

Perceived Aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological Benefits Among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on exploring and identifying Perceived aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological benefits among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers. There are three objectives that has been scrutinized in this study. The first objective is to find out the most commonly occurring type of poses. The second objective focuses on identifying the most commonly occurring feet gesture and the third objective focuses on the aspects of the poses that makes the pose comfortable and composed for the participants which also assesses the impact of live music. This study was initiated by forming a relationship between Yoga and Bharatanatyam from the existing literature. The method used to obtain data was through Qualitative research method using semi-structured interview and direct observation on sixteen participants, all of whom had over ten years of experience in the field of Bharatanatyam. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to analyse the obtained data. The results show us that the most commonly occurring poses were the Eka Pada poses (One legged poses) and the most commonly occurring feet gesture were swastika and the Kunchita Pada. The phenomenological experiences have been elaborately discussed in this study. With further tests and exploration, the results of this study may be of help in the field of Dance Movement Therapy (DMT).

Keywords: *Bharatanatyam, Yoga, DMT, Live Music, Phenomenological Experiences*

Dance, the rhythmic movement of the body to express or for the simple joy of movement has existed for as long as one can remember. It has been considered as an art form that has been used for social events, part of rituals, and many more social setups. Havelock Ellis writes “If we are indifferent to the art of dancing, we have failed to understand, not merely the supreme manifestation of physical life, but also the supreme symbol of spiritual life”. Dance lets an individual indulge in a non-judgmental and non-competitive form of joy that has the potential of engaging people in physical fitness.

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Perceived Aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological Benefits Among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers

Indian classical dance

Indian classical dance is considered to be very rich in the cultural heritage of India. The unique art forms are considered to also teach ways of life such as patience, discipline, mindfulness, and so on and these are considered to be required for one to sustain in (Mishra, 2001). Indian classical dance is considered to be the highest form of art. There are mainly 7 major forms of Indian classical dance and they are Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Odissi, Kuchipudi, Manipuri, and Mohiniattam. To be able to express certain feelings and emotions, these dance forms incorporate gestures, movement, and facial expressions (Pai, 2020). Research shows that Indian classical dance forms enhance cognitive abilities and improve physical fitness. Ayurveda has placed the benefits of dance at a higher level stating that it provides one with inner healing and awareness (Deekshitulu, 2019).

Benefits of Bharatanatyam

Bharatanatyam is considered “artistic yoga” due to its similarity with yoga poses. A closer look at the Bharatanatyam poses shows us the striking similarities between the Bharatanatyam poses and yoga asanas thus this correlation brings out the possibilities of the two to have a similar impact on one’s body and mind. An in-depth understanding of the Bharatanatyam form of dance requires a conscious presence. This art form is known for its physical benefits such as flexibility, endurance, coordination, and strength (Shenoy & Kumar, 2019). Due to its known advantages, it has been lately slowly incorporated for treating people with different disabilities in India. Dance, in general, has been used in the field of therapy known as dance movement therapy. In this form of therapy, movement and dance are used to help clients express and improve their physical and mental well-being. A study has shown that there was an improvement in the cognitive abilities, working memory, and reaction time in an elderly group of people of 35 years old who took part in a dance program for about 6 months (All Answers Ltd., 2018).

Dance Movement Therapy

According to the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA), dance movement therapy (DMT) is defined as "the psychotherapeutic use of movement as a process which furthers the emotional, cognitive, physical and social integration of the individual" (Loman, 2005). Dance movement therapy uses movement, expressions, and gestures to let one be able to express themselves. DMT is considered quite effective for those with mental illnesses where research shows that 30 minutes of dancing to lively music was sufficient to reduce their depressive symptoms. It was initially originated in America and was then slowly incorporated into the rest of the world. It was also introduced in India by Tripura Kashyap who is a movement therapist and she has been creating awareness about DMT all over India. This form of therapy is still considered to be nascent in India but people have grown more curious over the years to know more about it and now there are courses provided in specific places for Dance movement therapy (Pai, 2020). For the past couple of years, individuals practicing DMT have been noticing that cultural differences play a huge role during the sessions and thus started incorporating several Indian dance forms. Anusha Subramanyam, a dance movement therapist discusses about dance movement therapy conducted with South Asian women in Britain. She gave an example by talking about how some of the South Asian Women were very keen to do Garba which is a folk form. This form played a significant role in their lives especially during the Navaratri festival, which is a festival typically celebrated by the Hindus. By implementing this form in the therapy sessions, they felt a sense of joy and achievement. To them, a Dance Movement Therapy session provided them with a sense of validity to the client’s cultural norm

Perceived Aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological Benefits Among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers

and the freedom to openly express and explore themselves in a way they felt comfortable (Subramanyam, 1998).

Need for this study

Indian classical dance forms although included by some practitioners in dance movement therapy, still lacks the essence and importance as to how beneficial it can truly be. Bharatanatyam poses are known to be very similar to asanas such as Utkata Konasana, Vrikshasana, Ashwasanchalan, and many more. Reflexology studies have shown that certain pressure points in the feet play a role in enhancing blood flow, increased sense of well-being, and better healing potential (Blunt, 2006, p. 257). The pressure point in the feet is usually activated while doing Pada Bedas in Bharatanatyam which can be simply translated to positions of the feet. Thus, all of these correlations point us in the direction indicating that there can be several benefits in Bharatanatyam.

Overview of the research and its objectives

There are mainly 3 objectives in this study, the first objective is to identify the most commonly occurring pose. The second objective is to find out which is the most comfortable feet gesture and the third objective is to identify aspects of the pose that makes it comfortable for them.

Scope for the study

This research will add to any knowledge gap in the literature and get an in-depth understanding of the healing aspects of Bharatanatyam poses. Although Indian dance forms are slowly being incorporated in DMT practice, this study will be able to scientifically assess the benefits and increase the use of classical Indian dance forms than western methods in the DMT practice in India. Thus, this study can contribute to both dance movement therapy as well as dancers who pursue the Indian classical dance forms. The benefits can attract more individuals to practice this dance form because it not only brings physical ease but also provides mental benefits through the joy of dancing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research will create a foundation to study other dance forms more in-depth due to their similarities, and the current and future dance movement therapists can expand the use of their own culture and these Bharatanatyam poses into their practice to help harness its benefits that can be incorporated in therapy.

METHODS

Research design

The research design incorporated in this study is the qualitative research design.

Sampling design

Purposive sampling is being used in this study since the target sample is chosen based on the objective of this study and the characteristics of the population. The sample selected here is experienced Bharatanatyam dancers who have five or more years of training in the field. It takes about 4 to 6 years for dancers to gain necessary knowledge regarding Bharatanatyam as opined by professional Bharatanatyam dancers named S. Rao, S. R. Nagesh, S. Shekar, and P. Unni (Personal Communication, April 5, 2021). The age group chosen for this study is between 19 to 35. The reason for choosing this age group is to maintain homogeneity. Changes have occurred in the styles of Bharatanatyam over the years and differences can be noticed between generations (Sarukkai, 2019).

Perceived Aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological Benefits Among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers

Tools Used

Semi-structured Interviews and direct observation are the two methods of data collection used in the first phase of the study.

In the second phase of this study, a General health Questionnaire developed by Goldberg will be given to the participants. The main reason for this is mainly to screen the participants and make this study more empirical but the responses would not be statistically analyzed. The GHQ-28 is a widely used and validated questionnaire to screen emotional distress and possible psychiatric morbidity. Test-retest reliability has been reported to be high (0.78 to 0.9) and interrater reliability has both been shown as excellent (Cronbach's Alpha 0.9-0.95) high internal consistency was reported. It contains 28 items that, through factor analysis, have been divided into four subscales. The GHQ-28 is the most well-known and popular version of the GHQ (Sterling, 2011, p. 259).

Data analysis

For this study the data obtained will be analysed by using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). This method is concerned with examining in detail the perceived experiences of the individual. It involves an interpreting process that involves both the researcher and the participant (Willig & Rogers, 2017).

Procedures

The subjects are initially welcomed and are handed out an information sheet that consists of all the information regarding this research. Any doubts the participants have will be clarified by the researcher. Following this, the client will be given a consent form to the willing participants to get permission to record them and take the pictures of them performing the pose as well as the permission to record the interview. Bracketing will be done to prevent Researcher Bias. Bracketing is a process wherein the researcher notes down things that may come in the way of the research due to personal bias.

Interview question sample

“What about the pose makes it comfortable to you?”

“What according to you is the meaning of comfortable and composed?”

“What aspects of the pose do you like?”

“Are there factors that influenced your pose?”

First Phase

The participants will be first asked to move into a pose that they are comfortable and composed in and a picture and a video of it will be taken. Following the pose, a set of semi-structured questions will be asked about the pose shown by the participant.

Second Phase

Once the interview is completed. The next phase involves the client filling in the General health questionnaire by Goldberg. Since this study involves looking at the health benefits of Bharatanatyam poses, this questionnaire is to make the study more empirical. The responses from the questionnaire will then be checked in with the client as to their reason for the responses.

After the entire process, the client will then be thanked for their time and will be updated regarding the research as and when it proceeds.

Perceived Aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological Benefits Among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers

RESULTS

Table 1.1 Summary of the socio-demographic profiles of the participants

| Participant ID | Name | Age | Gender | Experience | Occupation |
|-----------------------|-------------|------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | S. G | 27 | Female | 20 | Working |
| 2 | V.V | 23 | Female | 12 | Student |
| 3 | M N | 30 | Male | 20 | Working |
| 4 | M.M | 21 | Female | 16 | Working |
| 5 | S. M | 26 | Female | 15 | Home maker |
| 6 | N. S | 21 | Female | 16 | Student |
| 7 | A P | 26 | Female | 21 | Working |
| 8 | K. K | 22 | Female | 18 | Working |
| 9 | M.D | 28 | Female | 23 | Working |
| 10 | V.S | 19 | Female | 16 | Student |
| 11 | A TV | 24 | Female | 18 | Working |
| 12 | S.C | 30 | Female | 15 | Dancer |
| 13 | P D | 26 | Male | 21 | Dancer |
| 14 | A B | 22 | Female | 15 | Working |
| 15 | P S | 23 | Female | 18 | Working |
| 16 | A P | 22 | Female | 10 | Working |

Table 1.2 This table shows the GHQ Results of the Participants

| Participant ID | Name | Score | Interpretation |
|-----------------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | S. G | 19 | Average |
| 2 | V.V | 16 | Average |
| 3 | M N | 4 | Low |
| 4 | M.M | 3 | Low |
| 5 | S. M. P | 13 | Low |
| 6 | N. S | 19 | Average |
| 7 | A P | 5 | Low |
| 8 | K. K | 17 | Average |
| 9 | M.D | 8 | Low |
| 10 | V.S | 19 | Average |
| 11 | A TV | 6 | Low |
| 12 | S.C | 4 | Low |
| 13 | P D | 2 | Low |
| 14 | A B | 31 | High |
| 15 | P S | 10 | Low |
| 16 | A P | 20 | Average |

The General Health Questionnaire was administered on the participants to check if their current state of health and their perceived health matches one another. That is, to test and verify the reality. Most of them scored a low score. However, participant 14 scored a high score and when clarifying she mentions that the main reason for her responses were due to the current covid pandemic. She mentions,

“Bharatanatyam has helped me mentally and also to stay fit, active, and not to think negatively about anything but apart from Bharatanatyam and the time I spend for dance each day there is a time where I am pre occupied with my personal thoughts and being away from my dad, not being able to travel and having close ones who are suffering from covid. So, this pandemic

Perceived Aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological Benefits Among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers

around you know like watching the news and everything and getting to know how its effecting everything has really affected me”.

Results for the first objective of the study

Results of the first objective of the study was interpreted by analyzing images of the poses that was most occurring among the experienced Bharatanatyam dancers. All the 16 participants were initially asked to show a pose that made them feel comfortable and composed. The most common poses shown were the “Ekapada poses” meaning one legged pose.

Table 2.1 Superordinate themes and Master Themes of the first objective.

| Superordinate Themes | Master Themes |
|---|--|
| The perceived experience of transcendence | Sense of spirituality Sense of divinity Balance of opposite forces Sense of being grounded Sense of calmness |
| Major aspects of physicality | Role of confidence Role of practice Sense of physical strength Physical pleasure |

Theme 1: The Perceived experience of transcendence

Theme 1 explains about how the participants experience something beyond the human experience and something extraordinary. In yoga, a one-legged pose is usually done in order to bring about a sense of equilibrium. In Bharatanatyam, these poses bring about that equilibrium according to these dancers and so much more as explained in the first sub-theme (master theme) that speaks about sense of divinity.

Sense of Divinity: Here the participants speak about how they feel when doing a one- legged pose while expressing a deity they feel close to. Bharatanatyam poses also give these dancers a chance to express whatever they wish to express unlike in yoga asanas. For example, one of the participants says,

“So, when I do a pose of Krishna who I like so much I feel closer to him and that makes me happy. It gives me some sort of energy”

Here the participant portrays a Krishna pose as she stands on her single feet, not only does she feel that she is physically getting the benefits but the fact that she is able to express her favorite deity gives her that sense of happiness from within which leads to a sense of calmness.

Sense of calmness: This master theme talks about how one-legged pose despite looking complicated, brings about a calm feeling to several dancers. Participant 14 says,
“As a whole while doing this there is a calm and composed thing within you”

This participant shows a pose that represents her favorite deity Saraswathi in a one-legged stance. She says that while doing this pose towards the end of a performance she feels calm and she enjoys that feeling.

Perceived Aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological Benefits Among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers

Sense of being grounded: The most repeated sub-theme that may have emerged would have been the experience of being grounded not only physically but also mentally, a participant who is also a yoga practitioner shows a Bharatanatyam pose very similar to the yoga pose called the Natarajasana and she says,

“It is about the balance I find even in the imbalance and it is that one moment that I find the ability to stand not only physically but also mentally. I am in one particular stand even if there is movement and even if there is a lot of chaos, at this particular posture finds me in one particular place”.

Another participant explains that the pose she showed me was the pose she tried to incorporate every time, as the pose reminds her that she is here, in the now.

“When I do this the first thing, I feel in my body is like my body is standing in one leg and it connects me from my core to the top of the head. You cannot always feel it but whenever I do something that requires balancing and anytime, I have to hold myself this reminds me that I am here”.

Balance of opposite forces: An experienced Bharatanatyam dancer shares his experience while doing the Nataraja pose which is perceived by dancers to be a very powerful and a divine pose. Nataraja pose can be portrayed in different ways. However, the ones who demonstrated this pose as a one-legged pose explains that it teaches them the balance of both good and bad in life,

“It is a divine pose and I feel like it teaches us about balance we have to you know, find in our life”.

In the above excerpt the balance explained by the dancer is elaborated to be the balance of opposite forces that is if there is happiness, then there is sadness too which one should accept,

“I feel very peaceful and comfortable in this pose, it is a kind of a sense of strongness and also kind of a peace. We always tend to see strong and then no peace but this is a pose when I hold it It needs so much concentration focused that I feel inner peace and joy.”

This pose has taught these dancers the importance of balance one must have in life and that knowledge in turn has brought about a sense of joy within these dancers.

Sense of spirituality: Sense of spirituality here speaks about how one experiences something that is bigger than themselves and connect with something more than themselves and to the world around them. This spiritual feeling that they experience can also give them the energy that they are in search of,

“I feel bigger than myself, I feel much wider. This pose helped me get more energy. I feel more energetic”.

The above excerpt explains a pose that makes a person feel and experience that there is something much more than them, a sense of openness, a pose that shows that there is much more than only you, here a participant also explains her journey as she shows a pose,

“The sense of beyond is everywhere when you are in that particular pose. It allows you to be in that moment where you finally think that it is not only about oneself but it is also about infinity it is also about the universe.”

Perceived Aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological Benefits Among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers

The experiences they have shared here as they do the poses is as though they are experiencing a level of transcendence which has helped them thrive mentally.

Theme 2: Major aspects of physicality

This theme discusses the different physical aspects of the pose. This theme includes physical comfort, strength and the pleasure they feel when they do a one- legged pose.

Role of physical strength: Physical ease can be very important to many. Physical ease here means more than just mere comfort but it talks about how one can be confident because they are physically comfortable with what they are doing. Participants tend to focus on their strengths as they perform a pose since that in turn boosts their confidence which is an important component in one's self-esteem,

“My legs are strong so I can do any pose that has to do with balancing and I feel confident in that.”

Focusing on one's physical strength is as important as focusing on one's mental abilities since the two components go hand in hand.

Role of confidence: When the participant showed a pose that accentuated her grace that gave her a sense of joy and confidence,

“In a certain way it is more like a show off like see I can do this and I feel like there are certain poses that does justice to that particular character and that gives me this happiness”.

It is important for some to do a pose that expresses their presence and that in turn gives them that confidence too,

“Because I am the kind of girl with short stature, I go for poses that elongates my body, makes me more feminine and louder”.

An eka pada pose also stretches many parts of one's body and that stretch can be comforting to many as studies mentioned in the review of literature also speaks about how a physical stretch can enhance performance, prevent injuries and also improve muscles range of motion.

Physical pleasure: Here in this sub-theme the main aspect that is focused is on the feel-good factor that is how one feels when they do a pose that makes them feel physically good. A participant explains her experience of physical pleasure as she demonstrates the one-legged pose,

“Physically as I mentioned the stretch. This particular pose that I did it is something that is called as Natarajasana. What happens is in Bharatanatyam as well. When you practice that pose there is a stretch in your hamstring that is what I like about it with respect to physicality.”

For some individuals, this stretch leads to a feel-good factor,

“When I did this pose, I could feel the strain on my hip because you're lifting your leg away from your body right? So, I could feel that strain but you know the kind of pain that comes with dance, the good kind of pain”.

Role of practice: One pattern that was interesting was the role of practice, for many these poses were not something they could do initially but after practicing they found comfort in

Perceived Aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological Benefits Among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers

the poses that was once something complicated,

“Practice has helped me be comfortable in the poses and I feel relaxed in it too. You have to work on it to know if you’re comfortable or not comfortable on it”.

According to these dancers just like any normal physical activity one cannot expect to find the benefits of something without putting the effort to learn its physicality because only then will they know its true essence,

“I feel this pose kind of allows me to fold my body in a way that is not comfortable but still with practice it becomes comfortable and I like that so I feel this practice makes me feel very comfortable to reach that thing so that’s why I keep practicing this, days together and now I feel comfortable doing this”.

The same participant also says that,

“So, dance is not about today, so it’s an ongoing process to keep doing it.”

Table 2.2 Superordinate themes and Master Themes of the second objective.

| Superordinate Themes | Master Themes |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Role of the Physical Characteristics | Role of physical comfort Role of Physical Beauty |

Theme 1: Role of Physical Characteristics

While speculating the data, it was found that right after the one-legged poses the second most repeated leg position seemed to be either the “cross-legged” feet gesture known as the “Swastika” and the other was the “one leg on the toes” known as the “Kunchita Pada”. However, with closer inspection we can see a striking similarity between the two types of feet position that is keeping one of your legs on the toes while keeping the other flat on the ground with a slight aramandi (Half sit). The major difference is that one of them is a cross-legged pose whereas the other is not crossed.

The beauty of these two feet gestures is that it automatically brings about a geometry to your body as you position your feet in either “Swastika” or “Kunchita pada”. As the participants showed me these two feet gestures the aspects of comfort and beauty played a role. A mere feet gesture to some makes them feel as though it accentuates their figure well. Participant 9 while showing me the Kunchita pada says,

“Because it is a combination of something which looks really good, very good and very graceful when we stand that way, it’s a curve that is very accentuated also it is not very difficult to hold”.

The fact that these feet gestures not only give comfort but also add to heighten one’s physical beauty shows its importance to one’s confidence and self-esteem. For some participants this is comfortable since it is a feet position they can relate to

“I like this (swastika), usually I stand like this, normal time also, I don’t know I automatically go into this position”.

To participant 6 the feet gesture was a very natural thing to do since her body was so used to it and she was comfortable with the position. The two sub-themes here, that is the physical beauty and physical comfort go hand in hand.

Perceived Aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological Benefits Among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers

Role of Physical beauty: When a person does the mentioned two feet gesture the body automatically moulds itself to a shape which to some may feel like it increases their femineity by accentuating the curves and to others the geometrical aspect of it makes it seem nice to the audience. Participant 13 mentions,

“I like to do swasthika, it is aramandi and the cross I really like the structure of my feet. It is geometric shape, two triangles, even aramandi it is two triangles so that I like”

When something looks appealing it may also seem comfortable to them. In connection to the physical beauty, physical comfort plays a major role in these two feet gestures.

Role of Physical Comfort: The feet positioning of the two feet gestures is very comforting to many participants. The placing of the toe is comforting to the ankle for some such as participant 6,

“It is considered good to stand in toes. I feel like my ankle relaxes when I stand that way.”

Participant 5 explains in detail the physical comfort the tribangi pose gives her,

“When I do this pose, the hips and the trunk is stretched the most, so when I’m having any kind of cramps after dancing instead of normally standing, I tend to automatically stand like this that gives you kind of relaxation, whenever you have some pain when you stretch that particular part that feels soothing, mainly when I dance, I do this because I’m a little stout, my trunk and the hip part starts aching okay, so this tribangi pose gives me that relaxation.”

She talks about how the body is placed in a tribangi posture. Your hips are usually pushed outwards while doing these feet gestures. So, a feet gesture can provide complete body relaxation to a few as well.

Table 2.3 Superordinate themes and Master Themes of the Third objective.

| Superordinate Themes | Master Themes |
|---|---|
| Power of live music to physical aspect | Increased energy Nature of interaction |
| Power of live music to psychological aspect | Impact on mood Freedom of expressing Feeling more involved Sense of being grounded |
| Internal Influencers to the pose | Relating to Self Role of early experiences Influence of Divinity |
| External Influencers to the pose | Role of Physical Appeal Glorifying one’s physical ability Role of physical comfort |

Theme 1: Power of live music to physical aspect

Theme 1 talks about how Live music has the power to impact one’s physical aspects that is their energy, stamina, things that are more external and visible in nature. Each and every participant experienced a difference when they did the pose with the music on. However, the participants all said that live music gives them more energy and other benefits in comparison to recorded music. The instruments in live music makes the music seem louder than when it is played through a recorded device. The first sub-theme speaks about the Increase of energy one

Perceived Aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological Benefits Among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers

experiences when there is live music.

Increase in energy: Participant 1 says,

“I very much prefer music. I prefer live music in fact. It is a luxury but during rehearsal when they have a live musician and a mridangam and all that’s when I feel the most active and energetic to dance so definitely yes”.

The fact that there are people performing with the dancers right there by their side unlike how it is usually done through recorded music gives them the energy to dance and perform well. In live music the instruments feel much louder. It is an activity that is happening simultaneously like mentioned by participant 3 who states,

“Live gives more energy, it is something that is happening in the present unlike cassette which is happening in the past”.

The fact that it is an act happening spontaneously makes them get that energy which leads to the second sub theme that talks about how this simultaneous activity between the dancer and singer leads to an interaction.

Nature of Interaction: When a singer sings and a dancer performs to it or vice versa, we see an interaction taking place between the two. Although in a recorded music there is still the song playing and the dancers dancing to the song, there is an aspect of reality and in person interaction missing there which plays as an element for liveliness. Participant 6 mentions,

“But with live music it’s a live performance happening with you simultaneously. It is both the musicians and the dancers, they interact together and understanding takes place between each other so both influences each other”.

Participant 7 speaks about the concept of manodharma which simply talks about the improvisation artists make during their creations and in the dancer’s case which happens better if there is live music. To this participant it allowed her to be able to interact not only with the musicians but also the dancers,

“I would definitely prefer live music because it allows me, not only me but many dancers would feel this way that there is a sense of manodharma when you have live orchestra”.

Participant 12 talks her beautiful experience when she listens to live music she says,

“Live, that is a different kind of joy, to interact with the musician, like everything, even the audience also enjoys a lot, onstage spontaneous changes, something can change on the stage and I like that. You feel like everyone is connecting with you both are accompanying each other, it makes me feel like I have wings, its overwhelming at times”.

Theme 2: Power of Live Music to Psychological Aspects

Psychological aspects focuses on being able to concentrate more, impact on one’s mood listening to live music and much more. The instruments and the singers during a live performance have the power to make an individual experience so many psychological benefits. Dancers feel that it gives them a sense of freedom to be able to express what they truly want to which leads to the first sub-theme that is freedom of expressing.

Perceived Aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological Benefits Among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers

Freedom of expressing: This sub-theme explains about how the participants felt that they could express their emotions better with live music.

“I like live because we can express however we want, live has variations we can always add in more” says participant 3.

The participants feel that although music in general helps them express the vastness, it is different in comparison to live music. Participant 5 says,

“Freedom to express whatever it is that I want to express. You can express in recorded too however the vastness is more in live music than recorded one. It is more explanatory than recorded music.”

To communicate and understand one must be able to express and it seems as though live music did justice to it by giving them that chance to express their emotions better. Participant 13 says,

“Live music I can explore whatever I want. There is no fixed timing as such and recorded music you cannot explore. In live music you do whatever you want, you get freedom and that’s what I want. You have ample space of exploring things. The singing and mridangam gives you so much power and then confidence.”

Expressing and exploring themselves is an important part of communication for dancers and according to participant 13 live music gives him that chance and in turn makes him more confident in being able to explore himself through live music. Been given that freedom to be able to express and explore really does have a positive impact on the dancers.

Impact on mood: With music in general it seems as though the participant feels calmer and more relaxed and they also feel like it makes them happy. However, with live music it seems as though the effect has double the impact. Participant 9 says,

“Live always is better in terms of the feel because it’s another thing entirely when the mridam is right there and the singer is right there. There is that sense of a complete performance which is not there in a CD. It is that much more excitement and that much more alive”

The participant here explains how uplifting it can be to dance to live music. The excitement also could be due to the fact that in a live set up everything is spontaneous and things may seem impulsive. Participants during the interview had mentioned that at times they would perform without having had the time to practice with the live singer as well as the orchestra and even though it was a nerve wrecking situation, the rush of adrenaline pushed them to perform better and enjoy the process. Participant 16 says, “I would say live is much better always, When I dance to live I feel literally goosebumps when the person is sitting literally beside and sings the song with all the instruments, it gives that completeness and the singer is also present in that moment it gives that sense of completeness to the art you are trying to deliver”

Feeling more Involved: For any artist being completely involved in their art is considered usually to be really important and if there are factors that could contribute to this involvement it is always considered a bonus. Many of the participants that were interviewed felt that music plays a huge role in contributing to that factor of involvement but more specifically they felt again that live music would help in that involvement in particular performance. Participant 4 says,

“When you are in sync with the musician that is when you are giving the performance, you cannot jump out of it. I become the character itself. I might be a male or a female or a small kid depending on the music, I actually become the character. Live music does

Perceived Aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological Benefits Among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers

justice to that.”

A dancer tends to portray characters in their performance and participants feel that music helps them get completely into that character to the point that they themselves become it. This also points at the direction of being in the moment which leads to our next sub-theme which is Sense of being Grounded.

Sense of being Grounded: This sub-theme speaks about how live music plays a role in bringing the participant in the present moment that is the here and now. The vibrations from the instruments or may it be the singer themselves makes the participants forget about anything happening around them and focus on what it is they are doing now. Participant 16 says,

“At times it happens where your thoughts might wander somewhere but when it is live music your mind is completely occupied to dancing then and you feel into it”

In fact, music in general helps people feel grounded. A live set up enhances it since everything is a very in the moment act that is happening simultaneously and requires a lot of concentration. Participant 8 says,

“Always a whole different experience for anyone who is present there for the dancer, musician, audience. It brings a whole different set of uniqueness and very in the moment. Because everything is done in the moment and is never been done before”

For a performer it is an important part to also connect to the audience and here live music helps that as well. Everything seems louder with live music and hence helps dancers enjoy and express freely what it is that they truly want to express.

Theme 3: Internal Influencers to the pose

This theme speaks about what were the internal aspects of a participant that influenced them to do a certain pose. This is with something that is not visible to the others such as something that relates to their past experiences they must have had, their traits or personality or also could be their personal interest in something that must have influenced them in a way that helps them feel good when they show a particular pose. Thus, moving into the first sub-theme of this super-ordinate theme is Relating to self.

Relating to self: This sub-theme speaks about how the participants could relate to the poses they showed in turn making them feel good about it. Participant one speaks about her pose that represents women and she herself being a woman the pose gives her a sense of connection. She says,

“I also like that it represents women because I am a woman and it resonates with me”

Participants have also mentioned about one pose makes them feel more feminine or masculine. Participants who have always been soft natured since their childhood prefer doing poses that they can relate to and in turn they feel good about it since they can relate to it. Participant 2 says,

“I prefer lasya poses than tandava poses. I prefer slow moving, graceful movements than sharp brisk movements.”

“Since my childhood I have always liked soft spoken, I like feminine poses”

This sub-theme can also easily connect to the next sub-theme that is the role of early experiences.

Perceived Aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological Benefits Among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers

Role of early experiences: Few aspects of the poses were shown by the participants because it was something that they have been doing since their childhood and it is something that reminds them of their childhood and that in turn makes them feel comfortable. Participant 9 says,

“It is a very nice thing for me to portray, and I enjoy doing that. Also, I think the age when I learnt it, it was a natural emotion for me to understand. Femininity or portraying feeling of love or first fleshes of love. Those were very joyful and I was excited to explore that and perform.”

The participant was explaining about how she enjoys showing poses that express Sringara, which is usually done to facially and bodily express love, romance, attraction and beauty. She talks about how these emotions to express was so natural in her teenage days and now when she does the same, she is reminded of her young days. The participant had portrayed the tribangi pose which is a very feminine pose and participants who have shown this pose has stated that it makes them feel more feminine. For some poses may relate to their early experiences as a child as for others it may be something that was influenced from their early experiences of other practices. Participant 7 states that,

“Early years of me being exposed to yoga practice. You know in the initial stage they have a particular goal like “I want to be able to do that pose” “I want to be able to do a head stand” so initially this pose that is the natrajasana that was my initial goal”

The participant here was exposed to yoga in her past which was something that influenced her to do a pose now that makes her experience comfortable and so much more. These aspects show us that past or early experiences of an individual influences their present and in many cases that factor itself may seem very joyful.

Influence of Divinity: Participants also tend to portray a pose that represents a deity or something that they consider to be divine. This in turn makes them either feel that they themselves are that or they feel closer to the deity in turn making them happy and for some powerful too. Participant 6 says two statements about she feels when she does a pose of her favourite deity that is Krishna,

“When I am close to him, I want to feel him. I am very happy when I give Krishna poses.”
“So, when I do a pose of Krishna who I like so much I feel closer to him and that makes me happy. It gives me some sort of energy”

And for others a sense of divinity could even help in their normal day to day life. For participant 13 the pose of Nataraja speaks about balance. He beautifully explains the importance of how the balance of everything including the good and bad is required in life and he says that Nataraja pose has taught him that.

“So immediately when I think about that posture when I see that Nataraja, I feel like I need to have that balance of both in my life”

Similar to participant 13, participant 10 speaks about the balance that she learnt from the pose. She shows the pose of Nataraja as well although both of them were different from one another.

“To mean something which is a combination of both of them. You are neither bending towards the active agile and powerfulness or neither are you being too timid and very agile and all that. So, it’s like in between of both. You are striking a balance between two things. Two extremities”

Perceived Aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological Benefits Among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers

Another participant here also speaks about the confidence she gets as she does the pose of her deity.

“Because Krishna is very close to my heart and I love the flute and it comes as the part of the pose and it gives confidence when you actually perform the pose. When you stand like Krishna you feel like he’s there like a confidence somewhere.”

These are the internal influencers to the pose and the next aspect would be the external visible aspects to the poses.

Theme 4: External influencers to the pose

Theme 4 is the final theme that has emerged from the third objective. Theme 4 discusses the visible factors that influenced the participants to show the pose. The external aspects that made them show the poses are being looked into. It could either be the comfort they felt doing the poses or how good they looked. Theme 4 focuses on the importance of how one feels when they know that, what they are physically showing looks good to the others and themselves. The first sub-theme speaks about the physical beauty that is, how one’s physical beauty while doing the pose enhanced their over-all confidence.

Role of Physical Appeal: Physical appeal here speaks about one’s physical attractiveness and to a degree to which one’s physical feature looks pleasing to one’s eyes. Here this master theme discusses about how the role of physical appeal influences one to show a particular pose. Participant 4 says,

“If you ask me to show another pose for peacock I will do it, I will do it happily but this sort of gives a different excitement to it. I feel like this pose looks good for the body I have”

Doing something that suits one’s body type gives them a sense of confidence. Another participant likes poses that will make her appear physically more pleasing to the eyes. Participant 8 says,

“Because I’m the kind of girl with short stature and I go for poses that elongates my body, makes me more feminine and louder”

This leads to our next sub-theme that is glorifying one’s physical ability. Which is an extension to this sub-theme.

Glorifying one’s physical ability: This sub-theme speaks about how one feels confident as they show what their bodies can portray. Everyone to an extent enjoys being unique and here the participants experience that when they show the pose.

“In a certain way it is more like a show off like see I can do this and I feel like there are certain poses that does justice to that particular character and that gives me this happiness”

To be able to show what one is capable of to others can give oneself a sense of confidence. These dancers do get that chance and when they do it makes them happy to show their capabilities. They find joy in the complicated poses that they now find comfort in through years of practice. Participant 8 states that,

“It makes me feel elegant and something I feel comfortable in and also people have told me that it is something that I look good doing. I feel like it’s more of a bold pose”

Participant 8 shows a one-legged pose that she finds comfort in, it is something that most may not be able to do. She enjoys doing poses that makes her feel unique and lets her stand out from

Perceived Aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological Benefits Among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers

the others. Everyone has their own aspects they find their confidence in. It is the matter of finding that aspect like how these dancers have. Similar to the previous participant, participant 14 also shows a pose that is not usually done by most and to her this pose is unique and something that suits her body,

“Usually the Nataraja poses is one of the common poses, damaru or Parvati. I felt like this might be a different pose to show and depict and also one of my favourites like I said. This is unique and stands out from usual poses”

Role of Physical Comfort: Physical comfort here talks about how a physical movement or a stance makes an individual experience physical ease or relaxation. Participant 15 says,

“I just think the main motto of doing this pose is relaxed, relaxed and relaxed”

She shows a pose that stretches her muscles because of which she feels relaxed when doing the pose and that made her choose the pose. A pose that stretches the muscle is comforting for many people. Participant 2 elaborates,

“Because I feel that my hip is stretched and my leg. And I am looking at the opposite direction. I can have a far sight vision since its diagonal and that is nice, I feel good. I can see long distance.”

Here she has also spoken in terms of her vision. When asked her to elaborate she says having to look straight at a person may bring in discomfort so a pose giving you that comfort of looking diagonally feels nice to her. Comfort here includes many aspects of one's body such as their arms, legs, posture and so much more.

“Thinking purely from a Bharatanatyam perspective the angashuddi (body position) is not that hard to maintain and even if you have to hold it for a significant amount of time also it is comfortable and I can stay there, it's not taxing and it doesn't take much to sustain it properly”

Participant 9 shows a pose that is very feminine and something she finds very comforting to do physically.

Thus, these themes discuss about the importance of live music to these experienced Bharatanatyam dancers and different aspects of why they portrayed a particular pose. Different superordinate themes and master themes emerged from the variety of responses and each of it has been given the importance it requires to understand what truly is comforting for a Bharatanatyam dancer.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study were obtained using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The reason for using IPA is to be able to understand the perceived experience of the participants. The results were derived on the topic “Perceived Aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological benefits among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers”. The study has three specific objectives. The first one is to identify the most common occurring type of pose in Bharatanatyam and the experiences of the dancers when they do the pose. The second objective focuses on the most commonly occurring feet gesture and its phenomenological experience of the dancers. The third and the final objective discusses about the aspects of the pose that makes it comfortable and composed and also here the impact of live music is discussed.

Perceived Aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological Benefits Among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers

To obtain the data for the study, semi-structured interview method and direct observation was used and to avoid researcher's bias bracketing was also done. Although purposive sampling was used the dancers obtained were from different institutes. Before the interview the participants were debriefed regarding the study and a consent form was given to ensure that they can withdraw from the study anytime during the study to ensure that the participants don't feel forced to part take in the study and to maintain honest responses for the study. At the end of the interview a General Health Questionnaire was given to see if there are any negative impacts due to Bharatanatyam. The data obtained then was coded line by line to ensure no information gets unused and through the sub-themes, Themes were derived. The superordinate themes from the first objective were The Perceived Experience of Transcendence and Major Aspects of Physicality. The superordinate themes from the second objective were Role of Physical Characteristics and the superordinate themes for the third objective was Power of Live Music to Physical Aspects, Power of Live Music to Psychological Aspects, Internal Influencers to the pose and External Influencers to the pose. The reason for having three different objectives is to ensure that each and every data is utilized and also to make it easier for the readers to understand the topic. Each sub-theme and theme have been explained through the examples of the participant's excerpts. The three objectives are inter-related to one another which will be discussed in this chapter.

The participants who took part in this study had over 10 years of dancing experience which makes their experiences more reliable than those with less experiences in the field of Bharatanatyam. This study was mainly done to ensure that its effect can also be experienced in a therapy set up, more specifically in Dance Movement Therapy. The result emerged in the study speaks about how different poses benefit them in a certain way. This art form is known for its physical benefits such as flexibility, endurance, coordination, and strength (Shenoy & Kumar, 2019). Many poses are similar to that of yoga and yoga asanas have shown to bring about improvements in physical and overall respiratory functions (Yamamoto-Morimoto et al., 2019, p. 62). There is a relationship between the two but there are differences too. Dance movement therapy is about expressing. Just the implement of yoga would not really help the clients. However, Bharatanatyam helps one express themselves through movement like how the participants explained during the interview. Being able to implement these movements may help clients experience what the participants have experienced doing a Bharatanatyam pose.

The participants during the interview were asked to show a pose of their choice with and without music and each and everyone felt a difference. Studies have already been established in terms of how music impacts the brain. During the interview several of them mentioned about their preference towards live music in comparison to recorded music and how they feel a difference between the two. Live music includes the instruments and singers and sometimes just an instrument or a singer. Being able to implement the concept of this in therapy may help client express better just like how it helped the participants in different ways. The one-legged pose was the most commonly occurring pose and when the participants did it with music they found a difference, now being able to do the same pose that they find comfort in, with live music may create a totally different experience where the individual can receive the best of both worlds. The second objective found that participants gain a lot of physical comfort while doing cross legged (Swastika) and one leg on the toe (Kunchita pada) feet gestures. Considering themes of the third objective that is the internal and external influencers to the pose, we can implement it in Dance movement therapy by understanding the client's personality and relating it to a pose best fit for them just like how the participants did. For

Perceived Aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological Benefits Among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers

example, participants enjoy doing feminine poses since they feel it enhances their femininity and vice versa for one of the male participants. Another example would be where participants felt confident doing a pose, they believed to be unique which can also be implemented in the therapy field to help those lack confidence in real life set-up.

Further studies can probe more into the changes happening in the brain when the participants do the pose that were emerged in this study. In yoga, one legged yoga asanas are said to improve one's balance and single-minded concentration (BHAVANANI & BHAVANANI, 2001). Since there are one legged poses in Bharatanatyam, being able to relate them to one another will help us understand the benefits from the Bharatanatyam poses with the addition of emotional catharsis taking place in Bharatanatyam.

Limitations

There were pointedly two limitations in the current study. Gender differences was not a focus of this study. However, further researches can be done to identify if there are any major gender differences. Since the study was done during the covid pandemic there was no in-person communication however, every measure was utilized to ensure that the truth prevails.

CONCLUSION

This study speaks and highlights the importance of Indian culture in a therapeutic set up, more specifically it discusses on ways to incorporate Bharatanatyam in Dance Movement Therapy. This study has gone deeper and more specific to help the field of DMT implement more of the Indian culture that is better suitable for certain populations in India. Not only did it focus on what poses can be used but has also found out what are the different aspects of the pose preferred by different set of people. If the participants who took part in this study have received the perceived benefits and the experience, then as researchers and psychologists, it is our duty to ensure that these benefits can be experienced by many others and this study can possibly create that awareness not only in the field of psychology but also in the field of dance as to the several benefits of this beautiful art form. Thus, in conclusion this study can act as a starting point to many further studies to find out how different Indian classical forms can be used in India, in the field of Dance Movement Therapy.

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Perceived Aspects of Comfortable and Composed Bharatanatyam Poses and its Phenomenological Benefits Among Experienced Bharatanatyam Dancers

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