# Experience Bharatnatyam through the Lens of Connected Devices

## Vandana Bharadwaj

Faculty, Bhanumati Nrityakala Mandiram, Bengaluru.

## ABSTRACT:

The COVID-19 pandemic has compelled the performing arts community to explore virtual platforms as a means of continuing their artistic practices. Bharatanatyam, a classical Indian dance form, has also witnessed a shift towards virtual training and performance. The purpose of this abstract is to share my experience in training and performing Bharatanatyam on a virtual platform and discuss the benefits and drawbacks. Alongside I have made an effort to list down few strategies to mitigate the technological drawback to safeguard Bharatnatyam's authenticity and cultural heritage.

## KEYWORDS:

Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), High Definition (HD), Ultra High Definition (UHD), 4096 x 4096 Resolution (4K), Three Dimension (3D)

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

## Introduction

Digital technology in a broad term covers a variety of technologies, including smartphones, computers, tablets, internet and social media. Digital Technologies have profound impact on human life, transforming various accepts of our life. It has changed the way we communicate, learn, work, shop, socialize and interact with modern world.

In recent years the influence of Digital technologies has transformed Bharatanatyam, most notably:

» **Accessibility:** Digital technology has made Bharatanatyam more accessible to a wider audience. Video recordings of Bharatanatyam performances can be watched online, and software can be used to learn the dance form from home. This has made it possible for people all over the world to learn and appreciate Bharatanatyam.

» **Innovation:** Digital technology is also being used to innovate Bharatanatyam. For example, dancers are using virtual reality to create new performance spaces, and software is being used to create new choreography.

» **Preservation:** Digital technology is being used to preserve Bharatanatyam for future generations. Video recordings of performances can be archived, and software can be used to create digital copies of manuscripts and other artifacts.

As digital technology continues to influence Bharatnatyam in a positive manner, it also has some negative effects that we need to be aware of in order to protect the art form's originality and cultural heritage. This journal's objective is to provide an overview of current & future technologies, their application in the art form. Alongside, efforts have been made to bring awareness on the detrimental effects of digital technology in Bharatnatyam performance & teaching.

## A glimpse of current & future Technologies

Bharatnatyam, as we all know, one of the oldest classical dance forms with rich tradition, has stood the test of time, enchanting audiences with its intricate movements, expressive storytelling and rhythmic grace. One key factor which has made Bharatnatyam immortal is its ability to evolve and embrace changes. However, in today's digital age, Bharatnatyam is experiencing a remarkable transformation, as new technologies are being seamlessly integrated into its practice and performance. Here are some of the cutting-edge technologies which are shaping the world of Bharatnatyam.

## Social media platform:

Social media is an open platform to share information and shape public opinion. They are a group of internet-based applications built on the ideological and technological foundations that allow the creation and exchange of user-created ideas. Platform such as You-Tube, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Google+ allow dancers to share their performances with global audience. This has helped to make Bharatanatyam more accessible, popular and creates a sense of community among Bharatanatyam dancers & enthusiasts. You-Tube Shorts, Instagram Reels and TikTok facilitate Bharatnatyam artist to produce short concise pieces and choreographies which attracts wider audience and aspirants among social media viewers. These platform in-turn facilitate in rise of internet celebrities and social media influencers who has more say in the community than traditional celebrities.

Social media platform is also used to raise funds & sponsor-ship for Bharatanatyam organizations and welfare of artists. For in-stance, Facebook & Instagram facilitates in setting up crowdfunding campaigns, or attract sponsorship from organizations interested in supporting cultural arts.

## Camera & Multimedia Technologies:

New generation camera technologies and multimedia plat-forms & software have greatly enhanced & enriched the viewing experience. Modern cameras can capture performances in high resolution and clarity. Powered by UHD & 4K technologies gives the viewers unique experience to enjoy and appreciate every intri-cate movement, facial expression, and costume details. 360-degree panoramic gimbals help capturing 360-degree video which offer a unique perspective of Bharatnatyam. This gives rise to new cho-reographic techniques. Latest multimedia technologies also enable integration of digital storytelling element into Bharatnatyam perfor-mances thereby creates a memorable experience.

## Augmented Reality (AR) & Virtual Reality (VR):

Augmented reality is an interactive experience that enhanc-

es the real world with computer-generated perceptual information. Augmented reality (AR) involves overlaying visual, auditory, or other sensory information onto the real world to enhance one's experience. Augmented Reality is a cutting-edge technology that promises quite a immersing experience for Bharatnatyam enthusiast

» AR can allow viewers to visualize a Bharatnatyam performance in their favorite environment, for instance, a performance in Brihadeeswara Temple stage.

» AR can overlay informational graphics and translations during a performance for better understanding

» AR can be used to project digital costumes and sets onto the performer or the stage, adding a layer of creativity and versatility to Bharatnatyam

Virtual Reality (VR) is a simulated 3D environment that enables users to explore and interact with a virtual surrounding in a way that approximates reality. For example, VR can transport viewers to the historical and cultural contexts of Bharatnatyam performances. Users can explore the rich history, mythology, and stories behind the dance form. Teacher & Gurus can create virtual tutorials in VR guiding through steps. Although VR is in early stages of development, but its adoptions in Bharatnatyam is more likely.

**Collaboration & Global Reach:**

Bharatnatyam has always been an art of collaboration where the dancers, musician & other support professionals collaborate to create a successful performance. Covid-19 pandemic forced people to stay at home thereby bringing halt to the traditional performance, workshops and teaching. Collaboration was near impossible, quickly artist community turned to social media platform and opened the stage but were constrained with effective collaboration. It was the time when conferencing platforms like Zoom, MS Teams and Google Meet, powered with WebRTC, opened new ways to collaborate and more effectively. Now with these platform artists can collabo-

rate from anywhere in the world.

## Preserving Traditional amidst Digitization- Bharatnatyam Performance

In the previous section, we have seen how Bharatnatyam has significantly transformed by both present and emerging technologies. In this section we will discuss the benefits that digital technologies have brought specifically to Bharatnatyam performance and bring an insight on where to draw a line to preserve the cultural significance of the art form.

Bharatnatyam is a performing art, every dancer will be motivated to perform what they have learnt. Today's technologies provide numerous opportunities for the dancers to showcase their talents and skills via digital media platforms. Dancers frequently post brief videos on Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts and TikTok that showcase a snippet of a performance. While these platforms can be a powerful tool for promoting and sharing Bharatnatyam performances, there are some potential drawbacks to consider:

» **Loss of Context:** Bharatnatyam is a deeply traditional and culturally rich dance form with a long history. When snippets or short clips of performances are shared on social media, they may lack the context and depth that a live or full-length performance provides. Viewers might not fully appreciate the nuances and storytelling aspects of the dance.

» **Dilution & Fusion:** A significant number of Bharatnatyam posts, although appealing, may dilute the core principles of Bharatnatyam with excessive fusion or incorporation of unrelated dance forms or styles.

» **False popularity:** The pursuit of social media likes, shares, and views on social media can sometimes lead to a focus on commercialization rather than the art itself. Dancers may prioritize producing content that is popular on social media platforms, thereby jeopardizing the art form's legitimacy.

» **Cultural Appropriation:** On social media, there is a risk of cultural appropriation, where individuals from outside the cultural background of Bharatnatyam may misunderstand or misrepresent the dance form, diluting its authenticity.

» **Pressure of Conform:** The desire for popularity and viral content may pressure dancers to conform to trends and expectations set by social media platforms, potentially leading to a loss of individuality and artistic expression.

To mitigate these drawbacks, it's essential for Bharatnatyam artists, enthusiasts and communities to use social media thoughtfully and in a way that preserves the originality and cultural richness of the dance form. Here are some of the strategies to help

» **Educate Dancer:** Ensure that dancers have a deep understanding of the art form's history, techniques, and cultural significance. Knowledgeable artists are less likely to engage in activities that compromise authenticity.

» **Promote Genuineness:** Encourage dancers to showcase their genuine skills and knowledge on social media. Emphasize the importance of staying true to the traditional style and principles of Bharatnatyam.

» **Avoid Excessive popularity:** Dancers should be warned about the false fame arise due to social media likes and from valuing fame and money before the art itself. Help them to keep in mind their basic dedication to the art form and its traditions.

» **Educate the Viewers:** Take steps to ensure the audience knows what real Bharatnatyam looks like. Share educational content that explains the nuances and complexities of the dance.

» **Review and Mentorship:** Create a mentorship and peer review system for the Bharatnatyam community. Dancers can maintain authenticity by asking seasoned mentors for advice and critique.

» **Community Accountability:** Develop a sense of civic responsibility among Bharatnatyam performers and admirers. Encourage people to report and deal with incidents of cultural appropriation or misleading depiction.

» **Transparency:** When sharing content online, ensure proper attribution. Dancers should credit gurus, musicians, and collaborators as appropriate, respecting the contributions of others to their performances.

Technology came in as a boon in the challenging times and provided numerous ways to online performances, specifically during the Covid times. Now online performances have become an numero uno for artist to showcase their performances. However they pose some challenges and impediments to fully enjoying Bharatnatyam performance.

» **Technical issue:** Poor internet access, server overloads, and software faults can all disrupt the flow of an online performance, resulting in pauses, freezes, or even entire stoppages.

» **Limited Audience Contact:** Because online platforms frequently have limited options for audience contact, it can be difficult for performers to measure crowd reactions or obtain instant feedback.

» **Limited Stage Presence:** Because online performances lack the physical presence and intensity that a live stage delivers, performers may struggle to transmit their charisma and engage the audience.

» **Distractions & Multitasking:** Viewers at home may be more susceptible to distractions such as notifications, domestic work, or other online activity that can divert their focus away from the performance.

» **Spatial Elements:** Dancers and performers may find it difficult to communicate spatial components such as distance, proximity, and movement through a screen.

Although emerging technologies (AR & VR) promise novel experiences, there is no substitute for a live stage performance. Bharatnatyam performers, enthusiasts, and communities should promote more live stage performances. Live casting a program would be a better adoption for a global reach.

## Preserving Traditional amidst Digitization- Bharatnatyam Training

The importance of a strong Guru Shishya Parampara, which offers a comprehensive approach to education and mentorship, is one of the fundamental tenets of learning Bharatnatyam. Digital technologies provide various online means through which dancers can learn Bharatnatyam regardless of geographical limitations. Guru Shishya Parampara has been affected by this, both favourably and unfavorably.

Virtual learning has enabled Guru Shishya Parampara to reach a global audience making it more accessible to individuals who may not have access to traditional gurus and thus democratizing the learning. The technologies have greatly helped in documenting the teaching ensuring the knowledge is not lost. It also facilitates in collaborative learning thereby enriching the understanding of art form.

On an unfavorable note, virtual learning lacks the personal connection and physical presence that are the integral part of Guru Shishya Parampara. Some of the nuances of the art form, such as hand placements and expressions, may not be as effectively conveyed online. While it can document lessons, it may not fully capture the oral tradition of imparting knowledge.

A careful balance must be struck between utilizing modern tools and preserving the cultural authenticity of the art form in order to preserve the Guru Shishya Parampara while incorporating digitization and technology. Following are methods to strike this balance

» **Blend Online and Traditional learning:** Incorporate both online learning and conventional, in-person instruction. While on-

line sessions can support theory, practice, and video feedback, in-person lessons can concentrate on physical corrections, nuanced expressions, and the relationship between the guru and the student.

» **Oral Tradition:** Continue to prioritize the oral transmission of knowledge. While digitization can aid in documentation, oral instruction is essential for conveying the nuances of pronunciation & intonation.

» **Balance technology:** Encourage students to balance the use of technology with traditional practice. While online resources are valuable, ensure that students engage in regular in-person practice to refine their skills

» **Cultivate learning:** Create a culture of lifelong learning among students by encouraging them to study about both traditional and modern aspect of Bharatnatyam as they continue to grow as an artist.

By incorporating the techniques, Bharatnatyam teachers can harness the benefits of digitization and technology to enhance their teaching while preserving the historic values, authenticity, and cultural diversity of this classical Indian dance form.

## Conclusion

Innovation of technology is inevitable. Embracing technology while respecting tradition requires a harmonious balance. As Dr APJ Abdul Kalam said, "As a young citizen of India, armed with technology and love for my nation, I realise, a small aim is a crime" Preserving the soul of Bharatanatyam while exploring innovation ensures endurance of its timeless charm. The onus in on to every dancer, gurus and enthusiasts' responsibility to identify and analyze the merits and limitations of technology and use them appropriately to preserve the authenticity and tradition of Bharatanatyam

## References:

1.    Swetha Sundaran Mangalath. (Sep 2020). Performance Goes Online: Usage of Social Media Platforms by Classical Dance Practitioners of Kerala at the Time of Covid-19 Pandemic. International Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences Studies.

2.    Lianhuli Li. Research on Dance Motion Capture Technology for Visualization Requirements.