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Recommended Citation

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BHARATANATYAM, AN EFFECTIVE PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION IN
DANCE/MOVEMENT THERAPY

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August, 2021

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Dance/Movement Therapy
Sarah Lawrence College

Abstract

Dance/movement therapy is a psychotherapeutic modality that acknowledges the human body as a window to the human mind and spirit. Through creative and dynamic interventions, it fosters a healthy unification of the mind and body to enhance an individual's holistic health. This research focuses on the traditional dance form of India, Bharatanatyam, and its influence on the body and mind of the practitioner. Journeying through the history of the dance form to its relevance in the field of dance/movement therapy, the thesis explores how Bharatanatyam can be useful as an alternate method, in a therapeutic session to facilitate navigation through checking in with our bodies and finding expression of thoughts and emotions. The thesis describes different aspects in the practice of Bharatanatyam that can be useful in structuring interventions in a dance/movement therapy session. Movement being the language of a dance/movement therapist, this paper expands upon the idea to bridge different cultures and provide an opportunity to explore creative alternative interventions, that can be used globally.

Keywords: dance/movement therapy, Bharatanatyam, benefits of Bharatanatyam, dance/movement therapy alternate interventions, Indian classical dance forms, Bharatanatyam interventions in therapy, global approach of dance/movement therapy

Bharatanatyam is among the oldest Indian classical dance forms of India and its origin lies in one of the oldest treatises, written between 200 B.C.E and 200 C.E, called the *Natyashastra* (Vatsyayan, 1996). The *Natyashastra* finds its roots in the *Sanatana Dharma*. According to *Natyashastra*, the art of dance was created by the Hindu deity, *Lord Brahma*, who is worshipped in the Hindu religion as the ‘Creator of the Universe’. Through yogic trance, he combined the ancient scriptures, called the *Vedas*, and conceived the *Natya Shastra*. The *Natyashastra* constitutes the literature from *Rig Veda*, the songs or the tunes from the *Sama Veda*, *Abhinaya*, the facial/body expressions, from the *Yajur Veda* and *Rasa*, the aesthetic experience, from the *Atharva Veda*. This was passed on to the Brahmin priest, *Bharata*, who wrote and compiled the treatise, and presented the backbone of Indian Classical Dance forms, *The Natya Shastra* (Ghosh,1950).

The Natyashastra

The *Natyashastra* consists of 36 chapters and six thousand verses in the Sanskrit language, encompassing detailed analysis and theories on diverse art forms that are embodied in the classical Indian concept of dance, drama, and music. It describes in detail the significance of facial expressions and non-verbal expressions, such as hand gestures, and head, eye, and eyebrow movement. The *Natyashastra* also gives an elaborate description for different movements of the feet, called *Charis*, different types and speeds of walking, called *Gatis*, types of jumps or different ways to leap, called *Utplavanas*, and ways to turn around in a circular motion around the central line of the body called *Brahmaris* (Chaturvedi, 2019).

History of Bharatanatyam

The roots of the Indian classical dance form of Bharatanatyam can be traced to the *Natyashastra*, which outlines the structure, or the grammar, needed to be followed by the practitioner (Deekshitulu, 2019). The word Bharatanatyam is derived by the conjunction of two words, *Bharata* and *Natyam*, where *Natyam* in Sanskrit means dance and *Bharata* is a mnemonic comprising 'bha' which means *bhava* or emotions, *ra* that is *raga* or melody and *ta* which is *tala* or rhythm. Bharatanatyam is closely associated with religion and spirituality. It stems from the Hindu religious perception of art being an expression of one's true self and acts as a discipline to connect with one's own sense of spirituality. Bharatanatyam was nurtured in the ancient temples of India and has been eternally documented in the form of sculptures on the walls of ancient temples in India. In the 7th century C.E, the dance form was popularly identified with different names, called *Sadir Natyam* or *Dasi Attam*, performed by *Devadasis*. *Devadasis* were female, unmarried artists who dedicated their lives to the worship and service of the temple deities (Adwani, 2015). They danced and sang as a part of the rituals in the temples, as a form of worship to the temple deity, and also when the statues and images of the gods were carried out in processions throughout the town. They were considered as harbingers of auspiciousness to a state and the society. During the time of the conception of the *Devadasis* tradition, temples were considered the hub of socio-economic existence of the residents in the villages. The temples that housed *Devadasis* received patronage from kings and wealthy individuals (Reddy & Sridevi, 2018). Thus, the temple courtesans who dedicated their entire lives in the service of the temple deity enjoyed a high social status and earned immense respect, as music and dance were an essential part of the rituals performed to worship God (Jamanadas, 2007). During the British colonial times, the East India Company launched the *anti-Nauch* campaign and placed a ban on

the *Devadasi system*, which forced these women out of the temples to look for alternative incomes by begging or through prostitution. During colonialism in India, the kings lost their lands to the invaders and thus had a deficit in funds. This led to withdrawal of patronage towards the temples and the artists who performed there, thus leading to further distress for the artists. For survival, the artists, who practiced *Sadir Natyam*, in the divine presence of the temple deity, began performing it in the courts and before men (Shetti, 2021). This led to the transformation of the art form, from being a spiritual journey for the performer, to being performative in nature. There was a social stigma attached to the dance form as it was associated with the art form practiced by prostitutes (Iyer, 1963). The relentless efforts undertaken by the Gurus of Bharatanatyam played a crucial role in reinstating this dance style. They fought against all odds in order to maintain the sanctity and purity of this dance style. Balasaraswati is credited to be one of the few Devadasis who continued to perform and preserve this traditional dance form. Another prominent figure in the history of Bharatanatyam is Rukhmini Devi, who reversed the negative societal stereotypes of the art form belonging to only a certain section of the society, specifically for prostitution, and made it available to people belonging to all sects of the society. She is recognized for her efforts in reviving the sanctity and the true intent, that is the devotional aspect, of performing the dance form (Iyer, 1963).

Bharatanatyam Training and the Margam

Practicing the dance form of Bharatanatyam involves years of intense disciplining of the body and mind, and channeling the internal energy and consciousness to the external. The training involves rigorous practice of comprehensive theory on gestural communication, sequential movements, postures of the body or poses which are geometrically aligned human anatomy. The training happens in a linear format, with a premeditated set of dance pieces. This

pre-designed sequence of dances is called the *Margam*. *Margam* reflects aesthetic progression, from rhythm-based dances to expressive dances that depict real-life emotions and situations, or connect the self and the audience to spirituality, through depicting stories of gods and goddesses. The *Margam* begins with purely rhythm-based dances called *Pushpanjali*, *Alaripu* and *Jati Swaram*. Synchronous movement is encouraged in the performer's body which also stimulates the mover's brain, by setting intricate dance sequences to be memorized. The *Margam* then proceeds to small narrative dances called *Shabdam* and *Varnam*, which include rhythm-based movements and emoting stories or situations in its sequence. It is an attempt at slowly introducing the performer to expression using facial muscles, *mudras* and different structural postures. The *Varnam* is usually a very long sequence of dance, which tests the performer's endurance and stamina. *Padams*, *Javalis* and *Kritis* are purely based on *Abhinaya* or facial and gestural expressions, where the mover sets on a journey of expressing their perspectives on different tales, their interpretation of the music composed by great poets, or real-life situations. The order of the *Margam* has been designed thus, to lead the mover from the journey of awareness of the external, through rhythms and body-based movements, to the awareness of the internal, through exploring emotions and perceptions, and expressing them. It also facilitates a process where the witness or the audience embarks upon a visual journey with the mover from the external to the internal. The *Margam* is concluded with a *Thillana*, which re-introduces rhythm-based movements, based on a certain theme, predominantly related to Hindu gods and goddesses. The *Margam* is only a structure, and it defines the gradual escalation in the mover's training in Bharatanatyam. It specifies the quality of the dances to be learnt and practiced rather than codified or choreographed dances. There are numerous versions of songs and choreographies for each step in the *Margam*. The songs are set to different *ragas* or melodies and

talas or beats, according to which the choreographies differ. Even though the *Margam* structuralizes the format of the dances, it provides a wide opportunity to explore creativity, perspectives and body endurance of the mover, through diverse choreographies (Suresh, 2006).

Bhedas

Bharatanatyam involves expressing one's thoughts, perceptions and emotions through gestures involving different parts of the body. These gestures are called *Bhedas* and it entails learning different positions or movements of the head, neck, eyes, eyebrows, feet, hands and legs, to communicate certain scenarios or express certain emotions. The eye movements, head movements and the neck movements are called the *Dhrishti Bhedas*, *Shiro Bhedas* and *Greeva Bhedas* respectively. The movement initiated in the feet is called the *Mandala Bhedas*, while the movement of the legs is called *Pada Bhedas*. Bharatanatyam explores different possibilities of movements in different parts of the body, and under each generic label, like *Shiro Bhedas* or *Greeva Bhedas*, there is a detailed description of possible movements in the specific part of the body, and each movement has been designated a name. For example, under *Shiro Bhedas*, when the mover moves the head upwards and downwards, it is called *Kampitam*, while when the mover shakes their head sideways, it is called *Dhutam*. To further elaborate through examples, the neck movements, also called *Greeva Bhedas*, have four types of movements. When the mover moves only the neck sideways, it is called *Sundari*, while if the mover moves the neck, in a horizontal 'V' position, or strikes the neck outwards diagonally, on the right and on the left, it is called *Thirascheena* (Suresh, 2006).

Mudras

Among the *Bhedas*, the most commonly used and the first to be learnt are the *Hasta Mudras*, or the hand gestures, which are used to symbolize different actions, objects, nature or deities. There is detailed description in the *Natyashastra* specifying *mudras* for almost every object in nature, man-made objects, like doors, and bowls, emotions, and for verbs, like washing, drying, eating, or searching. Thus, *Hasta Mudras* have been extensively practiced and implemented by movers to narrate stories, express thoughts, or recreate real-life or fictitious situations. For example, if the mover wishes to express togetherness, using the *Mudras*, the practitioner crosses over the little fingers while the other fingers are closed tightly in a fist. If the mover wishes to express fear or heart palpitations, the mover opens and closes their fingers, where the fingers on getting closer touch each other at the tip and open up separately (Suresh, 2006). Similar to their use in Bharatanatyam, *Mudras* are extensively implemented in other esoteric rituals and modalities like Yoga, Tantric rituals and Asian martial arts, where the goal is to enhance the physical, psychological and spiritual health of the practitioner (Nair, 2013). The *mudra* to improve mental health is the *Karkata Mudra* in Bharatanatyam or the *Vajrapradama Mudra* in yoga, where the individual interlocks the four fingers (except the thumb). This gives the individual firmness of the mind, self-confidence, courage, and fortitude. The *Kapota Hastha Mudra* in Bharatanatyam or the *Panchamukha Mudra* in yoga, formed by joining the tips of all five fingers of both the hands, helps the unification of body, mind and spirit and enhances emotional wellbeing (Iyengar, 2018).

Rasa

During the course of practicing a *Margam*, the mover, after learning the *Bhedas*, explores how every emotion is exclusively expressed by them and studies the changes in their body to

suitably express different *Rasas* or moods. The facial expressions, or *Bhavas*, are extensively categorized theoretically and are explored in detail. There are nine primary *Rasas*. They are love, humor, heroism, surprise, anger, sorrow, peace and fear. These primary moods are generic and are further subdivided based on situations and the stimulus for the emotion. For example, *Shringara Rasa* is the term in Bharatanatyam that describes the emotion of love. The emotion of love has different intentions based on the relationship between the characters. When used to describe love expressed between a parent and a child, it is called *Vatsalya Rasa*; when described by a lover, the expression and the intention is different from when used for love for nature or self-love. The expression and the body posture for each of the subdivided moods are different and thus, the mover embarks on an intense journey to recognize themselves inside out.

Illustrating with examples how the mover adapts the facial muscles to express a *Rasa* or emotion, when the mover is thinking, the eyebrows are raised, eyes look upwards glancing in a particular direction or is in Indirect Space Effort (not fixated on any object or person) and the lips are pursed. When the mover expresses fear, their body is inwards, and eyebrows are furrowed. This expression of different moods is unique to the individual and acknowledgement and understanding of how internal emotions are expressed externally is encouraged in Bharatanatyam (Bhosale, 2016).

Sanchari

Bharatanatyam can be described as a movement language which is an amalgamation of the expression of the mind, physical energy, and spiritual ideology. Situations and thoughts are often expressed in the form of themes or stories, narrated in the form of dance, and called a *Sanchari* (Suresh, 2006). The *Sanchari* provides a window for the audience to peek into the perspective of the dancer, as she narrates her version of the tale of either Hindu gods and

goddess, lovers and their stories, or real-life situations. Bharatanatyam encompasses a vast dictionary facilitating expression; for example, if one needs to describe separation, the index finger and the middle finger are crossed and joined with the thumb, ring finger and the little finger, similar to the image of a scissor, in both hands, and the wrists rotate from inwards to outwards, placed at the chest level. This movement of the hands is in tandem to the facial expressions, which convey the pangs of separation. Bharatanatyam, during its training, encourages the practitioner to explore how love, in different situations and in different relationships, would feel in the body and how each version of it, using the dancer's own perspective, would be expressed: mother's love, love towards a partner, love towards an animal, and self-love. This expression can be facilitated by use of certain hand positions, like holding a baby by scooping the fingers in the shape of a 'C', or feeling shy in the presence of a partner by joining the thumb and the index finger like a loop with the other fingers stretched outwards, joining the two hands at the tip of the loop, placing them close to the chest, moving the body inwards, and sometimes even looking downwards, with a blush.

Natya Karna

The *Natya Karnas* are phrases of movements which conclude in a unique position of the body. The word *Karna* is a Sanskrit derivative which means "doing". There are 108 *Karnas* and each involve conscious movement in separate parts of the body, simultaneously. It is the harmonious combination of *Gati*, *Chari*, *Sthanaka* and *Hasta Mudra*. *Gati* is the movement of the feet in a particular rhythm and style. *Chari* corresponds to the position of the feet while *Sthanaka* means the posture or stance of the body. Thus, while executing the *Karna*, the mover concentrates on the position of the feet, which move in a particular pattern, to a particular rhythm. The *Hasta Mudras*, or hand-gestures, play an equally important role in the execution of

a *Karna*. The *Karna Prakarana*, or the sequence of moving the body, integrates a pause at the appropriate interval, thus highlighting the need for balance, as the mover freezes in a specific posture (Rao, 2019). For example, the body is in a half sitting position, with the knees open wide and the feet in a wide 'V' position. From this position, the right foot is moved backwards and is placed on the ground on the toes, crossing the left foot, and then brought back to the original 'V' position. The initial position of the fingers is stretched out wide, representing a flower. As the right foot moves back and forth, the wrists rotate inside out once, and then the palm is placed on the thighs. This *Karna* is called *Vartittam*. The *Karnas* are among the toughest parts of the training in Bharatanatyam, as they involve working towards flexibility of the body and require conviction of the mind and discipline to master each sequence and posture.

Health Benefits of Practicing Bharatanatyam

While practicing the dance form of Bharatanatyam, the mover has to move barefoot. The dance form involves rhythmic striking of the barefoot on the ground. The mover balances on the toes as they prepare to jump and leap. The mover leaps and squats completely, landing on their toes, with their knees apart. The mover walks forwards, striking their heel first on the floor and then the entire foot rests. Similarly, while walking backwards, the mover strikes the toes first and then the entire foot rests on the floor. This striking of the feet plays a vital role in foot acupuncture, as several nerve endings are present at the base of the foot. Thus, it improves overall blood circulation in the body and boosts resistance and immunity. It also prevents poor eyesight, thyroid related problems and helps maintain healthy blood pressure (Sudhakar & Kanaka, 1994). Practicing Bharatanatyam has a positive effect on improving pulmonary functions. Continued practice of the dance form makes the lungs stronger and increases respiratory functions and efficiency. During the movement routine, the mover experiences an

increased requirement of oxygen and substrate in skeletal muscles and removal of carbon dioxide. Thus, the body experiences modification in the metabolic, pulmonary, and cardiovascular functions, in order to meet this requirement (Surekha et al, 2018).

The mover experiences improved health by practicing *Hasta Mudras*. There are several nerve endings in the hand that connect to several organs in the body. This relates to the science of Acupressure. According to Iyengar (2018), electromagnetic waves are emitted from the fingers, toes, lips, nose and ears (Iyengar, 2018). When the mover joins the fingers to practice a particular mudra, a nerve circuit is completed. When the hands are united, as the fingers of the right hand touch the fingers of the left, called the *Namaskara Mudra*, the cranial nerve circuits present in the head and the Vagus system are united (Bhavanani & Bhavanani, 2001).

The unique dance form of Bharatanatyam, through its body movements, expression of internal emotions and the deep influence of spirituality and religion, provides the mover a holistic approach in understanding the self and also enables the observer to experience the mover's journey.

Discussion

As a Bharatanatyam dancer, one experiences a journey from the external environment to the internal self and back to the external. This journey has a meditative quality. Exploring how different aspects of the dance form influences the physical and the mental state of the practitioner shifts the intention of practicing Bharatanatyam from being purely performative to having a self-transformational experience. The self-transformation arises from the deep concentration the mover needs to exercise to coordinate different parts of the body, in order to effectively move as directed by the mind. This concentration shifts the focus from the external environment, and

awareness of issues or stressful events, to one's emotions and how they manifest in the body. In the journey of my long years of training in Bharatanatyam, what began as a form for entertainment purpose, has become a spiritual one. The ability to multitask, through movements initiated in multiple parts of the body and simultaneously, the mind focusing on what it wants to convey and what is the best possible way to express, makes the experience therapeutic and transcendental. Bharatanatyam not only involves channelizing the mind and bringing awareness to our inner self, but also balancing and channelizing the energy in our bodies. The practice of *Mudras* and *Karnas*, balancing the body in different postures, brings in deep self-awareness and assessment of the physical capability of the self. To challenge ourselves to master the postures, mobilize parts of the body on which one does not often focus, motivates the mover, and boosts their self-image and self-confidence. Mapping one's own transformation, in the body and/or mind, can be therapeutic in nature. Thus, when movements become a gateway to an improved holistic health, one may call this experience therapeutic. After years of practicing the dance form as a student and as a teacher, this intense journey of the self-provided a guiding light towards seeking the essence of what dance/movement therapy has to offer.

Dance/movement therapy is a psychotherapeutic modality which is based on the core concept that the mind can communicate effectively through the body. It involves a comprehensive approach by integrating the mind and body, and using movement to promote emotional, physical, and social well-being of an individual. It involves building a bridge between the mover's mind and the mover's body, guided by the dance/movement therapist. The body houses the physical manifestations of the mental and emotional state of an individual. Dance/movement therapy facilitates exploration of the body, guiding an individual to understand one's own self in a deeper and a more meaningful manner. It explores one's own perception of

health and one's methods of navigating through life. It provides the space to share and highlight strengths, acknowledge what may be perceived as weakness and find methods through movement and collaboration to address how to convert a weakness to a strength.

Dance/movement therapy also provides a space for an individual to experience universality, where a member can relate to a community, while respecting each other's differences and acknowledging similarities. It is a modality which uses different movement-based interventions, props, human touch and imagery to facilitate the mover's discovery of who they are, why they are the way they are, embrace themselves through acknowledgement and work towards developing solutions for the self. This modality promotes developing tools to help one's own self either through the guidance of the facilitator or through group support. It involves building trust and secure relationships, where the mover is seen, heard and acknowledged by the witness, and also has the opportunity of viewing one's own self in a different perspective through the concept of mirroring. Mirroring the mover's movements helps the dance/movement therapist to imbibe the quality of the movement and reflect their perspective. Thus, dance/movement therapy provides the space for realizing and discovering one's own self through the body, which acts as a medium of communication.

The core concept of dance/movement therapy is to work towards the patient's well-being, and practicing aspects of Bharatanatyam could be beneficial in realizing this goal. The introduction of certain aspects of the dance form in a dance/movement therapy setting could facilitate a mover experience towards increased self-confidence, improved mental functioning, enhanced social skills, improved psychological well-being, self-expression and improved memory. At the body level, the mover could experience an improved muscular strength, motor

fitness, reduced risk of osteoporosis, better body-mind coordination, increased flexibility and agility, and improved body-balance (Deekshitulu, 2019).

A *shloka* or a Sanskrit verse from the *Natyashastra*, popularly taught, learnt and implemented in Bharatanatyam is, “Yato hastas, Thatho dhrishti, Yato dhrishti, Thatho manaha. Yato manas, Thatho bhaavo, Yato bhaavo, Thatho rasaha” (Suresh, 2006). The verse can be translated to “where the hands (*Hasta*) go, the eyes (*Dhrishti*) follow. Where the eyes move, the mind (*Manaha*) follows. Where the mind focuses, the emotions (*Bhaava*) follow. The flowing emotions creates the mood (*Rasa*) (Suresh, 2006).

The verse states that the mover’s eyes must follow the movement of the hands. The mover’s mind has to focus on what they observe, and thus, express their emotions accordingly. For the mover to concentrate visually on their hand gestures, while moving their feet to the beat or in a particular rhythm, whilst expressing their emotions, through *Abhinaya* or facial expressions, involves intense coordination. For a Bharatanatyam dance practitioner, mastering coordination is the primary goal. Coordinating the upper and the lower body, while maintaining the specified rhythm, and continuing to express with facial and hand gestures, helps in centralizing the mover’s mind and unifying it with the body. The experience could be grounding, and also provides an opportunity to connect the external self with the internal. The dance sequences involve intricately choreographed movement of the head, eyes, hands, legs and torso, that could span from a minute or less, to a choreographed dance piece of forty-five minutes duration, and longer. This helps in enhancing the mover’s stamina and endurance. Remembering the intricate movement sequences help improve the individual’s memory. The music and the beats to which the sequence is set, at different speeds, requires the mover to constantly remember the patterns and simultaneously coordinate the different parts of the body that one needs to move.

Bringing the core concept of focus and memory from the dance form to a dance/movement therapy setting through small choreographies created by the mover and the therapist or the members of the group, could foster a collaborative and an interactive environment. This also provides a space for the dance/movement therapist to analyze movement preferences and the quality of movement the mover expresses. This collaborative effort of bringing the mental focus on multiple parts of the body at the same time could be a transformative experience in the journey of self-discovery which creates a therapeutic environment. This collaboration may also facilitate a bond of trust between the dance/movement therapist and the mover and/or the mover and the group.

Though dance/movement therapy speaks about accessing psychology through physicality, the emphasis is on the mental processing of the influence of movements, rather than body fitness and body strengthening. Introducing elements of Bharatanatyam like *Mudras* and *Karnas* in a dance/movement therapy setting would improve the mover's physical self along with mental health. The *Mudras* facilitate mental expression and improved physical health. They are close representations of the objects in nature and the quality of the movement can be used to strongly and clearly symbolize the thoughts. For example, when the mover wishes to express the happiness experienced on seeing the beauty of nature, the happiness can be expressed through facial expressions. To further specify what imagery caused happiness, the mover may wish to express parts of nature, like a bee sucking nectar from a flower. The mover can be encouraged to use the *Alapadma Mudra* or the hand gesture, where all the fingers are stretched outwards, to symbolize a flower. The mover may use the *Brahmari Mudra* or where the index finger is bent inwards, while the tip of the thumb and the middle finger is joined, symbolizing a bee, can be used to describe the bee sucking nectar from the flower. In another instance, if the mover

chooses to express denial or refusal, one can use the *Pataka Hasta Mudra* or when the fingers are stretched outwards but are joined along the length, and move horizontally outwards from being crossed at the wrists. If the mover wishes to request something, the hand gesture that may be used is the *Samdhamsha Mudra*, where the tips of all the fingers in one hand are touching (Suresh, 2006).

Using *Mudras* in dance/movement therapy could facilitate easier expression of one's thoughts and feelings. When one wishes to express a certain thought, situation, or emotion, and finds it difficult to express the same in words or actions, the facilitator could help guide the mover towards using *Mudras* that feels the most relatable to them. The *Mudras* act like a vocabulary for non-verbal communication. Using *Hasta Mudras* can be a useful intervention for members who have a strong sense of imagery, and choose to observe physical manifestations of those imageries in their bodies. The mover can be encouraged to choose relatable *Mudras* from a wide choice of them, printed out on paper or hung on walls, or could be guided by the therapist through mirroring. Charts with images of different *Mudras* could be useful to guide the mover's process of embodiment of abstract feelings and physicalizing emotions. By seeing the visual representation of what the *Mudra* would look like, the mover could identify which one closely relates to their emotion or thought. It could motivate the mover to mirror the hand gesture and also experience a sense of satisfaction on embodying the image, thus facilitating a therapeutic experience. Physical manifestation of the mover's emotion and thoughts could further facilitate the mover's journey of self-exploration and expression. Thus, the chart provides the mover an opportunity to seek out their own way to connect to their feelings within the safe perimeter of a therapeutic setting. This also helps the observer connect to the mover's expression and experience. The chart would be one of the many ways to introduce *Mudras* in a session; the

dance/movement therapist could also actively suggest hand gestures, when the mover verbalizes a feeling or thought. The *Mudra* chart provides the therapist an opportunity, along with the patient, to relate to what the mover expresses. By mirroring the hand gestures displayed by the dance/movement therapist, the mover could experience relatability, and this shared experience could help forge a deeper and a meaningful bond between the facilitator and the mover.

The usage of charts does not completely eliminate the role of the therapist, as the presence of the therapist in the space provides a transformative experience. As the mover navigates through their own emotions and finds their own path towards expression using the charts, the therapist's role is of a guide, suggesting either exploration of why a particular *mudra* felt closely relatable, or explore the experience of how the hand gesture facilitated expression, guiding the mover to expand on how the hand gestures could be used to tell the mover's own story. In the story session, each member of the group could identify one *Mudra* or use multiple ones to actively build a small story around it. On building a story or a narration, the member presents it to the group non-verbally, and this could lead to further discussions on the different perceptions that different members in the group have. *Mudras* have a deep influence in improving the physical health of the mover. Through self-directed dance/movement therapy interventions, the mover can identify which part of the body requires more attention. Based on this awareness, the mover can mirror the specific hand gesture associated with that part of the body, either by glancing at the chart of *Mudras* or by the guidance of the facilitator. This could relieve pain and improve the health in the specific body part. Mirroring a *Mudra* is a non-invasive method of providing relief for the physical body and thus, can be used as a part of the dance/movement therapy session, after self-exploration and identifying the area of discomfort in the body. For example, the *Mudra* of *Hamsasya*, where the index finger and the thumb are joined

together at the tips, increases blood circulation in the body. The *Apana Vayu Mudra*, commonly referred to as the *Heart Mudra*, where the mover folds the index finger inwards, the thumb, middle finger and the ring finger touch at the tip while the little finger is stretched outwards, is extremely beneficial in reducing the pressure on the heart and can be used to avoid or receive quick relief in case of a heart attack. It is also beneficial for people who experience hypertension. With the *Soochi Mudra*, or stretching the index finger straight outwards, while the tip of the other fingers touches and are held together, the mover experiences better blood circulation in the stomach, spleen, heart and pancreas. The mudras help control and maintain the equilibrium of the brain. The *Garuda Mudra*, where the right and the left thumb interlace and the rest of the palm is spread outwards to form a bird-like gesture, enhances blood circulation, energy in the body and helps regulate menstrual cycles (Iyengar, 2018).

The practice of *Bhedas* requires the mover to isolate and move only the prescribed part of the body, while the other parts of the body remain still. This generally qualifies as a beneficial warm up for the dancer. For example, when the mover initiates movement in the feet, while the rest of the body is static, it is called the *Pada Bhedas*. This helps the mover concentrate on flexing their feet, identifying stiffness or any difficulty in moving the same. This could draw the mover's attention to easy, painful or inhibited flow of movements. Using *Bhedas* helps the mover to concentrate on one body part at a time, and also improves mobility and strength through constant practice of the same. Introducing *Bhedas* or initiating patterned movements in individual body parts in a sequence, choreographed by the members of the group, could prove beneficial in acknowledging and checking in with their bodies. It also fosters togetherness in the group, as each group member mirrors the *Bheda* suggested by either another member of the group, or the facilitator. The use of *Bhedas* can introduce a pattern of exploring of the multiple

ways one can move their body parts. For example, when the mover chooses to explore *Greeva Bhedas*, which are different ways to move the neck, one can move the neck sideways, in a horizontal 'V', a vertical 'V' or forward and backward. Dance/movement therapy is about self-directed movements, and Bharatanatyam can facilitate more options and increase the mover's awareness and range of movements, from which they can embody the ones they relate to the most.

Introduction of rhythms in the body could help elevate the mover's mood, reduce anxiety and provide stress relief (Yap et al., 2017). Dance/movement therapy uses different rhythms in the interventions. Naturally occurring rhythms in our bodies like breath and heartbeat, and rhythms from nature and music, are used to facilitate the mover's experience of self-exploration and exploration of the space around them. It provides an opportunity for the community to express and extend support to each other. In Bharatanatyam, there are various combinations of rhythms taught and practiced. These rhythms are structurally organized and are embedded in most of the movements in the dance form. Rhythmically striking the bare foot on the ground is a very important aspect in Bharatanatyam and is taught foremost. The variations include striking the foot flat on the ground, striking the toes, striking the heels, or combinations of these movements, while incorporating beats and pace of the movement in the sequence. The rhythmic striking of the bare feet on the ground promotes the feeling of being grounded in the mover. In Bharatanatyam, there exist five specific beat patterns which are intertwined with various leg movements and positions. These rhythms, combined with leg positions and movements, could lead to a creative and a collaborative choreography. In a dance/movement therapy session, through the addition of the structured beat system of Bharatanatyam, the mover could have an opportunity to release their emotions or deep feelings using different combinations of

rhythmically striking the feet. With or without music, members of the group can focus and explore how striking their feet in the different rhythmic patterns and combinations of their choice feels, with respect to their emotions. This could also create an environment where the mover feels heard and acknowledged, as the facilitator or the group members mirror the striking of the feet. Creating these rhythmic combinations in one's body and in the space around helps promote a sense of community while dancing together in a group. It unifies an individual with a collective and promotes the mover's positive self-image.

Along with the use of rhythm, the mover may be introduced to different body postures and positions, which are called *Karnas* in Bharatanatyam. This rhythmic, systematic, movement of the separate parts of the body like, head, neck, hands, torso and legs, in a particular pattern, mobilizes the entire body. It improves concentration, as the mind needs to be alert and the positions need to be precise. The *Karnas* improve body flexibility and are also efficient for weight management. Practicing the *Karnas* boosts emotional wellbeing by improving the mover's self-image, and self-confidence, and elevates the mood. In a dance/movement therapy session, the mover may be encouraged to mirror certain *Karnas* that could be beneficial in elevating their emotional state or physical health. This could be done through visuals of the *Karna* or the facilitator could suggest the *Karna* specific to the mover's experience and, if the mover chooses, can physically embody the movement.

Dance/movement therapy and Bharatanatyam have common goals of improved health of an individual, but differ in the basic approach towards the same. While dance/movement therapy encourages more self-guided movement, Bharatanatyam is structured and the guru or the guide teaches or prompts the mover to move a certain way. It has a book entailing details of different combinations of the movement and the effect it has on the human body and mind, while

dance/movement therapy is about exploring the 'here and now' of the mover and self-exploring how certain movements can be used for communication and what is the psychological intentions of moving a certain way. There exists a performative aspect to Bharatanatyam where the audience witnesses the movement with a lens of entertainment, while the witness in a dance/movement therapy session observes and reflects the observations based on the lens of variable perceptions to increase the mover's awareness and to enhance holistic well-being. Despite Bharatanatyam's modern reputation as a performative dance form, recognizing and acknowledging the elements embedded in it can augment the effectiveness of a dance/movement therapy session.

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