

## Rabindra Nritya (Tagore Dance) As An Effective Art Form

**Dr. Susmita Bhattacharyya**

*Associate Professor*

*Department of Sociology*

*University of Calcutta, Kolkata, W.B.*

*Email: mithususmita20@gmail.com*

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

**Received: 29-11-25**

**Approved: 05-12-25**

**Dr. Susmita Bhattacharyya**

*Rabindra Nritya (Tagore Dance) As An Effective Art Form*

Artistic Narration 2025,  
Vol. XVI, No. 2,  
Article No.17 Pg.109-114

Similarity Check: 06%

**Online available at:**

<https://anubooks.com/journal-volume/artistic-narration-dec-2025-vol-xvi-no2>

**Referred by:**

**DOI:**<https://doi.org/10.31995/an.2025.v16i02.017>

### **Abstract**

*Dance as an art form was associated with a specific section of people in India. This specificity dissociates dance form from the generalized orientation of people. Actually, Indian dance forms are linked with two traditions — Bharatnatyam, Odissi and Manipuri Dance forms had a religious tradition in origin. Kathak dance was recognized as a court dance. Rabindranath Tagore has created a new dance form with a specific intention of involving commoners with dance. As a worshipper of the beauty cult Tagore had an interest in dance also. Hence, he put emphasis on dance in his extraordinary thought of education. His concept of education is linked with the growth of individual potentiality with a concern for the holistic social milieu. Rabindra Nritya as an artistic representation is inherently focused on the gradual uplift of mental state. An aim of education includes free and open-mindedness, self-reliance and self-criticism. These trends are prevalent in the Tagore dance form. The world outlook of understanding and cooperation is recognized as not only a component of education but also for dance. Tagore propagated the message of education with an emphasis on practical significance. This applied aspect is deeply rooted in the immediate surroundings. Representation of Rabindra Nritya is completely dependent on natural human feelings in expressions and postures. Hence the natural connection is truly visualized in this context directly and indirectly. The bonding with the universe becomes prominent with this kind of action. Tagore was a proponent of equal access to knowledge irrespective of gender existence. He carries forward the same opinion in the sphere of dance undoubtedly. Many girls of his educational institution took active part in several Tagore dance dramas created and Tagore songs. Tagore clearly divided the two segments of education in terms of knowledge. Rabindra Nritya also has these segments like pure and utilitarian knowledge. In the aspect of utilitarian knowledge, the gender distinction takes place because need-based education is associated with a differential focus on gender. Thus dance form defines different stylization on the basis of gender specific differences. He discarded book-centered education. In the sphere of education Tagore opined on the unification of East and West. So, education can be considered a consequence of cultural assimilation. He made a holistic perspective on dance with emphasis on several dance forms. Tagore made a specific trend of Rabindra Nritya considering all other focuses of dance forms like Manipuri and Kathakali Dance.*

## *Rabindra Nritya (Tagore Dance) As An Effective Art Form*

---

*Dr. Susmita Bhattacharyya*

*He defined education as essential for the balanced growth of the personality of the individual and the society separately as well as in their integrated form. So he put great importance on creativity. Tagore dance is a form of excellence with an implicit indication of creativity. He organized educational exercises in an organized setting of institutions. He accepted dance as a course in his institutional setup. Thus dance as a discipline becomes institutionalized as well as professionalized with his effort. The creative genius of Tagore has transformed the artistic ethos of Rabindra Nritya into a practical foundation of reality in the format of an academic discipline.*

**Keywords**

*Dance, Education, Nritya, Creativity & Nature.*

Dance has been accepted as a specific art form of Indian tradition from an early age. In the ancient period dance was specifically linked with a particular section of people. This specificity dissociates dance form from the generalized orientation of people. Actually, Indian dance forms are linked with two traditions — Bharatnatyam, Odissi and Manipuri Dance forms had a religious tradition in origin. Kathak dance was recognized as a court dance. Several art forms have undergone a holistic transformation all over the world since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Rabindranath Tagore had an exposure to the Western world especially in the cultural sphere. As a worshipper of the beauty cult Tagore had an interest in dance also. In that period Indian classical dance forms had very limited acceptance in the educated middle class. Tagore had an idea in mind regarding breaking the class-specific barrier of dance in Indian society at large. In this orientation, Rabindranath Tagore has created a new dance form with a specific intention of involving the educated middle class with dance. He created a genre in dance is known as ‘Rabindra Nritya’. His intention was to draw the respectable section of women of the middle class within the fold of dance. According to the opinion of scholar’s creation and practice of Rabindra Nritya can be viewed as a dance movement in Bengal. Moreover, he put emphasis on dance in his extraordinary thought of education.

Exploration of Tagore dance revealed the performative gestures and body movements in connection to dance through which negotiation appeared involving colonized bourgeois women. Purkayastha (2017) pointed out that through dance, deep tensions between Indian patriarchy and colonial domination in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Bengal took a specific orientation. Critically Tagore perceived the colonial model of theatre with the usability of elaborate sets, technology and machinery. All the attempts were made to create a naturalistic mode of representation. He went through the traditional texts for an understanding of stage directions in ancient Indian drama. He carefully observed Javanese performance through a spectator’s lens. These two trends of stage presentation were a meaningful influence on him to stage his own dance-dramas in non-naturalistic modes.

**Objectives:** There are some specific objectives of this paper. These are – a] to explain the significance of dance as an art form and b] to analyse the role of Rabindra Nritya as an effective domain of art.

**Link Between Dance and Education:** Approach of Rabindranath to the ultimate reality is integral. Thus, education as a holistic approach should not be confined to a bookish syllabus only. His different perspective on education also includes dance as a component. He believes in an inner harmony between man and Nature and God. This harmony can be established by proper education. Education focuses on three major aspects like research, invention and creation. These three aspects are very much linked with Rabindra Nritya. Modern education should not be limited to the field of professions only. It must have a relation with practical life. Dance links with the inner aspect of life apart from professional linkage.

According to Rabindranath, education of the body in the real sense does not exist in play and exercise but in applying the body systematically to some useful work. Hence he emphasizes games in school education. Pointing out the value of physical activities in the child 's education, he says, even if they learn nothing, they would have had ponds, plucking and tearing flowers, perpetrating a thousand and one mischief on Mother Nature, they would have obtained the nourishment of the body, happiness of mind and the satisfaction of the natural impulses of childhood. He wanted to establish dance as an academic field for the fulfillment of this aspiration. As a naturalist Tagore believed that nature should be regarded as the great teacher. God is revealed through various forms, colours and rhythms of nature. This inner rhythm of nature can be echoed in the sphere of dance on the basis of the opinion of Tagore. Being an internationalist Tagore was an ardent prophet of the unity of the world. The reflection of the unity can be seen in the cultural field also. Rabindra Nritya is an excellent example of this kind of cultural unification.

Tagore was in favour of the inclusion of activities necessary for physical development in the aspect of education. Thus swimming, dancing and so on become popular as parts of education. Education must be linked with moral and spiritual development. It is true that several moral and spiritual qualities can emerge with education like self-discipline, tolerance, courtesy and inner freedom. All these qualities are aids to the moral as well as spiritual development of personalities. Each and every aspect of these sectors can be associated with the sphere of dance undoubtedly. Education through emotion was another favourite approach of Tagore. Dance can be seen as a valuable tool of education in this focus. Rabindranath focuses on the activity method of education also. Actually, activities can stimulate all the faculties of the body and mind. In Viswa Bharati Tagore made the artistic activities as compulsory aspects. Dance as an aspect of education has entered in such a way.

In general Tagore focused on equal access to knowledge irrespective of gender differences. In the field of dance Tagore gave equal importance to girls and boys. So, in Rabindra Nritya there is an equal presence of girls and boys. On the basis of the opinion of

Tagore, there are two components of education like pure and utilitarian aspects. There was no difference in the matter of pure aspect of dance also. Variation is mainly linked with the aspect of utility. Gender specific stylization is observed here. Overall observation focuses on the integration between the individual and society.

**Role of Rabindra Nritya as An Aid of Education:** The analysis can be revolved under four basic aspects. These are cultural assimilation, creativity, natural linkage and institutional setup.

Cultural assimilation is a process by which a group adopts the values and patterns of behavior of another group. As a consequence, the traits of the culture of both groups change in different directions. In common parlance cultural assimilation implies the intermingling of different traits of culture on one platform. In the sphere of Rabindra Nritya this kind of cultural assimilation takes place. Tagore was in favour of the unification of East and West as the basic matter of assimilation. Ideally the result of assimilation has got a new form of artistic evidence. Thus, in the sphere of Rabindra Nritya inter inter-country cultural assimilation can be perceived easily. In the choreography of Rituranga [Dance drama of Tagore] there was a clear presence of the dance style of Java. Tagore traveled around the world to disseminate his notion, aim and mission related to education. During this phase he came into contact with several cultural traits of those countries. He stored all the information in his mind. In a practical scenario it was found that a new dance form began to appear with his supervision incorporating different styles of dance of his liking. Indian classical dance forms were also adopted by him. He was interested in the cultural synthesis of Manipuri dance and Kathakali. The tenderness and soft style of Tagore dance were taken from Manipuri dance. The feminine style of Rabindra Nritya was influenced by the Manipuri style whereas the bold and masculine style was adopted from the Kathakali dance form.

Creativity is the most valuable component of any kind of artistic activities as well as the educational aspect. Creativity is linked with the inner potentiality of an individual. Creativity should be perceived as the reflection of the original worth of an individual undoubtedly. By participating in dance an individual can enhance his/her standard of creativity. This effect is not limited to dance only, but it is also linked with educational purposes holistically. Creative amalgamation of varied musical traditions takes place in Tagore dance. Balanced growth of the mind of the individual and society depends largely on the integrative way of representation. Creativity becomes a need for the fullest achievement of the life of an individual. Thus, the participation in dance-related activities is linked with the overall presence of creativity. Active and direct participation in dance always focuses and enhances the creative side of the mind. Even indirect participation also inculcates the creative aspect of the mind. In Rabindra Nritya creativity as a component is the most significant aspect.

Focusing on natural objects and settings is another area of attention. Tagore liked the method of utilization of natural resources as an aid to education. In the setting of dance Tagore was in favour of maintaining the natural environment completely. Natural human behavior becomes highlighted in Tagore dance directly and indirectly. The Indian classical dance tradition is related to strict grammatical rules. Rabindra Nritya as a genre avoids grammatical hardship. This form focuses on natural aspects in the periphery of dance. Adherence to grammatical rules can be seen as straight straitjacket in a free-flowing dance style. Nature is utilized as the background of dance here. The presence of nature is prevalent in the grace and rhythm of Tagore dance directly and indirectly. The key concept of Rabindra Nritya is 'suppression of physicality' in dance. Expression must be associated with natural inclination. Rhythm and grace are two recognized components of personality development. These two forces are focused on the periphery of natural presence. Artistic activities draw the individual to nature. Thus dance as an artistic activity brings the performer close to nature. Nature generates the tendencies towards beauty, grace and companionship in the individual personality. All these feelings are associated with dance in general and Rabindra Nritya in particular. Hence individual can develop the feeling of fulfillment with the integration of nature. This kind of feeling can also emerge from practicing Tagore dance also. Instincts and aptitudes towards sympathetic relation with nature come surface in this situation. This kind of aptitude and instincts become necessary elements in the performance of Tagore dance.

Rabindra Nritya took the matured shape in the hands of Pratima Devi, daughter - in -law of Rabindranath. Interestingly, she can be marked as an untrained dancer or choreographer. Her excellence lies elsewhere; she was an extraordinary observer. Her power of perception not only brings out the soul of a dancer within herself, but it also gives Rabindra Nritya a permanent platform. She was habituated to different genres of dances. She had ample scope to see different styles of dances of the Orient as well as the Occident. As a true follower of Rabindranath Tagore, Pratima Devi put emphasis on the freedom conceptually in the expression of dances. In her opinion the focus and stylization of dance depend on the context of inter intercultural scenario. Choreography, body movements, attire and expressions of Rabindra nritya come from different cultural aspects. She wrote that it was difficult only to stick to the rules of Indian Classical dances rather her suggestion was focusing on assimilating several styles. The aesthetic foundation of the Modern dance of Santiniketan was an amalgamation like chemical synthesis. Hence it is still hard to find out any specific traditional or classical dance style in Tagore dance. It is actually a continuous process of creative exercise coming out of synthesizing multiple dance genres.

### **Phase-wise division of Rabindra Nritya**



Rabindra Nritya can be practiced in Viswa Bharati informally. There is also a provision for taking Dance as an academic course. Hence Rabindranath has designed the course format of Rabindra Nritya. Rabindra Nritya is recognized as a form of academic discipline. Thus, the genre of dance is organized in the setting of an organization. There is an effort at professionalization of dance through this institutional orientation. Lots of teachers, performers, and musicians are now involved in this sector. Dance-related education has enhanced the chance of spreading the dance-related concept of Tagore. The real presentation of Tagore dance needs the proper synthesis of bhava with the respective literary focus. Stagecraft, light and related factors are used in a conscious manner in this context. Hence certain amount of education becomes compulsory for the proper execution of Rabindra Nritya. Make-up technique, pattern of dress and so on all need special attention in this genre of dance. Hence education and Rabindra Nritya become interrelated to each other.

Tagore was an advocate of holistic as well as complete education. this concept includes the existence of dance, music, handicrafts and so on. With the proper understanding of education, several experiments are done in the sphere of Rabindra Nritya. A close affinity between education and Rabindra Nritya can be marked easily. Education has a logical frame with a rational method. Dance symbolizes artistic representation. Tagore transformed the artistic ethos of Rabindra Nritya into a rational foundation of education. Creative genius of Tagore thus institutionalized Rabindra Nritya in the patterned frame of reference.

#### **Reference:**

1. Jary D. and J. Jary (1991), Collins Dictionary of Sociology, HarperCollins Publishers
2. Prasad D. (2000), Rabindranath Tagore, Philosophy of Education and Painting, National Book Trust India.
3. Priyanka M. (2017), Rabindra Nritya: The Cultural and Artistic Essence of Tagore's Inimitable Efforts in Dance Choreography, Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Arts and Humanities, Vol. 4, Pg. **93-106**
4. Purkayastha P. (2017), Choreographing gender in Colonial Bengal: The dance work of Rabindranath Tagore and Pratima Devi in In Clio. Women, Gender, History 2017/2 No 46, Pg. **65—86**.