

# **Bharatanatyam**

Bharatanatyam is the classical dance of Tamilnadu which originated in the temples. It involves body discipline, dedication and above all, perseverance. Years of rigorous practice go into making a professional Bharatanatyam dancer. It can be performed by both males and females as it comprises two forms of dance - Tandava and Lasya, respectively for men and women.

It takes at least seven to eight years to complete a full repertoire of Bharatanatyam. In the present syllabus, we are dividing the entire course into three modules - Basic [CB], Intermediate [CI] and Advanced [CA]

## **SYLLABUS**

### **BASIC -**

#### **CB1 - Beginners Level 1**

This module introduces the students to Bharatanatyam. Students here learn to appreciate the art form and also discipline their body and mind for further complicated movements to come.

##### **PRACTICAL COURSE -**

- Shlokas - Every Indian Classical Art form begins with invoking the Almighty. Chanting of shlokas improves the concentration and disciplines the mind of the dancer. The shlokas will be from Abhinaya Darpana.
- Postures - The basic postures in Bharatanatyam are taught which are - The Samapada, The Araimandi or ardhmandala and the Muzhumandi
- Warm up exercises - These exercises are a prerequisite for learning any step in Bharatanatyam. We begin here with exercises to strengthen the knees and thighs in order to sustain araimandi while dancing
- Asamyuta and Samyuta Hastas - These are one hand and two hand gestures used in Bharatanatyam. According to the Abhinaya Darpana, there are 28 Asamyuta hastas and 23 Samyuta hastas. Students would learn to depict these hastas with the shloka given in the Abhinaya Darpana.
- Adavus - These are the steps used in Bharatanatyam and form the base for Nritya or pure dance. There are many categories of adavus in Bharatanatyam, which can be divided on the basis of difficulty levels. The first set would comprise 30 adavus. Rhythm is the most important aspect of dance. Thus, we inculcate a sense of rhythm in the dancers by making them perform adavus in three speeds.

##### **THEORY**

- Theoretical knowledge of Bharatanatyam makes the dancer a consummate performer. We begin by teaching the students the definition of Bharatanatyam, the origin of dance [Natyotpatti] and also introduce some basic treatises on dance.

## **CB2 - Beginners Level 2**

In this module, the dancers learn to discipline their entire body with various rigorous adavus. They are also introduced to Tala, or rhythmic patterns.

### **PRACTICAL**

- Introduction to Tala - Demonstration of Adi Tala, Misra Chapu and Roopaka Tala is taught.
- Advanced exercises - These exercises help in improving the muscle strength. Dancers also learn some yoga asanas to improve balance.
- Nethra (eye), Griva (Neck) and Shiro (Head) Movements - Dancers learn the movements of the head, neck and eye with shlokas from the Abhinaya Darpana. In addition, they also learn some eye exercises which are useful in dance
- Adavus Part II - This set comprises approximately 50 adavus, which are more rigorous in comparison to Level 1. More emphasis is laid on stretching, jumping, and leaping movements. The dancers are prepared for these rigorous adavus with the help of the Asanas.
- Performance items - At this stage, we begin with a small Swaranjali which can be used in performances.

### **THEORY**

- Identification of dancers shown in pictures (Picture Memory), Notation of Tala cycles taught, Notation for adavus in three speeds

## **CB3 - Beginners Level 3**

In this module, the basic adavus are put to use in Nritta items. The dancers learn to appreciate Nritta characteristic to the Tanjavur style of Bharatanatyam.

### **PRACTICAL**

- BASIC POSTURES - The dancers are taught the Sthanakas and Mandalas as are given in the Abhinaya Darpana. These are to understand the basic postures of Bharatanatyam.
- NRITTA HASTAS - As we proceed with the syllabus, the dancers are also taught various Nritta Hastas, or hand gestures useful in dance.
- MUSIC - Bharatanatyam breaks into Bha for Bhava or emotion, Ra for Raga or melody and Ta for Tala or rhythm. It is incomplete without music. Narthaki lashana also mentions that dancers should have the knowledge of music. We begin with teaching certain introductory shlokas and sarali and Janta varisais.
- TALA - The Sapta Talas are introduced and the Sollukattu of Adavus is taught here.
- PERFORMANCE ORIENTED ITEMS - We begin the performance items at this level. Dancers learn the

Alarippu  
Jathiswaram

### **THEORY**

- Definition of Margam, distinctions between Abhyasa and Sabha Margam, Definition and explanation of Alarippu and Jathiswaram

## **INTERMEDIATE -**

## **CI1 - Intermediate Level 1**

This module introduces the concept of Abhinaya. The dancers theoretically understand the distinction between the four types of Abhinaya and their knowledge of the Drishti, Griva and Shiro Bheda would be put to practice.

### **PRACTICAL**

- **NRITTA HASTAS, DASHAVATARA HASTAS AND NAVAGRAHA HASTAS** - These are hastas used respectively in Nritta, to depict the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu, and to depict the nine planets. These hastas are used in many Abhinaya and Nritta items and hence are important to learn.
- **TANDAVA AND LASYA ADAVUS** - The distinction between the two types of adavus is understood here.
- **MUSIC** - Along with learning the music of the dance items, the students would learn small songs called geethams, to further enhance their knowledge
- **TALA** - We teach basic tala and sollukattu exercises in order to intensify the understanding of Tala
- **PERFORMANCE ITEMS** - Dancers will learn  
Sabdam  
Swaranjali (Advanced)

### **THEORY**

- **Guru Shishya Parampara** - an introduction, Life history of E.Krishna Iyer, the Devadasi heritage, Explanation of Sabdam and Swaranjali

## **CI2 - Intermediate Level 2**

By this time, the dancers have some idea about Abhinaya and Nritta, and their knowledge of Jatis and Korvais will be further enhanced in this level

### **PRACTICAL**

- **VINIYOGAS [A]** - The depictions of hastas are very important in understanding where they can be used in Abhinaya. This also aids in choreography. In this level, the dancers learn the depictions of the Asamyuta hastas, along with the shlokas from Abhinaya darpana
- **NAVARASA** - Abhinaya is characteristic to Bharatanatyam. The concepts of bhava (expression) and rasa (emotion) are explained here
- **MUSIC** - Dancers proceed to learn small keerthanams, and also learn to notate songs, as this would aid in dance
- **TALA** - Along with Tala exercises, certain korvais will be taught and explained, as are learnt in the practical. Reciting korvais and jatis would also be part of this level.
- **PERFORMANCE ITEMS**  
Pushpanjali  
Tillana

### **THEORY**

- **Four types of Abhinaya** with description, Life history of Balasaraswati, Kattumannar Muthukumaran Pillai and K.N. Dandayudapani Pillai

**ADVANCED -**

## CA1 - Advanced Level 1

This stage prepares the dancers for their arangetram [which means ascending the stage]. Arangetram is the debut performance of the dancer wherein all his/her learning and skill is put to test. The dancers learn the “piece de resistance” of Bharatanatyam, the Varnam. All the exercises and adavus learnt in the previous levels would help the dancers to gain stamina and confidence to perform the Varnam.

### **PRACTICAL -**

- VINIYOGAS [S] - We teach the depictions of the two hand gestures, Samyuta hastas, along with the shlokas from Abhinaya Darpana.
- MUSIC AND TALA - Jati recitation and notation is an important aspect of this level. Dancers learn to notate and recite the jatis with talam. They also learn to conduct a jati on the tattukazhi
- PERFORMANCE ITEM  
Varnam

### **THEORY -**

- Introduction and distinction between the Ashtanayikas [Eight types of Nayikas], Deeper understanding of bhavas

## CA2 - Advanced level 2 (Preparation for Arangetram)

By the end of this stage, the dancer is ready to set foot on the stage. With dedicated hours of practice and good stamina, the dancer can be considered fit for performance.

### PERFORMANCE ITEMS -\*

Padam  
Keerthanams  
Javali  
Kavadichindu  
Tiruppugazh  
Stotram  
Bhajan

MUSIC - The dancers should, by now, have the knowledge of the raga, tala and composer for all the compositions taught.

By following the three modules of learning, the dancers would have ascended the stage and entered the arena of Bharatanatyam dance, where they would have to prove their mettle as a dancer.