



Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the role of mudras in Indian classical dance and sculpture. How do these symbolic hand gestures convey meaning across different art forms? **(150 words)**

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Approach

- Introduce the answer by defining mudras
- Delve into the role of Mudras in Indian Classical Dance and Indian Sculpture
- Discuss its contemporary relevance
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

Mudras, symbolic hand gestures, serve as a fundamental element in **Indian classical dance and sculpture**, conveying a wide range of **emotions, characters, and narratives**.

- The origins of mudras can be traced back to ancient Indian texts like the **Natyashastra**, a treatise on the performing arts written by **Bharata Muni**.

Body

Mudras in Indian Classical Dance:

Mudras are integral to classical dance forms like **Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi, and Kuchipudi**. They serve multiple purposes:

- **Portray Characters:** In Bharatanatyam, the **Krishna mudra (flute-playing gesture)** instantly identifies the character of Lord Krishna in mythological narratives.
- **Represent Objects:** The **Padma mudra represents a lotus**, often used in dances depicting nature or divine beings.
- **Depict Actions:** In Kathak, the **Tarjani mudra (pointing finger)** is used to show threatening or commanding actions.
- **Express Emotions:** The **Karuna mudra**, depicting compassion, is frequently employed in Odissi to portray nurturing characters like mothers or goddesses.
 - **Tribhanga Mudra**, involves a three-bend posture, creating a sense of **grace and elegance**.
- **Transcending Language Barriers:** Mudras serve as a universal language, transcending linguistic barriers.
 - Dancers can use stories to audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds. For example, **Pataka Mudra**, with all fingers extended, **represents a flag or banner**, often used to symbolize victory or celebration and **Anjali Mudra**, with palms joined together, conveys respect and reverence.

Mudras in Indian Sculpture:

Sculptural mudras identify deities, convey attributes, and narrate stories:

- **Buddha Statues:** The **Bhumisparsha mudra (touching the earth)** is seen in sculptures of Buddha at the moment of enlightenment, such as those at Sarnath.
- **Hindu Deities:** The famous **Nataraja bronze sculpture of Shiva** as the Lord of Dance combines multiple mudras, including the Damaru mudra (drum-holding) symbolizing creation.
- **Narrative Scenes:** Temple reliefs, like those at **Khajuraho**, use mudras to depict complex mythological stories without words.

Contemporary Relevance:

- **Modern Dance:** Choreographer Chandralekha famously incorporated traditional mudras into her contemporary work "**Sharira**," blending classical and modern forms.
- **Health Practices:** The **Gyan mudra (thumb and index finger touching)** is widely used in yoga and meditation for its purported concentration-enhancing effects.

Conclusion

Mudras are a vital component of Indian classical dance and sculpture, serving as a **powerful language for conveying meaning and emotion**. Their historical origins, their role in storytelling, and their cross-cultural influence demonstrate their enduring significance as a form of artistic expression.

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