



Original Article

RETHINKING DANCE STUDIES THROUGH THE NĀṬYAŚĀSTRA: A HERMENEUTIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary dance scholarship has increasingly turned toward decolonial perspectives, yet much of this work continues to operate within conceptual frameworks that separate theory from practice and aesthetics from embodied experience. This paper addresses this limitation by revisiting the Nāṭyaśāstra as an Indic framework for understanding methods in dance education. Adopting a hermeneutic approach informed by Sanskrit aesthetic theory and a phenomenological sensitivity to embodied experience, the study examines key concepts related to dance studies, including the idea of the “classical,” pedagogical methods in theory and technique, and the relationship between emotion and aesthetic experience. The analysis demonstrates that the Nāṭyaśāstra does not treat these as discrete domains but integrates them within a unified system in which practice, theory, and pedagogy are inseparable. By situating the text as a practice-oriented śāstra that both codifies and emerges from performance traditions, the paper highlights its continued relevance for contemporary dance education. In doing so, it challenges dominant pedagogical binaries and proposes an alternative framework grounded in inquiry, experience, and aesthetic coherence, arguing that revisiting such Indic approaches offers a productive means of rethinking the conceptual and pedagogical foundations of dance studies.

Keywords: Dance Studies, Natyashastra, Hermeneutics, Dance Pedagogy, Bharatanāṭyam.

INTRODUCTION

Dance scholarship worldwide has increasingly turned toward decolonial perspectives, seeking to foreground indigenous epistemologies and challenge Eurocentric frameworks Banks (2023), Candelario and Henley (2023), Mantillake (2024). However, much of this work remains anchored within conceptual categories that distance dance studies from practice, aesthetics, and embodied experience, positioning it primarily as a form of cultural and social analysis rather than an artistic inquiry Morris (2009). As a result, even efforts at decolonization often reproduce the very binaries they seek to critique. This raises an important question: can alternative knowledge systems offer fundamentally different ways of structuring dance pedagogy and aesthetic inquiry?

India has a continuous tradition of technical texts associated with its dance heritage, dating back to at least 500 BCE Dace (1963), Vatsyayan (1995). This unbroken tradition sets India apart from many other contexts, where comparable bodies of ancient performance knowledge are either fragmented or unavailable.

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This paper explores ancient Indian perspectives on dance theory, pedagogy, and aesthetics as articulated in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, an early Indian treatise on the practice and theory of performing arts attributed to sage Bharata. It examines pedagogical approaches embedded within the text and considers their relevance to contemporary dance education. In doing so, the paper questions dominant Anglo-European binaries in dance pedagogy, such as tradition versus modernity, history versus aesthetics, and classical versus traditional, while offering an Indic framework that rethinks these divisions.

Specifically, this paper develops an Indic perspective on (I) the concept of the “classical” in Indian dance, (II) the holistic model of dance studies in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, (III) dance technique pedagogy, and (IV) emotion, aesthetics, and analytical inquiry in dance.

Adopting a hermeneutic approach, the paper examines key chapters of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* related to dance and highlights their relevance to contemporary pedagogy through interpretive and philosophical analysis.

This paper makes three contributions to dance studies. First, it advances a unified Indic framework for dance pedagogy by demonstrating how the *Nāṭyaśāstra* integrates technique, theory, and aesthetics rather than treating them as separate domains. Second, it challenges dominant Anglo-European pedagogical binaries, such as theory versus practice by showing how these distinctions are reconciled within the *śāstric* tradition. Third, it repositions the *Nāṭyaśāstra* not merely as a historical text but as a living epistemological system that continues to offer actionable insights for contemporary dance education and choreography.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a hermeneutic approach to examine the *Nāṭyaśāstra* as a framework for understanding dance pedagogy, aesthetics, and practice. Hermeneutics, as a mode of interpretation, enables an engagement with classical texts that goes beyond literal translation, attending instead to layers of meaning, context, and philosophical intent Chari (1993), Gadamer (1975). In the context of Sanskrit aesthetic theory, such an approach is particularly relevant, as meaning is often conveyed through suggestion, implication, and experiential insight rather than direct exposition.

It is important to note that the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is not a purely theoretical or speculative text, but one that emerges from and responds to an already existing performance tradition Unni (2019). The treatise systematizes practices that were in circulation, codifying movement, expression, and aesthetic principles while remaining grounded in their performative realization. This has implications for the present study: the text is approached not as an abstract body of theory to be interpreted in isolation, but as a practice-oriented framework in which knowledge is inseparable from its enactment. A hermeneutic engagement with the *Nāṭyaśāstra* therefore necessarily attends to this reciprocal relationship between codification and performance.

The analysis draws on close readings of selected chapters of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* related to dance, focusing on concepts such as *nṛtta*, *abhinaya*, and *rasa*. These are interpreted not as isolated theoretical categories, but as part of an integrated system of knowledge that informs both artistic practice and pedagogy. The interpretive process is guided by principles of Sanskrit poetics, particularly the emphasis on layered meaning and aesthetic experience discussed in traditional literary criticism Chari (1993).

At the same time, the study is informed by a phenomenological sensitivity to embodied experience Dufrenne (1973), recognizing that the concepts articulated in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* are realized through practice. While the primary method remains textual and interpretive, the analysis is shaped by sustained engagement with Bharatanāṭyam as a performer and choreographer. This experiential grounding supports a reading of the text that attends to how meaning unfolds in and through the body.

Rather than treating theory and practice as separate domains, the methodology adopts a dialogic stance in which textual interpretation and embodied knowledge inform one another. This approach allows the *Nāṭyaśāstra* to be understood not merely as a historical document, but as a living framework whose pedagogical and aesthetic insights remain relevant to contemporary dance practice.

RE-THINKING THE CONCEPT OF THE “CLASSICAL” IN INDIAN DANCE

Unlike in Western dance traditions, where terms such as Classical, Romantic, Neoclassical, and Contemporary ballet refer to historically distinct styles and artistic movements Homans (2013), the term “classical” in Indian dance does not primarily denote a historical period. In many Indian languages, these forms are instead described as *śāstrīya nṛtya*, a term rooted in the Sanskrit word *śāstra*. The English term “classical” therefore functions only as an approximate translation of *śāstrīya*, which signifies a practice grounded in analytical inquiry, codified knowledge, and embodied experience rather than merely historical classification.

The word *śāstra* denotes a “scientific treatment of a subject” Abhyankar (1961). However, the “science” implied in *śāstra* is not limited to the largely deterministic methods of modern science Ganesh (2022). Thus, when Indian dance is labelled as *śāstrīya*, it signifies a dance form capable of answering the question, “Why?” enabling a balance between the subjective and objective. To further clarify this point, let us understand the pedagogic approaches to dance in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

The text adopts a question-and-answer format as its methodology for knowledge transfer. It uses the dialectic method of embodying knowledge as not a dictum but as generative principles. The hundred students of the ancient sage Bharata, the author of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, raise pertinent questions on the purpose, practice and performance of *nāṭya* – which is revered as the mother of all arts including dance. Upon Bharata’s answer, they raise doubts or objections which are clarified further by the sage.

Here is a sample extract from the treatise that illustrates the methodology:

In Chapter 4, Sage Bharata provides a detailed account of the category of ‘dance.’ He enumerates 108 distinct movements, which are classified as *nṛtta*—pure/abstract/non-representational dance movements that do not aim to convey meaning. Following this description, the students ask,

“If, for communicating meaning, the learned use facial and bodily expression (abhinaya), why do we have pure dance (nṛtta), and what is its nature?” Nāṭyaśāstra [NS] 4.265 Unni (2019)

In response, the sage addresses their doubts explaining, *“Pure dance has no meaning of its own. It imparts beauty and is auspicious. It is inherently loved by all. Furthermore, it is a source of entertainment during celebrations like weddings, childbirth and other festivities” (NS 4.268-271: Ghosh (2002)).*

By fostering such analytical exchanges, sage Bharata teaches us that choreography is incomplete when the subjective approach is divorced from the objective, and vice versa. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* therefore, serves as a guide to achieve this balance in performance by outlining techniques and concepts that assist an artist in achieving this goal. This methodology is the ideal approach to *śāstrīya nṛtya* or “classical” dance.

If dance in India is considered ‘classical’, what then is traditional? ‘Classical’ dance is transmitted through *guru-shishya Parampara* (teacher-student lineage), a system followed by Bharata himself. This methodology also reveals the modern label of ‘traditional’ to be insufficient to describe the nature of continuity that is embedded in the ‘traditionalism’. This lineage ideally passes down not only technique but also a vision of purpose. To facilitate this exchange, classical dance is often taught in informal settings, a practice that remains prevalent to some extent even in today’s context Vatsyayan (1982). However, following the colonial era, there arose a need to fiercely protect traditions that were at risk of being lost. This has resulted in a “colonial hangover”—an overreliance on tradition without questioning its authenticity. On one hand, clinging to tradition without reason can lead to stagnation in art, while on the other hand, modernization without a solid foundation risks superficiality and is inefficient. Both rejecting tradition outright and adhering to it blindly are counterproductive to the evolution of dance Ganesh (2017).

Ancient Indian pedagogy combined scientific inquiry with tradition and came up with a blend of the two. Discussing *Nāṭyaśāstric* dance pedagogy, Mandala (2022) notes that “the teaching-learning process is a tradition of inquiry that demonstrates the willingness to question and be comfortable in a place of uncertainty, rather than the perpetuation of the authority of tradition which renders knowledge static, absolute, or exclusionary of diverse experiences”. This reflects an ideal system—one that moves away from authoritarian instruction and philosophical extremes, striking a balance between modernity, tradition, and ancient wisdom. Such a stance defines the ideal pedagogy for “classical” dance in India, where an analytical approach to practice informs both teaching and choreography.

A HOLISTIC MODEL OF DANCE STUDIES IN THE NĀṬYAŚĀSTRA

Modern dance studies has increasingly expanded beyond the analysis of movement and performance to engage with broader questions of history, politics, identity, gender, caste, and cultural studies Dodds (2019), O’Shea (2010). While such approaches may offer social insight, they often risk taking the “dance” out of “dance studies,” as the concerns of the practitioner gradually recede beneath broader frameworks of cultural and political interpretation. The study of dance therefore becomes primarily socio-political, while the lived experience of artistic cultivation becomes secondary.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* offers a markedly different approach to the study of dance. It presents a holistic model in which social understanding, ethics, philosophy, aesthetics, and artistic practice remain integrated within the lived experience of dance and the dancer. Chapter 1 itself makes this clear with Bharata talking of dance history, by describing the origin story of dance¹. Below is a hermeneutic interpretation of the story presented by Bharata where topics such as the need for dance in society, social inclusivity, human understanding and interdisciplinarity in dance are discussed:

- 1) The gods approach Brahma asking for an art form that is both audible and visible—“*dṛṣyam śravyam ca*”—something that gives relief and enjoyment, “*krīdanīyakam*”, to people living in a world filled with conflict, desire, sorrow, and restlessness (NS 1.11, Ghosh (2002)). Bharata is immediately establishing the place of dance in society. Human beings need aesthetic experience. **Dance is treated by him as an emotional necessity.**
- 2) The text also says that the *Nāṭyaveda* must be “*sarvavarṇikam*”—accessible to all *varṇas* (NS 1.12: Ghosh (2002)). Earlier Vedic knowledge was restricted to certain groups of society, but *nāṭya* is imagined as open and shared. Dance is not reserved for a small intellectual class, a particular social group, but belongs to society as a whole. The need for **inclusivity** is articulated as a basic feature of the practice of dance woven within the story.

¹ We take the liberty here of using the term ‘dance’ rather than ‘*nāṭya*’, as what we recognize as dance in India today has evolved from *nāṭya*. In the Indian context, drama and dance have never been regarded as entirely separate entities. While structural differences exist, the underlying philosophy of dance remains closely aligned with that of *Nāṭya*.

- 3) Bharata then explains what *nāṭya* contains and what it gives. It offers guidance in dharma, material well-being, fame, and human conduct. It teaches, entertains, consoles, disciplines, and refines [Bharadwaj \(2016\)](#). In one place, Bharata says drama contains duty, peace, love, conflict, laughter, courage, sorrow, and even killing (NS 1.106-112: [Ghosh \(2002\)](#)). Dance therefore does not escape life; it imitates and transforms life aesthetically, becoming **a way of understanding the human condition**.
- 4) The *Nāṭyaśāstra* also explains that *nāṭya* draws from all four Vedas: lyrics from the *Rgveda*, music from the *Sāmaveda*, gesture from the *Yajurveda*, and *rasa* from the *Atharvaveda* (NS 1.17-18: [Ghosh \(2002\)](#)). Dance is therefore not treated as mere movement or entertainment. Literature, music, philosophy, emotion, gesture, and aesthetics all come together in performance. This has important implications for artistic training. If *nāṭya* is *bhāvānukīrtanam*—an exalted imitation of the states of the three worlds—then the artist cannot remain technically narrow. A dancer must understand literature, music, ethics, emotion, philosophy, nature and human behavior, thereby suggesting the need for **interdisciplinary approaches** to dance pedagogy.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* therefore presents a holistic vision of dance studies—one in which society, philosophy, ethics, history, *rasa*, pedagogy, and performance remain connected to the lived experience of the artist. Here, theoretical inquiry does not move away from dance. It returns the artist more deeply to it.

DANCE TECHNIQUE PEDAGOGY IN THE NĀṬYAŚĀSTRA

The technique of Indian “classical” dance brings together movement and expressive communication within a unified performative framework. While contemporary pedagogical systems across Indian classical dance traditions often place significant emphasis on non-representational movement training [Sathyanarayana \(1969\)](#), performance itself ultimately aims toward the evocation of *rasa*. As Indian aesthetic thought has long regarded *rasa* as the very essence and life-force of poetry and performance, technique in dance cannot remain an end in itself, but must ultimately serve aesthetic and emotional realization [Sreekantaiyya \(2001\)](#). Training and choreography must therefore consciously orient technique toward this larger aesthetic goal, enabling the realization of *rasa* for both performer and spectator [Balakrishnan \(Director\) \(2010\)](#).

To this end, ancient Indian aestheticians developed a systematic framework, elements of which continue to inform contemporary performance traditions. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* presents a range of techniques and concepts that guide the choreographer in structuring a performance such that the audience can meaningfully engage with the emotional and aesthetic dimensions of the work. A significant feature of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is its detailed attention to the training of the body. The text offers an extensive account of the movements of individual body parts, demonstrating a highly refined understanding of physical articulation. Efforts such as those of Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam have played a crucial role in reconstructing and transmitting this movement vocabulary, making this practice-oriented knowledge accessible to contemporary practitioners [Subrahmanyam \(2003a\)](#), [Subrahmanyam \(2003b\)](#).

The treatise systematically organizes movement across different parts of the body. It details gestures of the head (NS 8.17-18), eyes (NS 8.103-107), eyebrows (NS 8.116-120), and eyelids (NS 8.112-115), as well as movements of the torso (NS 10.12-15), arms (NS 9.208-209), waist (NS 10. 21-24), and feet (NS 10.41-50). These are further combined into more complex units such as *cārīs* (coordinated lower-body movements, NS Chapter 11), *maṇḍalas* (composite stances, NS Chapter 12), and *karaṇas* (NS, Chapter 4), which integrate multiple bodily actions into unified movement sequences. Such a layered approach reveals a pedagogical system that progresses from isolated control to full-body coordination.

What distinguishes the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, however, is not merely the precision of its technical descriptions, but the way in which these are consistently linked to expressive and aesthetic dimensions. Movements are not presented as neutral exercises; they are situated within a broader field of meaning. The text illustrates this integration by associating specific bodily movements with a range of experiential states. For instance, the head movement “*dhutam*”, involving a slow turning of the head from side to side, is connected with emotions such as “unwillingness, sadness, astonishment, and contemplation” (NS 8.22). Similarly, the eyelid gesture “*prasṛta*”, characterized by a widening of the eyes, is associated with states of “wonder, joy, and heroism” (NS 8.113). This relationship extends to larger bodily configurations as well. The chest movement *ābhugna*, marked by a slight contraction of the torso with lowered shoulders, is linked to affective conditions such as “sorrow, fear, fatigue, and introspection” (NS 10.3). Taken together, these examples suggest that movement in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is not conceived as purely technical or functional. Rather, each gesture is embedded within a spectrum of possible meanings, inviting the dancer to explore how physical articulation can evoke, transform, and communicate emotional experience.

From a pedagogical perspective, this implies that training the body is not an end in itself, but part of a broader process of cultivating aesthetic sensitivity to experience. Movement becomes meaningful when informed by observation, reflection, and an awareness of how emotions manifest in lived reality. In this sense, the pedagogy of movement of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* encourages dancers to engage with the world as a source of artistic insight, so that technical rigor can become a vehicle for aesthetic imagination, rather than an end in itself.

The study of dance from an ancient Indian perspective is therefore deeply intertwined with life. Just as a seed grows through sustained nourishment, a dancer’s creative capacity develops through continuous engagement with observation, perception, and

reflection. Because the theoretical foundations of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* are centred on human experience, its concepts remain relevant to contemporary practice.

EMOTION, AESTHETICS, AND ANALYTICAL INQUIRY IN THE *NĀṬYAŚĀSTRA*

If the earlier chapters of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* establish a holistic model of dance pedagogy, its discussion of *rasa* provides the aesthetic foundation upon which this model ultimately rests. Despite the elaborate discourse on dance and performance technique, the most significant contribution of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* lies in its exposition of *rasa* (aesthetic experience) and *bhāva* (emotion). The ancient Indian understanding was that a mere technical education of dance, devoid of a mindfulness of the essence of art, was incomplete. As discussed in the previous section, the inseparability of technique and content runs throughout the text. The chapters on *rasa* and *bhāva* explore the creative possibilities in the content of art.

Let us look at some examples of aesthetic philosophies from Chapters 6 and 7 of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

“Just as ‘flavour’ is a mixture of spices, herbs and other substances, rasa is a mixture of many bhāvas (emotions), and rasa is called so because it can be relished (āsvādyatvat).” (Nāṭyaśāstra 6.32) Masson and Patwardhan (1970)

Here Bharata compares the art experience to savouring tasty food. A tasty meal is rich in flavours and similar must be the experience of art. One must be able to relish emotion. In life, the experience of emotion or *bhāva* can be pleasant or unpleasant on account of personal attachment. In other words, actions or situations trigger emotional responses like anger, fear, laughter, love etc. which are not always positive or desirable. In art, according to sage Bharata’s *rasa* theory, the ideal is when momentarily, this personal involvement in a situation is removed. When this happens, the experience of any emotion becomes enjoyable Raghavan (1940). In this momentary state, we are experiencing or ‘tasting’ emotion without the burden of personal attachment and this experience that is relishable is elucidated as *rasa* in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

Bharata not only compares *rasa* to the relishing of food, but also provides the elements through which it may be aesthetically realised. He presents the famous *rasa sūtra* or dictum on *rasa*, which may be understood as a foundational formula for choreography:

“Vibhāvānubhāvavyabhicārī samyogād rasa niṣpattih” (NS 6.31: Ghosh (2002)

This statement became the subject of extensive philosophical debate over several centuries, reaching its most influential interpretation through the writings of Abhinavagupta. The *sūtra* explains that various causal elements such as characters, surroundings, objects, and situations—collectively known as *vibhāvas* trigger one dominant emotion (the *sthāyi bhāva*). These are depicted through bodily and aural expression (*anubhāvas*). There are several fleeting emotions that surround the central emotion and enhance their presence adding flavour and richness to the performance (*vyabhicārī bhāvas*). Further, there are involuntary bodily reactions that occur in performance (*sāttvika bhāvas*) such as tears, horripilation etc. that indicate heights of the aesthetic experience of *rasa*. Through the interplay of these elements, emotions are transformed into aesthetic experience, culminating in the realization of *rasa*.

Bharata’s discussion of the *rasas* reveals how the *rasa sūtra* operates in practice. Of the eight *rasas* he describes, the first is *śṛṅgāra rasa* (the amorous sentiment). For each *rasa*, Bharata identifies the dominant emotion, its causes, expressions, and accompanying emotional states, thereby offering a practical framework for choreography and performance. The following descriptions of *śṛṅgāra rasa* are from Chapter 6 of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (6.45–6.48):

- 1) The dominant emotion (*sthāyi bhāva*) is *rati* (love) (*Nāṭyaśāstra* 6.45: Ghosh (2002). This gives the choreographer clarity regarding the **emotional centre** of the work. The *sthāyi bhāva* acts like the thread holding together a garland of flowers. Without the thread, the flowers exist as separate entities; with it, they become a unified work of art. In the same way, the *sthāyi bhāva* gives emotional continuity and direction to the choreography. It forms the foundation upon which the aesthetic experience is constructed.
- 2) The second element of the *rasasūtra* is the *vibhāva* or the cause that triggers the *sthāyi bhāva*. Bharata explains that *śṛṅgāra*, “arises from determinants *vibhāvas*) like the pleasures of the season, the enjoyment of garlands, unguents, ornaments, [the company of] beloved persons, objects [of senses], splendid mansions, going to a garden, and enjoying [oneself] there, seeing [the beloved one], hearing [his or her words], playing and dallying [with him or her]” (*Nāṭyaśāstra* 6.45: Ghosh (2002). This gives a choreographer suggestions on **structuring** the plot providing situations for the development of the emotions, characters, movements etc.
- 3) The third element is the *anubhāva*, the expressive actions through which the emotional state becomes visible in performance. Bharata states that *śṛṅgāra* “should be represented on the stage by means of composure of the eyes and the face, sweet and smiling words, satisfaction and delight, and graceful movements of limbs” (*Nāṭyaśāstra* 6.48: Ghosh (2002). Here, Bharata lightly suggests the quality, layers, and emotional character of movement itself, guiding the performer beyond mechanical execution toward expressive embodiment.
- 4) Love alone cannot sustain a realistic or aesthetically rich portrayal of a story. Alongside the *sthāyi bhāva* of *rati*, several transient emotional states arise and disappear, thereby strengthening the central emotion of love. Emotions, such as jealousy, excitement, anxiety, joy, anger, laughter, intoxication, dreams, and restlessness, enrich the emotional landscape of the

performance and are referred to as *vyabhicāri-bhāvas*. Bharata further notes that *vyabhicāri bhāvas* associated with love in union “do not include fear, indolence, cruelty and disgust” as they oppose the emotional current of *śṛṅgāra* (*Nāṭyaśāstra* 6.48; Ghosh (2002)).

- 5) Throughout the Nāṭyaśāstra, discussions of movement are consistently linked to emotional states, situations, and aesthetic intention, connecting technique with expression at every stage of pedagogy. Bharata’s framework of *rasa* therefore offers a practical structure for choreography, seeking clarity in communication, richness in representation, and depth in aesthetic experience. In this sense, Bharata not only explains *rasa* as aesthetic relish, but also provides a method for creating choreographies capable of producing it.

When dance becomes dramatic and representational, the relevance of Bharata’s *rasa* framework to choreography is immediately evident. But Bharata extends this logic even to non-representational dance (*nṛtta*). He explains that abstract dance is aesthetically appropriate in situations of joy, union, beauty, celebration, and emotional fulfilment, such as scenes involving lovers in pleasant surroundings. Conversely, he advises against the use of *nṛtta* in moments of anxiety, longing, emotional separation, or psychological unrest. Only after emotional balance is restored does abstract movement become appropriate again (*Nāṭyaśāstra* 4.309–4.318; Ghosh (2002)).

These passages demonstrate the practical clarity with which Bharata approaches choreography and performance. Even non-representational dance is not treated as movement for its own sake. Bharata consistently connects movement to emotional atmosphere, dramatic context, and aesthetic appropriateness, ensuring that technique remains guided by *rasa* rather than decorative display alone.

CONCLUSION

Ancient Indian approaches to dance studies, as reflected in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, foreground direct experience, observation, and introspection as central to both pedagogy and aesthetic inquiry. Rather than separating theory from practice, this framework integrates technique, philosophy, and aesthetics into a unified system of knowledge. Such an approach challenges contemporary tendencies to fragment dance into discrete domains and instead presents an epistemology in which artistic practice and scholarship are mutually constitutive.

Although this integrated system is not fully retained in modern institutional contexts, its influence persists. Many contemporary practitioners continue to engage deeply with textual, performative, and cultural sources, drawing on them to inform both pedagogy and creative practice. This continuity points to the enduring relevance of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* as a living framework that continues to shape artistic thinking.

At its core, this approach advocates an iterative process of engagement, where past texts are revisited, contemporary experience is critically examined, and meaning is generated through practice. By placing lived and embodied experience at the centre of artistic inquiry, it enables a dynamic and reflexive understanding of dance. Revisiting such frameworks is therefore not an act of preservation alone, but a means of expanding the conceptual and pedagogical foundations of dance studies in the present.

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