



## The Concept of Dance Drama in the Works of Rabindranath Tagore

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### Abstract

This paper argues that Rabindra Nritya, i.e., Tagore's style of dance drama, is a distinct and transformative creation that not only reinterprets Indian classical and folk dance traditions but also functions as a means for cultural and social change in Bengal and beyond. By analyzing the origins and evolution of Rabindra Nritya through Tagore's writings, letters, and the structure of his dance dramas, this article aims to demonstrate that Tagore's work both preserved India's rich heritage and introduced a progressive artistic vision. The fundamental question guiding this research is: What is the history of Rabindra Nritya's emergence, and what unique impact did it have? The answers to these questions have indeed been found in his various writings. By analysing his dance dramas and his letters, the history of the creation of Rabindra Nritya can be understood. Rabindra Nritya incorporates elements from almost every genre of Indian classical dance. Even foreign dance forms have influenced this expressive, emotion-centered dance tradition. It has had a profound impact not only in Bengal and India, but also abroad. While this paper discusses four dance dramas, it is hoped that it will inspire more detailed research on Tagore's remaining dance dramas.

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## **1. Introduction:**

On today's vibrant and highly engaging television platforms, the popularity of modern dance shows and competitions makes the traditional Rabindra Nritya (Tagore's style of dance) seem quite out of place. In recent times, Rabindra Nritya has blended with Western dance forms and other styles, giving it a new dimension that appeals to the people of the modern era.

In the *Natyashastra*, the word *Natya* signifies a combination of dance and music, implying that it is an intimate part of drama. In contrast, the word *Nritya* refers to the expression of emotions and sentiments through bodily movements. Rabindranath Tagore's dance dramas portray the cruelty, oppression, and suffering caused by colonialism. However, the British government never imposed any censorship on his writings. The plays he presented were widely appreciated in society. During the colonial education period, India's ancient cultural traditions were fading away, and in this context, Tagore brought a new wave of thought to education and culture. Although Rabindranath himself did not receive any formal training in dance, growing up in a culturally rich environment from childhood nourished his creative imagination. He was deeply passionate about music and drama, even though he was never seen performing dance himself.

Rabindranath Tagore was one of the foremost figures behind the dawn of the Bengal Renaissance. Through his novels, short stories, poems, songs, plays, musical dramas, and dance dramas, he became deeply intertwined with every emotion of the Bengali people.

Rabindranath Tagore extensively studied both Indian and foreign dance traditions to compose his dance dramas. From this extensive practice emerged a profound body of thought which he shaped in his own unique way and gifted to Bengali society. However, the question arises: what struggles did he face in creating these dance dramas? Or with how much sincerity and through what kind of difficult challenges did he succeed in establishing these dance dramas within Bengali society? And, what was the history behind the emergence of Rabindra Nritya? The main objective of this paper is to seek answers to these questions.

## **2. Research Methodology:**

Since this paper is a research-oriented study, the writings and letters of Rabindranath Tagore have been given primary importance. By analysing those texts, the paper highlights his intense

hard work and dedication in the creation of his dance dramas. Therefore, it is entirely an **analytical and descriptive** research paper.

### **3. Limitations of this Research Paper:**

In the true sense, the term dance drama is primarily associated with Rabindranath Tagore's three works- Chandalika, Shyama, and Chitrangada. However, works such as Mayar Khela, Shapmochan, Tasher Desh, Nutir Puja, and Riturango have also been presented as dance-dramas at different times. It has not been possible to discuss all of these dance dramas in this paper. For the convenience of research, the poet's ideas have been highlighted through an analysis of four selected dance dramas- Chandalika, Shyama, Chitrangada, and Shapmochan. In the future, the scope of the study may be expanded to include the remaining dance dramas.

### **4. Rabindranath's Concept of Dance Drama:**

What we understand today as *Rabindra Nritya* (Tagore's dance style) is not a separate genre. He was familiar with and influenced by various forms of dance from both India and abroad. These influences deeply inspired him, and he wished to enrich the Bengali community with them. By bringing this art form into Bengali homes, he elevated the nation's cultural pride. Through his new cultural vision, we evolved into a more self-reliant and progressive society.

In the 19th century, his dance drama presentations were influenced by renowned dancers of the time, among whom Rukmini Devi Arundale, Anna Pavlova, Uday Shankar, and Ragini Devi were particularly noteworthy. In 1921, *Visva-Bharati* was established at Shantiniketan, and by 1923, under the guidance of Shantidev Ghosh, formal dance training began there. Later, Shantidev Ghosh also became the principal of *Sangeet Bhavan*.

Tagore's immense love for the art of dance can be traced through his travel writings. In 1878, he went to London, where he stayed for a year and became acquainted with various dance forms, including ballet and the waltz. His *Letters from a Journey to Java (Java-Jatrir Patra)* is a remarkable collection. From these letters, we gain deep insights into the culture of Java. The country fascinated the poet immensely. Through these letters, we also learn about Tagore's travel experiences in Southeast Asia.

In his letters to his son Rathindranath, he vividly described the art, culture, attire, and customs of the people of Bali. He wrote that the entire land seemed like a painting — there was no

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hunger or poverty, and because food was abundant, people valued art deeply *“daridrer chinho nei, vikhuk e porjonto chokhe porlo na”* (Tagore, 1927, p. 63) *(There is no sign of poverty, not a single beggar has been seen so far)*. Their homes, walls, and furniture all bore traces of fine craftsmanship; even their utensils were artistically designed. Every house looked like a beautifully adorned temple. Men and women alike were graceful, with well-proportioned bodies that seemed shaped by the rhythm of dance. Every village had festivals of song, dance, and drama.

As Tagore observed, *“porjapte chole atmaraksha, aporjapte atmaprakash.”* *(Sufficiency leads to self-preservation, while insufficiency leads to self-expression.)* (Tagore, 1927, p. 2) Perhaps that is why, in poor countries like ours, art is less valued — few people understand its worth. But in Bali, both physical and spiritual nourishment were plentiful, and thus, the people devoted themselves generously to art. There were no beggars — not a trace of poverty. Such a beautiful land could indeed be the ideal center of cultural practice.

The chief element of Balinese culture was dance. Their bodies swayed like ocean waves. Through culture, a nation’s identity is expressed — just as *kirtan* fills the heart of Bengal, for them, dance was the medium of emotional expression. Every aspect of their lives, travel, acting, warfare, love, and even humor, was expressed through dance. The entire island resonated with rhythm and melody. Their dance had its own language full of meaning and symbolic gestures, which one must know to fully understand the performance.

For example, the story of Shalva and Satyavati was enacted entirely through dance in the royal palace. The emphasis was on rhythm, tempo, and motion. Their gestures were expressive and full of symbolic meaning. Though based on the *Mahabharata*, their depiction of war was unlike any real battle — rhythm and grace transformed it into something both surreal and unique. In Tagore’s words, there was an extraordinary power in their dance, *“boro ashchorjo tar shakti”* (Tagore, 1927, p.65), where *every gesture made words come alive*. That is the essence of dance drama, the dialogue becomes rhythm, blending with the steps of the dance.

In our own country, dance is not only a visual delight but also a nourishment for the soul, an experience in which the audience feels spiritual ecstasy through rhythm and melody.

At Gianyar Palace, Tagore discovered a new musical instrument called the Gamelan. Its sound was unlike that of any Indian instrument, a harmonious blend reminiscent of the *jal-tarang*,

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*mridangam*, and bells, accompanied by cymbals. Young girls performed dances to this melodious music, captivating the poet completely. Their graceful rhythmic movements were enchanting. However, girls danced only until age 12, as their flexibility declined thereafter.

Dance in Bali was diverse — one striking form was mask dancing. Mask-making was an art form in itself, representing individual and class characteristics. The actor's gestures followed the mask's expression rather than the emotion, making the character come vividly alive. Tagore was deeply impressed by the precision of these performances.

Although he repeatedly praised their dance, he could not appreciate their music much. Given the supreme status of melody in Indian music, a *tuneless vocal style could not naturally* appeal to him. In India, costume is an essential part of dance; each form has its own ornaments and attire that enhance its beauty and grandeur. But in Bali, dancers wore almost no ornaments, sometimes a few bangles or small palm-leaf earrings. Their simplicity reminded him of ancient cave paintings. The dance was filled with unbounded joy — Tagore compared it to “*jharnar tarangito dharar moto.*” (*Like the rippling flow of a waterfall.*) (Tagore, 1927, p. 70)

From Bali, Tagore traveled to Java, visiting the cities of *Surabaya* and *Surakarta*, from where he wrote several letters to his daughter-in-law Pratima Devi. In *Surakarta*, he attended a royal dance performance that left a deep impression on him. The grand marble stage was illuminated by thousands of lamps, creating a magical atmosphere. The theme was drawn from the *Ramayana* — the battle between Indrajit and Hanuman. The king's brother himself played Indrajit, and, being a skilled dancer, he doubled the audience's excitement.

The depiction of Hanuman was unlike anything Tagore had seen before — there was no comedy, only reverence. His long tail and attire inspired awe, not laughter. The battle sequence between Indrajit and Hanuman was synchronized with a perfect rhythm and accompanied by instruments such as drums and bells, as well as *deep human chants*, creating a dramatic symphony. The male dancers displayed graceful masculinity, but when women performed male roles — like the duel between Arjuna and Subala — their strength and flexibility earned high praise.

Later came the Ghatotkacha dance, one of the most beloved episodes from the *Mahabharata*. It included his marriage to Arjuna's daughter and even his sorrowful separation. Through imaginative dance movements, he was shown flying through the air — entirely via mime. The

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depiction of the *Mahabharata* through dance and even shadow plays amazed Tagore. Every emotion found expression through dance and acting.

Tagore wrote,

***“nachta eder bhasha.....eder gamelaner sangittao surer nach l kokhono druto, kokhono bilombito, kokhono probol, kokhono mridu, ei sangittao sangiter jonne noy, kono-ekta kahinik nrittochonder anushongo debar jonne.”*** (Tagore, 1927, p. 96)

*Dance is their language... even their Gamelan music is a dance of melody — sometimes fast, sometimes slow, sometimes loud, sometimes soft. The music exists not for itself but to accompany the rhythm of a story through dance.*

While staying at the Pakoe Alam palace in Yogyakarta, Tagore wrote another letter to his son, Rathindranath. Invited to a dance performance at the palace, he witnessed something remarkable — even royal women performed dance and acting, which was considered a matter of honor. At that time in India, no aristocratic woman could imagine such participation; dance was confined to *baijis* or *devadasis*. Tagore was awestruck by the performance of four women, two of whom were princesses. He wrote,

***“ekhane ese joto nach dekhechi sob cheye eitei sundor legeche”*** (Tagore, 1927, p. 103)

Of all the dances I have seen here, this one is the most beautiful.

He also visited their dance school to better understand their art form. There he witnessed the *Jatayu-vadha* (Death of Jatayu) performance — a seated dance full of rhythm and grace, depicting scenes from the *Ramayana*. The male performers played female roles. Even if some meanings escaped him, the charm and spiritual joy of the performance were undeniable. As Tagore said, ***“e mohakabyer desh” (This is the land of epics)*** (Tagore, 1927, p. 103). For him, their dance was the play of rhythm and melody. Tagore’s engagement with dance was not limited to Java. While in Sylhet, he came across Manipuri dance at the *Gopinath Temple* in Machimpur. He was so impressed by the *Raas* and *Rakhāl* dances that he decided to bring a Manipuri dance teacher to Shantiniketan. On his request, Maharaja Birendra Manikya Bahadur of Tripura sent Guru Buddhimanta Singh to Shantiniketan in February 1920, marking the beginning of Manipuri dance training at the Ashram.

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However, Bengali society was not yet ready to accept this modern outlook. To avoid criticism, the *Shantiniketan* magazine publicly described the sessions as *mridangam-based musical exercises*, concealing the fact that they were dance lessons. After some time, Guru Buddhimanta Singh returned home, but Tagore's progressive vision could not be accepted by the conservative minds of his time.

Yet Tagore did not give up. He invited masters of Bharatanatyam and Kathakali from different parts of India. In 1922, his play *Sharadotsav* was staged with elements of Gujarati folk dance. In 1923, during *Basanta Utsav*, Tagore himself participated in the music and directed the dance drama.

In 1924, Professor Jahangir Vakil from Bombay joined Visva-Bharati. At the request of Pratima Devi, his wife began teaching the girls Garba and Kathiyawadi dances, which were later incorporated into the play *Raja*. During a farewell to Professor Prosthon Kohn, the Gujarati *Garba* dance was performed — something unimaginable in Bengal at the time.

Gradually, Tagore's beloved Shantiniketan was transforming into a *Vishwaniketan* — a global home of culture. Scholars and artists from across the world began visiting. In 1925, Italian professors Giuseppe Tucci and Carlo Formichi came. The same year, Manipuri dance masters Nabakumar Singh and Baikunthanath Singh joined. From Sri Lanka, *the Kandyan dance was introduced, and from Japan, martial arts dance (Jiu-jitsu)* was taught under Shinzo Takagaki. Under Pratima Devi's supervision, students like Gauri (daughter of Nandalal Bose), Nandita Devi, Amita Devi, and Yamuna Devi learned from these masters — all discreetly, away from public eyes. In 1926, after much struggle, the Department of Dance was formally established. That same year, *Natir Puja*, directed by Pratima Devi and Nabakumar Singh, was performed.

Through dance, Tagore sought to spread true education and artistic awareness in society. In 1927, a South Indian student named Vasudevan joined *Kala Bhavana*. Recognizing his talent, Tagore cast him as the lead dancer in *Rituranga* (an adaptation of *Nataraja*). The song "*Jete jete ekla pathe*" was choreographed by Vasudevan. He also inspired Shantidev Ghosh to learn dance.

Later, responding to Tagore's invitation, Bharatanatyam guru E. Krishna Iyer and the legendary Uday Shankar came to Shantiniketan. Tagore compared Uday Shankar to Lord Shiva himself. At Tagore's request, the Maharaja of Cochin sent Kalyani Amma, who taught the students

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*Swaram*, *Kaikottikali*, and *Kalam-muli* — enriching Shantiniketan's dance tradition and fulfilling Tagore's dream of a universal art education.

Among those whom Rabindranath nurtured with his own hands, Pratima Devi's name comes first. Pratima Thakur was born on 5 November 1893. Her father was Sheshendra Bhushan Chattopadhyay, and her mother was Binayini Devi, the sister of Gaganendranath Tagore. Gaganendranath was the son of Rabindranath's elder brother. Pratima married Nilanath, the grandson of Gaganendranath's younger sister Kumudini, when she was only 11 years old. Unfortunately, Nilanath died in an accident a few years later.

Five years after this tragedy, Rabindranath arranged Pratima's marriage to his England-returned son Rathindranath Tagore — the first widow remarriage in the Tagore family. This also indicates that marriages within the extended family were not uncommon in the Tagore household.

Growing up and living her entire life in the creative atmosphere of the Jorasanko Thakur Bari, Pratima's talent blossomed in extraordinary ways. Recognizing her artistic potential, Rabindranath sent her to Germany, where she was exposed to modern European dance. Upon returning to India, she beautifully blended Eastern and Western dance traditions, giving birth to the Rabindrik (Tagorean) style of modern dance.

At that time, Bengalis had little inclination toward learning dance. With the poet's encouragement, Pratima Devi began training young women in dance at Santiniketan. Her journey began modestly, incorporating small dance segments in *Valmiki Pratibha* and *Maya Khela*. In 1888, *Maya Khela* was performed by girls at the Bethune School grounds.

Although she was not deeply involved with women's dance troupes, Pratima herself acted in *Lakshmir Pariksha* as the character *Khiri*. She devoted herself wholeheartedly to the aesthetic presentation of Rabindranath's dance dramas. The poet had immense faith in her capabilities. Often, Pratima would request him to write dance-dramatic versions of his plays. Her deep passion for dance helped transform Tagore's works, such as *Chitrangada*, *Shapmochan*, and *Pujarini*, into full-fledged dance dramas.

She designed everything — from stage décor and costumes to dance postures. In a patriarchal society, making dance acceptable within the upper-class domestic sphere was revolutionary.

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Pratima aimed to preserve the grace and dignity of Rabindranath's dance dramas. Through authentic performances of Manipuri and Garba dances, she enthralled audiences — and tickets were even sold for these performances. Thus, by bringing dance from temples and royal courts onto the public stage, Tagore and Pratima gave it new cultural legitimacy.

Encouraged by the poet, Pratima went to Dartington Hall School in England to learn ballet, which she later incorporated into her performances. She masterfully created a lyrical atmosphere by combining poetry and dance. Her performances of the poem “*Jhulan*” and the song “*Eso Nipabane,*” accompanied by dance, remain memorable. She also staged *Chitrangada* with students at New Empire Theatre, and later it was performed across Khulna, Comilla, Chittagong, Sylhet, and Mymensingh (now in Bangladesh).

In 1940, when Mahatma Gandhi visited Santiniketan to inquire about the ailing poet's health, *Chandalika* was performed before him through dance. Pratima Devi's contribution to Rabindra culture is undeniable.

Even today, festivals like Basant Utsav and Ritu Utsav at Santiniketan are celebrated with grandeur and dance. Although Rabindra Nritya does not follow a strict grammatical structure, it emphasizes the expression of emotions (*bhava-pradhan*). Its aim is to portray the theme through acting and movement. Essentially, it is a fusion of various dance styles — Manipuri, Kathakali, Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Java-Bali, and Hungarian dance.

A *dance drama* is a drama that combines song and dance to narrate a story. The *Gitagovindam*, by court poet Jayadeva, is an early example of such work that combines music and dance. In the modern era, Rabindranath Tagore revived and redefined the form of dance drama in India. His creations *Chandalika*, *Chitrangada*, *Shyama*, *Natir Puja*, *Shapmochan*, etc. are priceless treasures of Bengali culture.

Initially, Tagore wrote *Gitinatya* (musical dramas) such as Valmiki Pratibha, Maya Khela, and Kalmrigaya, in which the dialogue unfolds through song. Later, he developed dance dramas that did not adhere to any one dance tradition. For example, in *Shyama*, one can observe a synthesis of Kathakali, Manipuri, and Kathak. The fusion of song, dance, and story created timeless, exquisite masterpieces.

A brief overview of some major dance dramas from **Rabindra Rachanabali**:

- a) **Shapmochan** — Tagore described it as a “*Kathika*”. “*je boudhho akhyan abolombon kore Raja natok rochito tari avase shapmochan kothikati rochona kora holo*” (Tagore, 1339, B.E, p. 7). The *Kathak* narrates parts of the story from behind the stage, while songs are danced out in front. It tells the story of the cursed celestial being Saurasen, reborn as Aruneswar, and his reunion with Kamalika after trials of beauty, pride, and repentance.
- b) **Chandalika**— The two central characters of this dance-drama are the untouchable woman, Prakriti, and her mother. Through them, Rabindranath Tagore portrays the assertion of self-respect by a mother and daughter belonging to a socially neglected class. When the Buddhist monk Ananda asks Prakriti for water, a transformation begins within her mind. From that moment, she starts to establish her own sense of human dignity. Overwhelmed by her daughter's love and longing, the mother resorts to magical rituals to bring Ananda back to her. However, this wrongful method causes Ananda both physical and mental suffering. In the end, Prakriti realizes her mistake and frees Ananda from the spell of illusion, thereby attaining her own spiritual purification. “*khoma koro khoma koro-matite tenechi tomare, anechi niche, dhuli hote tuli nao amay tobo punyoloke*” (Tagore, 1402, B.E, p. 186) (*forgive me, forgive me- I have dragged you down to the dust, I have brought you low, lift me up from this dust into your sacred realm*).
- c) **Chitrangada** — The king of Manipur, desiring a son, received a boon from Shiva, but a daughter was born. She was raised like a warrior son. Later, she falls in love with Arjuna and seeks feminine beauty from the god of love. Arjuna falls for her new form, but Chitrangada ultimately reclaims her true identity, asserting that a woman's worth lies not merely in beauty but in character and talent. Here, Rabindranath has established her own dignity and glory,

*“hela kori more rakhibe piche se nohi nohi. Jodi parshe rakho more sankote sampode, sommoti dao jodi kothin brote sohay hote, pabe tobe tumi chinite more.”*

*If you keep me behind in neglect, that will not do, never. If you place me beside you in both hardship and prosperity, if you allow me to stand by you in your*

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*difficult vows, only then will you truly be able to know me. (Tagore, 1402, B.E, Rabindra Rachanaboli, vol. 13, p. 164)*

- d) **Shyama** — Shyama, a beautiful court dancer, falls in love with the foreign merchant Bajrasen. When Bajrasen is imprisoned for theft, she persuades her admirer, Uttiya, to take the blame. Upon learning this, Bajrasen abandons her, leaving Shyama heartbroken. In this dance -drama, the poet has beautifully portrayed love, guilt, remorse, and sacrifice. Uttiya's selfless love and Bajrasen's abandonment of Shyama have given the dance drama its ultimate intensity,

*“prio je tomar, bachabe jare, nebe mor pranorrin-tahari songe tomari bokhhe badha robo chirodin morondore” Tagore, 1402 B.E, p.194.*

These complex dance dramas required immense effort to stage, made possible through the dedication of Pratima Devi, Shantidev Ghosh, and others.

Moving to Uday Shankar, son of scholar Pandit Shyamsundar Chaudhuri, he was born in Udaipur, Rajasthan, on 8 December 1900. From childhood, he was drawn to art and dance. After studying at the J.J. School of Art, he went to the Royal College of Art, London, where he gained both theoretical and practical knowledge of dance. During his stay at Kensington Palace in 1920, he met Rabindranath Tagore, who was also in London.

After gaining fame abroad, Uday Shankar returned to Calcutta in 1937. The poet, deeply moved by his performance, blessed him and invited him to Santiniketan, where Uday was captivated by its free and natural environment. At Tagore's request, he added innovative elements to the dance dramas *Chandalika*, *Chitrangada*, and *Shyama*. Inspired by the poet, he established the Uday Shankar India Culture Center in Almora, Himachal Pradesh, in 1939. Tagore wrote of him,

*“tumi nrityakolake songini kore poshchim mohadesher joymalyo niye bohudin pore fire esecho matrivumite / matrivumi tomar jonno rochona kore rekheche—joymalyo*

*noy—ashirbadputo boronmalyo / Banglar kobir hat theke aj tumi ta grohon koro-----  
----".<sup>1</sup>*

*“You have returned to your motherland after conquering the Western world with the art of dance as your companion. For you, the motherland has not woven a garland of victory, but a garland of blessings. Today, accept it from the poet of Bengal.”*

### 5. Key Findings of this Paper:

Since both analytical and descriptive methods have been used in this article. The purpose of this writing is to explore the content of the social and cultural impact it had during that period and to examine how relevant it remains even today. It also aims to examine how deeply it influenced the general Bengali populace at the time and to what extent that influence continues.

The distinctive dance style of Rabindranath Tagore, though influenced by a variety of Indian classical and folk-dance traditions, possesses a unique expressive character of its own. For this reason, it is often described as “*Bhava Nritya*” (*expressive dance*). This term highlights the central emphasis on emotional expression rather than on the technical aspects of dance movements.

Tagore pioneered a new genre known as the dance drama, in which the entire narrative is conveyed through music and dance instead of spoken dialogue. By challenging the rigid social conservatism of his time, he paved the way for middle-class women to assert their dignity and self-respect. As a result of his progressive vision, women from middle-class families were able to participate in and perform dance dramas on stage.

Tagore’s dance dramas offer vast possibilities for acting and emotional expression. Performers engage with the work through their entire being, expressing its emotional depth through movement and gesture. In this sense, the art form is fundamentally emotion centric. This style of dance has had a profound influence on Bengali society. Even today, when people think of a dance that is graceful, serene, and aesthetically refined, they often associate it with *Rabindra Nritya*.

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<sup>1</sup> Prabasi, Vadra 1340. Bangadarshan Information Desk, 26 May 2018, p. 1. Retrieved from <https://share.google/dvSGHt1Ld8oiDwXu8> Accessed on March 05, 2026.

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In conventional theatre, dramatic performance generally relies primarily on acting. However, Tagore's dance dramas combine dance technique with deeply expressive acting, thereby giving the stage a new vitality and artistic dimension.

I have already mentioned above the poet's own view's regarding Uday Shankar. At one time, dance did not enjoy much respect within Bengali society. The extraordinary talent of Uday Shankar brought global recognition to Bengalis in the field of dance, a contribution that Tagore himself acknowledged in his writings. Proud of Uday Shankar's achievements in elevating Bengali participation in this art form, Tagore invited him to Visva-Bharati University.

Tagore was deeply committed to developing Santiniketan as a centre for dance practice and cultural learning. Each of his dance dramas conveys significant social messages, particularly regarding women's emancipation, social equality, and human dignity. Themes such as caste discrimination, women's search for identity, and the profound dimensions of love and sacrifice are also portrayed with sensitivity and depth.

Within the broader framework of Indian culture, Tagore's dance dramas introduced a modern intellectual perspective and brought about a remarkable cultural transformation. His progressive ideas continue to astonish and inspire the literary and artistic world even today. This harmonious fusion of modernity and humanism opened a new horizon in artistic expression, offering enduring lessons for future generations.

### **6. Concluding Remarks:**

The aforementioned *Java Jatrir Patra* is a historical document that reflects Rabindranath Tagore's observations on the culture and dance traditions of Southeast Asia. In this writing, the poet beautifully portrays the social, religious, and cultural aspects of places such as Java and Bali.

Tagore wrote many such travel narratives, which helped shape his own thoughts and ideas. Therefore, the significance of this particular letter written by him is immense. By reading this work, we too become enriched. It is not merely a travel account; rather, it also reflects Tagore's philosophical thinking, his subtle sensitivity, and his extraordinary power of observation. *Java Jatrir Patra* stands as a remarkable example of Tagore's profound vision of universal humanism.

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All of Rabindranath's dance dramas were set in contemporary social contexts, portraying the oppression of imperialism and colonial exploitation. These works also reflected the struggles of women for dignity and equality in a patriarchal society. The independence movement was not only a fight against colonial domination but also a movement for women's liberation.

The Devadasi system, once a sacred offering of women to deities, had degraded into exploitation by kings, landlords, and priests. Devadasis were denied marital status, inheritance rights, and social respect. Their dance, once known as Sadir, became stigmatized.

The movement to abolish the Devadasi system began in 1888 and culminated in the Madras Devadasi Abolition Act of 1947. However, during this upheaval, traditional Indian dance forms were on the verge of extinction. Rabindranath Tagore made tireless efforts to preserve these dying art forms among ordinary people.

In early 20th-century Bengal, dance was often associated with courtesans or folk traditions, but Tagore transformed it into a refined art form, using educated middle-class youth, both men and women, as performers. His dance-drama heroines, such as Chitrangada, Chandalika, and Shyama, became symbols of social revolution. Thus, breaking away from societal conventions, the Poet of the World established dance as an art of dignity and self-expression.

Rabindranath was the first figure to introduce dance drama into Bengali literature. His creations brought a new dimension to Indian performing arts. At a time when women's dancing in public was looked down upon, he elevated it to a realm of education and spirituality.

At Santiniketan, he even made dance a part of the curriculum, reflecting his deep reverence and love for the art. By fusing classical, folk, and Western ballet traditions, he created an entirely new aesthetic language. His dance dramas convey themes of freedom, love, sacrifice, social discrimination, hatred, humanity, and moral values, making them not just art but enduring messages of human and social awakening.

Rabindra Nritya still occupies an important place in the cultural and entertainment sphere of the Bengali people. Although its form has changed over time, Bengali has not lost its original charm. Its aesthetic significance is immense due to the confluence of classical and folk-dance traditions. Through dance, music, and dialogue, the emotions expressed in these dance dramas possess a deeply humanistic aspect. Today, dance dramas such as Chitrangada, Chandalika,

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and Shyama continue to be equally admired and performed on the Bengali stage. The artists of the new generation have presented Rabindra Nritya before audiences by adorning it with new colors and forms, thereby winning their hearts. The influence of Rabindranath Tagore on education is immense. Today, Rabindra Nritya is practiced at Rabindra Bharati University and Visva-Bharati University and performed at various cultural festivals. People from various parts of the world assembled to witness the celebration of the Basant Utsav at Visva-Bharati University. Apart from India, the practice of Rabindra Nritya is highly popular in many countries worldwide, particularly in Bangladesh, many European countries, and the United States and Japan, where there are significant Bengali communities. The practice and promotion of Rabindra Nritya have developed extensively.

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