchantress (Chatterjee, 2013). Therapeutic value extracted from this dance form includes various body movements, body balancing, expression, muscle movement, muscle constriction and relaxation (Chatterjee, 2013, p. 79).

## Expressive Elements of Indian Classical Dances

### Abhinaya

The following Sanskrit shloka from the book Abhinaya Darpana (the mirror of gestures), which is another scripture of Indian Classical Dances, accurately captures the true essence of these dances and also emphasizes the mind-body interconnection involved-

*Yato Hasta tato Drushti*

*(Where the hand goes, there the eyes follow)*

*Yato Drushti tato Manaha*

*(Where the eyes go, the mind follows)*

*Yato Manaha tato Bhavaha*

*(Where the mind goes, there the expression follows)*

*Yato Bhava tato Rasaha*

*(Where the expression goes, the mood/emotion follows), (Nandikeśvara, Ghosh, 1957)*

The above shloka conveys that every gesture is like an alphabet of the Indian Classical Dances which has its own specific meaning, these gestures attract the attention of the witness/observer to follow the movements of the hand which in turn invites the mind to follow in the same direction by inducing certain emotions and feelings.

*“Abhinaya is the imitation of the thing seen by self or is an expression of sentiment experienced by oneself.” (Angikabhinaya, 2018)*

Another important aspect of the Indian Classical Dances is the Abhinaya. According to Ganapathi (2011), “Abhinaya uses a combination of codified hand gestures and facial expressions, sometimes stylized, otherwise natural, to transform the written script into a dance to convey a story. Abhinaya constitutes three kinds of gestures: 1) Āngikābhīnaya: Expressing through body movements which involve the use of symbolic gestures, postures and movements of major and minor parts of the body which also include the facial movements.

2) *Vācīkābhīnaya*: Expressing through speech which includes poems, lyrics, written script.

3) *Āharyābhīnaya*: Expressing through appearances, costumes, make-up etc. (Technique of Indian Classical Dance, n.d.). In this project, I am focusing primarily on the *Āṅgīkābhīnaya* (physical expression) because the objective of this project is to discuss the ways in which Indian Classical Dances use body movements as a tool for expression. It is the physical expression of various gestures, emotions and moods using different parts of the body. There are three elements of the *Āṅgīkābhīnaya* (bodily gesture): the limbs, the parts of the body and its features (*Anga*, *Pratyāṅga*, *Upāṅga*). According to *Abhinayadarpana* (Coomaraswamy, Duggirala 1917), in *Āṅgīkābhīnaya* the head, hands, arm-pits, sides, waist, feet and also the neck, are considered the limbs. In *Pratyāṅgīkābhīnaya* the movements are focused on shoulders, shoulder-blades, arms, back, stomach, thighs, calves, wrists, knees, and elbows. In *Upāṅgīkābhīnaya* the eyes, eyelids, pupils, cheeks, nose, jaw, lips, teeth, tongue, chin, face, are considered the features. The heel, ankle, fingers, toes, and palms constitute as the accessories.

Abhinaya provides a non-verbal movement-based vocabulary to express various emotions, creatures, objects and subjects using the different body parts. For example, there is a list of eight different types of glances and nine different types of head movements which are used to express different emotions. Also, it includes a number of different hand gestures to denote trees, animals, familial relationships such as husband and wife, mother and father are just to name a few. This non-verbal vocabulary of creative expression can be used with individuals who have difficulty putting their feelings into words or even those whose speech abilities are compromised.



Mrigasheersha hasta & Shikhara hasta (left to right) are used together to portray a relationship between wife & husband respectively.

### Gestures

Gestures in performance tell us about the characters, their emotions, and also about the action in the story. We can observe from the movement of the body and the gesture of the hands what a character's age and gender are, how they are feeling about something happening in the story, and actions they take to move the story along. Gesture is the language of dance, rhythm is the heartbeat of the story (Gesture and Rhythm, n.d.).

### Navarasas

All forms have traditionally been structured around the nine *rasas* (state of mind) which are known as Navarasas: 1) *hasya* (happiness); 2) *shoka* (sorrow); 3) *krodha* (anger); 4) *karuna* (compassion); 5) *bhibatsa* (disgust); 6) *adhbhuta* (wonder); 7) *bhaya* (fear); 8) *viram* (courage); and 9) *shanta* (serenity) (Hays, 2008). These Navarasas are used in the Indian Classical Dances to express various emotions and feelings through facial expressions. One of the important works on facial expressions and human emotions was done by Paul Ekman. Ekman (1999) posited that the seven emotions (happiness, sadness, anger, fear, disgust, surprise, contempt) are experienced universally across different cultures in various ways. These Navarasas have an uncanny similarity with the Paul Ekman's seven basic emotions as follows-

Paul Ekman's Seven Basic Emotions	Navarasa & associated emotions (bhava)	Emotions associated with Rasa
1. Happiness	1. Hasya	Happiness, Laughter
2. Sadness	2. Karuna	Compassion, Sorrow, Empathy
3. Anger	3. Raudra	Anger
4. Fear	4. Bhayanaka	Fear
5. Disgust	5. Bibhatsa	Disgust
6. Surprise	6. Adhbhuta	Surprise
7. Contempt	7. Viram	Proud, Courage
	8. Shringar	Love
	9. Shanta	Peace, Tranquil

Furthermore, Darwin also catalogued various expressions into categories which are similar to the categorization of Ekman and Navarasas. He further also noted the facial deformations that occur as an expression of a certain emotion (Darwin, 1904). For example, “the firm opening of the mouth when in surprise” (Srimani, Hegde, 2012). These descriptions of facial expressions by Darwin are quite similar to the ways in which the nine emotions are expressed.

### **DANCE/MOVEMENT THERAPY**

*“The body can be the key to unlocking profound levels of healing (Gleissner, 2007).”*

DMT is a form of expressive therapy where movements, actions, gestures are used as a medium of expression. It provides a creative approach to psychotherapy which is rooted in the belief that mind and body are inseparable (Levy, 1988). Movement is universally considered as the basic form of communication because as babies we learn to communicate using our bodies before we start speaking. As we grow older, we find it difficult to express our feelings and

emotions with words, but movement makes it easy to express our deep, innermost feelings and thoughts without feeling the burden of finding the right words to express themselves. Dance therapy is based on a belief that our mind and body are interconnected and hence, feelings and experiences get trapped in the body. DMT provides an outlet for expressing those trapped feelings and emotions which are often too difficult to put into words. In DMT, the actions, fluidity, and movement are interpreted more like a language than a choreographic performance (Gleissner, 2017).

DMT originated in America and started to emerge as a professional field in the early 1940s when many of the early forerunners noticed and realized the healing benefits of dance and movement in the form of psychotherapeutic treatment. American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) (2019) defines DMT as “the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote emotional, social, cognitive and physical integration of the individual”. The definition clearly suggests that DMT emphasizes the holistic well-being of an individual. The foundation of DMT is based on these four primary focuses: Emotional, Social, Cognitive and Physical mentioned in ADTA’s definition. Currently this is a commonly acceptable and widely used definition of DMT for research studies.

### **Dance/Movement Therapy and Holistic well-being**

DMT is believed to enhance one’s holistic well-being by integrating the physical, emotional, social and cognitive aspects of an individual. Many research studies have established the effectiveness of DMT to improve one’s overall well-being and quality of life. The first and the foremost comprehensive study undertaken on nonverbal behavior by Darwin and Rachman (1983), revealed that body movements not only had a significant impact on the biological aspects of species, as believed in the earlier studies, but also on the emotional expression.

Panksepp's (1982) psychobiological model indicates that there is an interconnection between the emotions and physical, motor processes. In addition to this, there is a mutually influential association between emotions and thoughts, perception and cognition. DMT works on a similar premise as Panksepp's psychobiological model with a focus on an interactive relationship between physical (body-movement), cognition, emotions which strengthens the foundation of DMT. Koff (2000) emphasized that movement serves as a basic form of communication, experience and expression and it allows one to be aware of their own senses and actions enhancing their self-awareness and emotional response. Furthermore, movement is perceived as essential for survival, to understand one's environment, to adapt to it and connect with others (Gilliom, 1970). Gilliom's view of movement sheds some light on the importance of DMT in social well-being of an individual.

### **Indian Classical Dance and Holistic well-being**

*“It is this need for psycho-physical union that Dance can so directly fulfill..Its instrument of expression is the human body and its medium body movement.” (Blanche Evan, 1964, n.p.)*

The mind-body interconnection is at the heart of Indian Classical Dances similar to DMT. DMT works on enhancing this connection between the mind and body with a focus on the holistic well-being of an individual. Similarly, Indian Classical Dances have many benefits to the physical, emotional, cognitive and social well-being which constitutes the holistic well-being. Different DMT forerunners explored different areas of focus in the process of developing their own frameworks. Indian Classical Dances and Chacian framework are closely linked with a similar focus area – movement as a communication tool.

**Physical:** Many research studies have identified the improvement in physical fitness as a result of practicing the Indian Classical Dances. One such study by Raut (2015), concluded that the



dancers who practiced Odissi, Bharatnatyam and Kathak had higher levels of cardiovascular endurance. Moreover, specific elements of these dances have also proved to be beneficial to one's physical health. The *thaat* performed in Kathak dance form includes the therapeutic torso movements and it is now used for the treatment purpose also as a form of physical exercise (Chatterjee, 2013, p. 77). Additionally, the Tatkar/footwork in Kathak performed at various speeds and patterns can help to improve movement sequential skills and strengthen the body-mind connection (Kashyap, 2005). The basic or standing position (Sthanak) of Kathak is in itself an 'Asana'. It involves straight alignment of spine and neck as well as pressure on both the hands right from arms which can be used in the treatments of paralysis, spondylitis. Vinjan in his article mentions the findings of a study done by Dr. Johari who is a pediatric orthopedic neck surgeon. The findings of his study concluded that the lateral gliding neck movements, primarily used in Bharatanatyam have been used as secondary treatment for children born with Torticollis, a congenital condition that limits the neck motion. Most of these dances are performed barefoot and extensive research suggests that the ones which involve stamping of feet acts as a treatment of acupressure for arthritis (Ramchandran, 2007).

**Cognitive:** Studies with PET imaging have identified the brain regions which are activated while performing a dance/movement activity. Out of these various regions include the somatosensory cortex which is responsible for motor control and eye-hand coordination (Dancing and the brain, n.d.). Indian Classical Dances can enhance the eye-hand co-ordination with the use of various hand gestures which are always followed by eye-movements as stated in the shloka, Yato Hasta, Tato Drishti (where the hand goes, the eyes follow). In addition to this, eye movements are also used to express many emotions.

Bharatanatyam, Kathakali and Kathak, primarily use a horizontal saccadic eye movement in which the eyes are moved from one fixed point to another. Studies have found that these horizontal saccades improve memory. The mind & body connections come into play in enhancing memory through eye movements. According to a research done by Parker, Parkin & Dagnall (2013), “Saccadic bilateral eye movements improved fluency of memory retrieval but only for episodic memory”. Episodic memory encompasses memory of recent or past events such what you ate for breakfast, where you parked your car this morning, your best friend’s wedding and so on (Heerema, 2019).

In progressive neuropsychological disorders such as Alzheimer’s, Dementia, the episodic memory is affected. One of the hypothesis which could be further studied is that even though the disease and its effects cannot be reversed, they may be delayed by incorporating the saccadic horizontal eye movements used in the Indian Classical Dances with a focus on improving the episodic memory and delaying the loss of it.

The Anga Bhava (expressing emotions through body movements) and Taal Bhava (musical measure) requires the engagement of both right and left brain respectively (Oak, 1970). This holistic brain development may improve the overall cognitive functioning is just another hypothesis which could be further investigated.

**Emotional:** The Navarasas which are extensively used in Indian Classical Dance forms can be a good tool for individuals who have difficulty expressing their emotions (Kashyap, 2005). It can also be a useful expression tool for people who experience the lack of emotional awareness. Khandelwal and Joshi (2016), in their comparative study attempted to understand the role of emotional management training using the Navarasas to identify its effect on Emotional Intelligence of adolescents. Results of the study found that adolescents in the experimental group

who underwent the emotional management training through the use of Navarasas had increased levels of emotional intelligence and no changes were seen in the control group.

Indian Classical Dances are known for using a wide range of hand and facial gestures which are used to communicate through symbols the feelings, emotions and mood. The footwork used in Kathak dance is represented by stamping of feet to various rhythms. As stated by Chatterjee (2013), the footwork done on a fast rhythm in Kathak helps to release anger and tension. Stamping the feet requires them to be in contact with the earth which gives one a sense of empowerment and grounding (Kashyap, 2005). Since the footwork also require one to be attentive, it helps people to stay in present moment.

**Social:** Facial expressions used in all the seven dance forms involve the use of a number of facial muscles. According to Ekman (1999), “emotional expressions are crucial to the development and regulation of interpersonal relationships” (p.47). Facial expressions are essential in the formation of healthy attachments which includes attachments during infancy as well as adulthood. Also, they are involved in regulating the acceleration or deceleration of aggressive emotions. Ekman in his study with people suffering from congenital facial paralysis found that they faced difficulties in developing and maintaining even the basic relationships due to their lack of facial expressiveness. Following Ekman’s theory, using the facial exercises from the Indian Classical Dances, one’s ability to express may be improved. Furthermore, these facial exercises can be used as an effective tool for people with certain psychological disorders who experience flat affect or are unable to express themselves due to the tension in the facial muscles.

In addition to this, the various rhythms in these dances may be used as a tool to facilitate social skills. Individuals can be encouraged to converse with using rhythms, where one person creates a rhythm and the other one responds with the same rhythm. This rhythmic non-verbal

communication can result in establishing good listening and responding skills since in order to respond to something, one needs to carefully listen to the rhythm created.

### **MARIAN CHACE FRAMEWORK**

Within the field of DMT, out of the plethora of different frameworks, I am most drawn to and influenced by the work of Marian Chace. Unlike the other frameworks of DMT the Chacian framework emphasizes a relational approach to therapy. Chace posited that the established relationship between a client and therapist is the place where the therapy occurs (Fischer & Chaiklin, 1993). Chace was influenced by Harry Stack Sullivan's work who was an interpersonal psychoanalyst. Although Sullivan was trained in psychoanalysis, his primary focus was on the power of therapeutic relationship that fosters change. He stated that human beings are in need of support, security and mutual satisfaction that comes from relationships (Fischer & Chaiklin, 1993).

In a collectivistic culture like India, there is a great importance placed on relationships. Desai (1999) states that, "Indian culture has been referred to as one which is inherently inter-relational." Rituals are considered as important aspects of Indian culture. The rituals allow to formalize and honor relational ties, most often in social ways which communicate the importance of relationship within the culture (Desai, 1999).

### **Dance for Communication: Marian Chace**

The basic principle underlying Chace's approach is the belief that dance is a source of communication and hence fulfills the basic human need (Chaiklin et al., 1993). In her work with psychiatric patients in the St. Elizabeth Hospital, she attempted to meet the clients where they were at by using body movements as a tool to communicate. She developed "Dance for Communication" program in the hospital. In one of her unique performance pieces, "Hotel St. Elizabeth", her clients creatively portrayed their lives in the hospital through movements (Chace,

1993). It was not necessarily a psychotherapeutic technique, but it still allowed her clients to express themselves.

### **India Classical Dances As A Medium of Non-verbal Communication**

*“The soul is in the body” (Copeland, 1983 p. 518)*

Traditionally, the Indian Classical Dances were always considered to be a form of entertainment because dance is a means of artistic expression which involves discipline, stamina, technique, and creativity (Rounds, 2016). The body is believed to be a powerful tool for communication, and these dances involve the use of the entire body including the minor parts such as the eyebrows. As Rounds (2016) states, “dance is a significant means of communication – communication in which the soul expresses itself through meaningful gesture-ubiquitous and important.” Gesticulating is an important aspect of Indian Classical Dances which includes not only the hand gestures but also facial gestures. Of the various sources on the importance of gestures in communication, Clement Crisp and Edward Thorpe’s *The Colorful World of Ballet* (1977) accurately states the historical significance for dance as communication:

*“Mankind has always danced. He expresses himself through movement and when he shows his emotions it is often gestures rather than words that tell what he feels (p.6).”*

In her foreword, Susanne Langer states that, “Dance gesture is not real gesture but virtual gesture” (Carter, Cohen, Copeland, 1982, p.31). In other words, she suggests that dance gestures are not a genuine expression of emotion, but they still communicate emotion (Rounds, 2016). One of the important aspects of Indian Classical Dances is Abhinaya, which can be used as a means for expression. Abhinaya is comprised of plethora of gestures forming a unique movement vocabulary, which can be used to express a range of emotions and feelings.

### **Chace's Theoretical Concepts and Indian Classical Dances**

Four theoretical components of the Chacian framework, as outlined by Chaiklin & Schmais (1993, pp.17-19): 1) Body action, Symbolism, Therapeutic movement relationship & Rhythmic group activity.

**Body Action:** According to Chace, “change occurs when the patient is ready, and allows himself to experience action in his body” (Levy, 1988, p. 2). Body action pertains to recognizing the movement within the body, breathing patterns and expression of emotions. Chace says that, “distortions in body shape and functions (are) maladaptive responses to conflict and pain” (Sandel, Chaiklin & Lohn, 1993, p. 77). The mind-body connection lies at the core of Chace’s work. Even though this concept has several layers to it, the underlying principle that movement of the body can lead to moving the mind remains constant (Chaiklin, Wengrower, 2009).

**Body Action in Indian Classical Dances:** Angikabhinaya is an important aspect of Indian Classical Dances which involves expressing through body movements with the use of symbolic gestures, postures and movements of major and minor parts of the body which also include the facial movements. It works on the Chacian’s premise of Body Action by using body movements as a tool to express emotions and feelings.

**Symbolism:** “Symbolism in dance/movement therapy provides a medium by which a patient can recall, re-enact and re-experience” (Sandel, Chaiklin & Lohn, 1993 p. 79). The symbolic stage represents release of unconscious feelings, emotions and desires through fantasy, recollection archetypes, imagery or roleplaying with a combination of verbalization, visualization and body movements (Levy, 1988). Chace believed that patients can work through their problems using symbols and images without the need to analyze or interpret them (Marian Chace, 2016). The previously unprocessed past material often surfaces in clients through the use of symbols in

movement. If and when the past material comes to surface, the Dance/Movement therapist might add a new symbolic movement or provide a movement intervention based on the symbolic theme. The core principle underlying the use of Symbolism is the hope that the symbols, gestures or movement allow the unconscious feelings, emotions to present in the conscious awareness of the client (Chaiklin, Wengrower, 2009).

**Symbolism in Indian Classical Dances:** Indian Classical Dances have a plethora of hand gestures which are associated with expression of a symbol or symbolic activity/action such as a flying bird, flowing river are just to name a few. Indian classical dancers make use of symbolic body actions to communicate the story by expressing the underlying emotions and feelings. The dancer uses various hand and facial gestures to enact the symbols in the story. Chace also used symbolic images when she was working with psychotic patients because she believed that the symbolic expression of the patients was his/her way to communicate the complex feelings which otherwise would be difficult to be put into words. The symbolic dance actions help to evoke certain specific memories. For example, the action or gesture of flowing river can lead to a patient recalling sitting peacefully by a flowing river.

**Therapeutic Relationship:** According to Corteville (2009), “therapeutic movement relationship entails the therapist involving him/herself in a movement relationship or interaction with the patient in a way that promotes emotional acceptance and communication” (p.12). It includes Mirroring and Reflecting as two primary techniques which were Chace’s brainchildren. The main purpose of these techniques was to communicate empathy by mirroring the patient’s movements to communicate that, “I hear you; I understand you” as a way of validating his/her experiences in a non-verbal communication (Levy, 1988).

**Therapeutic Relationship in Indian Classical Dances:** These dances use the Navarasas through an engagement of their entire body to convey each rasa. The success of the performance depends on evoking a certain rasa within the audience through the use of specific gestures and facial expressions. The audience/witness/ observer of these movement conveying *rasas* experience these emotions due to the phenomenon of mirror neurons. It may not evoke the exact same emotions, but the witness is able to relate to the rasa being conveyed through the movement as a way of unconsciously empathizing with the character performed by the mover.

**Rhythmic Group Action (GRA):** According to Levy (1988), “rhythmic action was used by Chace to support expression of thoughts and feelings in an organized and controlled manner.” Rhythm is present in everyday life; in our breathing, heart beats, speaking, walking, working and playing. Chaiklin et al (1993), states that rhythm provides a structure for chaos, and when the experience is shared with others, provides a feeling of strength, safety and cohesion. (p. 80). “The rhythmic concept is also foundational because it brings each group member back to their bodies, and even more specifically, to their hearts and lungs – systems that are basic to human life” (Landgraf, 2013, p.63-64).

**Rhythmic Group Action in Indian Classical Dances:** Structure is at the core of Indian Classical Dances and every element of these dances – rhythms, gestures, postures, facial expressions, eye movements and body movements represent it. Unlike Angikaabhinaya, Nritta aspect of these dances is an expression of rhythmic movement through the use of various hand movements and footwork. Each of these dances have their own unique Tala (rhythms); the dance/movements are performed to the beats of these rhythms. Sherman (n.d.), states that right brain is responsible for producing, responding to the music and the processing of the musical



elements is ascribed to the left brain; as a result, rhythm engages both sides of the brain.

Following chart is created by me to provide an illustration of the synthesis of the common features of Chacian DMT and Indian Classical Dances-

<b>Chacian DMT</b>	<b>Indian Classical Dances</b>	<b>Common Features</b>
<b>Body Action Symbolism Therapeutic Movement Relationship Rhythmic Group Activity</b>	<b>Angikabhinaya (physical expression) Mudra (gestures) Navarasas (nine s moods) Tala (rhythms)</b>	<b>Provide structure</b>
<b>Belief that mind-body interconnected</b>	<b>Includes both the dances of the body as well as the mind</b>	<b>Mind-body interconnection</b>
<b>Uses dance as tool for communication</b>	<b>Use dance to express, convey and narrate stories</b>	<b>Dance for non-verbal communication</b>
<b>Focuses on enhancing the physical, social, emotional and cognitive well-being.</b>	<b>Uses the entire body including the minor parts such as eyes which results in positive benefits towards the benefitting the physical, social, emotional and cognitive functioning</b>	<b>Holistic well-being</b>

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this thesis project was to bridge the gap between the western theories of DMT and the abundance of therapeutic elements embedded in Indian Classical Dances with a long-term aim to explore and expand the practice of DMT in an Indian cultural context. DMT principles, concepts and theoretical frameworks are primarily based in the western culture and therefore, it is essential to enhance the scope of DMT across various cultures. Through reviewing the current literature, it appeared that there are many links between the Indian Classical Dances and DMT. Both these frameworks can be used to enhance one's physical, emotional, cognitive and social well-being which constitutes one's holistic well-being.

Many studies reviewed in this project provided an understanding of the therapeutic value of the numerous elements of Indian Classical Dances which perform the similar functions as DMT. For example, DMT uses body movements as a tool for expression. Similarly, Indian Classical Dances are linked with emotions and use the entire body as a tool to express these emotions. Indian Classical Dances also showed a great potential to be used as a practice of DMT through their synthesis with the Chacian framework. The four theoretical concepts of Chace-body action, symbolism, therapeutic movement relationship and rhythmic group action were linked with four elements of Indian Classical Dances which are – Angikabhinaya (physical expression), Mudras (gestures- facial, hand), Navarasas (nine moods), and Tala (Rhythms) respectively.

### **Limitations of the study**

Overall the current literature is not enough to consider Indian Classical Dances as a psychotherapeutic technique. The available literature only discusses only the therapeutic elements of the Indian Classical Dances and lacks a strong scientific support for the findings. Many dance/movement therapists in India are using the elements of Indian Classical Dances but they have not been documented into research studies. Due to this, there is scarcity of resources on the therapeutic importance of these dances.

These dances are highly technical and skilled and therefore require a great anatomical understanding of the human body. Not all elements can be applied for every physical, social, emotional or cognitive need presented by a client. Also, it is necessary to take into consideration that some of these elements such as the use of hand gestures may put some strain on the movement of wrist muscles. Therefore, one needs to have expertise in one or more of the Indian Classical Dances in order to use the elements as a technique of DMT.

Furthermore, majority of the research studies on the therapeutic value of Indian Classical Dances are qualitative. Even though qualitative research can convey detailed information, the lack of quantitative and empirical data reduces the reliability and validity of the research. Despite the challenges attached to the quantitative research in the field of DMT, due to the lack of standardized observation and, assessment tools, there is a dire need for a quantitative research for the growth of this field.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Marian Chace pioneered the use of DMT through revising, refining, expanding her initial ideas and established principles and methods to practice DMT. Similarly, the ideas discussed in the current thesis project can be researched further with more support from scientific research studies. Formulating a theoretical framework of DMT based on Indian Classical Dances will be the long-term vision for the current project. So, DMT can become more accessible and relatable in the Indian cultural context. I am positive that this research will be a significant addition to the exploration of the field of DMT across different cultures.

If future evaluations and research documents the success of integration of Indian classical dance elements and DMT, then it can provide a basic foundation to develop movement therapy interventions. These interventions can be experimented with clients exhibiting a wide range of behaviors such as depression, tremors, flat affect etc. Conducting a comparative study with a pre and post intervention research design can help to understand the effectiveness of these interventions. Moreover, these interventions can also be applied within a culture other than the Indian culture to understand the cross-cultural effectiveness of the therapeutic elements of Indian Classical Dances. By linking the theoretical frameworks of DMT and Indian Classical dances,

the synthesis suggests a unique approach to psychotherapeutic which can result in the expansion of DMT practice and education.

The project can also serve as a guide for future dance therapists, current dance therapists, dance therapists in India or dance therapists around the world to develop movement-based interventions using the expressive elements of the Indian Classical Dances. It can also spark interest in future researchers to explore DMT within their own cultural contexts.

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***THESIS APPROVAL FORM***

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**Student's Name:** Ruta Pai

**Type of Project:** Thesis

**Title:** Bridging the gap: Exploring the Indian Classical Dances as a source of  
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In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

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