

# Art-Forms and Dance-Forms: Insights on Their Meaning, Formation and Classification

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## ABSTRACT

This article reveals the deeper meaning of certain terms that otherwise have a common and colloquial usage among artists. The terms elaborated in this article are art, art-form, dance and dance-form. The article begins with an explanation on the relationships that exist between art and its expression, art and art-forms, art-forms and artists. Based on this explanation, the article proceeds to provide some insights on the birth and formation of art-forms. It then analyses the conventional classification of art-forms followed by an analysis of contribution of science and technology to formation of newer art-forms and their changing relationship with the society. The article then applies these viewpoints to further analyse the relationship between dance and dance-forms, the birth, formation and classification of dance-forms, and their relationship with the society. Lastly, with a comparison of classical Ballet and classical Kathak, the article reveals how every well-formed dance-form has a unique identity and an established relationship with the society.

**Keywords:** Art, Art Forms, Dance, Dance Forms, Technology

## Introduction:

The word 'form' used to fascinate me often. It is because, while studying dance, I used to come across two terms quite frequently, namely art-form and dance-form. What is meant by this form? How is a form formed? I have been wondering ever since. A form is a label given to that which is formed. Usually it implies a completion. It indicates that something has undergone a process of formation and when the end-product is ready, it is called a form. How to then contextualise this meaning of form in relation to art and dance? This has been my query for many years. This article shares some insights on the meaning, formation and classification of art-forms followed by that of dance-forms.

## The Meaning of Art and Art-Forms:

The word art implies expression of something. That which is ultimately brought out as an expression is colloquially called as art. Many times we feel something. Or we imagine

something. At times we also get inspired by a novel thought or we get moved by emotion. And then we want to express that experience of ours. In that state of our being, the art lies in the way, the manner, or the fashion in which that feeling, imagination, inspiration, or experience is expressed. Thus in relation to expression, the word art can be understood in two ways. One, art is the ultimate expression or end-product or that which is finally expressed as an art-work. And two, the manner in which that expression is expressed – the process, the skill. In other words, these two aspects are the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of an expression. Moreover, what is expressed ultimately becomes an art only if how it is expressed is also made to be an art. Thus the two aspects of the meaning of art are interlinked and are complementary to each other.

In this context, art needs a ‘medium’ through which it can be expressed. Sound works as a medium for the art of singing. So do colours for painting. Similarly for the art of dancing, movements work as a medium. Such mediums of expression decide the ‘form’ in which one’s feeling, imagination, or inspiration would be expressed. Music, painting, and dance thus become some of such well-known art-forms. Had there been no variety in these mediums of expression, there would not be found any variety of art-forms. In other words, if we look at what exists behind these mediums, we would find that, what we call as ‘art’ is only ‘one’. All art-forms are then born from this single essence called as art. However, they differ from each other depending upon their medium of expression.

The medium of expression decides the skill or the faculty of expression that would be used by an artist. An artist is one who works for expressing the art. Consequently he/she needs to possess the corresponding bodily efficiency that would provide him/her the ability to express his/her feeling. If the medium of expression is sound, the artist may use voice and express art in the form of music. Such an artist is then called as a singer. Instead, for the same medium of sound, another artist may use palms and fingers to operate a musical instrument. The artist is then known as an instrumentalist. Thus according to the art-form one chooses, the artist develops certain bodily efficiencies. For a singer it is voice whereas for an instrumentalist it is palms or fingers. Such physical-artistic skills which a person develops in order to become an artist can be called as the ‘instruments’ of expression of art. For example, in dance art-form, the medium of expression being movement, the dancer’s body acts as the instrument. Moreover, an art-form and its medium of expression exist objectively and impersonally, whereas the corresponding physical instruments that are utilised to express the art remain subjective to every artist. Hence the expression of the same art-form – both, in its process and manner of expressing as well as in its end-product, differs from artist to artist. That is how, for example, a song sung by one singer can appeal differently to the listeners, than the same song sung by another singer. Similarly, the same theme, when it is choreographed and performed by different theatre-artists, has differing degrees of success and appeal. In this way, this dynamic relation between art, art-form and artist holds true with all art-forms across the world and all artists across Time.

In short, there exists essentially only one art. Depending upon the mediums and instruments chosen for expression, this essential art gets moulded into various forms. These art-forms further get moulded into numerous distinct expressions according to the artists who work with those art-forms.

## **Formation of Art-Forms:**

### **Birth:**

Since ancient times, the Indian heritage has been rich in various art-forms that include not only *lalit kala* (fine arts and performing arts), but also *upayogi kala* such as carpentry, weaving, jewellery-making, garland-making or flower-arrangement, and so on. Today we see all these art-forms as a part of the Indian culture. However there must have been some point in history when such art-forms were not functional in the society. For example, the art of jewellery-making could come into existence only after man could develop tools that could mould and give a variety of shapes to metals. Similarly, fine art of painting could come into existence only after man could discover the use of colours. In other words, such art-forms were artistic inventions of those times before they could amalgamate into a society's culture.

This shows that art-forms are born, and what lies behind their birth is man's faculty of creativity. This creativity is a quality that has been inherent to the nature of man. If we go backward in time, seeking the roots of this human creativity, we would perhaps reach the same point when manhood evolved from animal-hood. All that is invented by man is nothing but the product of this creativity. This includes performing arts such as singing, drama and dancing too. Although by their origin they are very intimate to human behaviour and nature, they were born as art-forms along with the birth of creativity in man. Thus all the numerous art-forms that we see in the world today are born as a result of this human creativity.

### **Development:**

As seen above, the birth of an art-form is an artistic invention. Once invented and born, an art-form grows further in terms of its content. As time passes, numerous artists explore the art-form. They discover newer manners of expression and also create newer artistic products that emerge from their own artistic inspirations. In this way, the content or the repertoire of that art-form grows in terms of both quantity as well as quality. Slowly the art-form develops and thereby gets a sufficient establishment and acceptance among people. Consequently it becomes an intimate part of the society's culture. This shows that formation of an art-form is not an event but a process. This process is gradual and takes place with the help of more than one generation of artists.

Moreover, an art-form bears a relationship not only with artists who create and develop it but also with the rest of the society that receives it. This relationship with the society is seen vividly in the way art-forms are categorised conventionally. As mentioned earlier, the two categories are namely *lalit kala* and *upayogi kala*. They show two different types of relationships that an art-form can have with the rest of the society.

## **Relationship of Art-Forms with Society:**

### ***Upayaogi Kala:***

The term *upayogi kala* literally means art-forms that have a utility (which means *upayog* in Sanskrit). Take the case of a goldsmith who skilfully casts gold and creates various designs of jewellery. It is an art, more precisely, an art-form. The medium of expression is the material, gold. The instruments of expression are the goldsmith's skilful fingers that are capable of moulding gold into various patterns and designs. For using these 'medium' and 'instrument' of expression, what works is the goldsmith's creativity, power to imagine various designs of jewels and ability to visualise beauty in the form of a necklace or a bangle and so on. This art-form comes under the category of *upayogi kala* because it has a direct application or a utility in the society. The utility in this case is that the jewels are ultimately selected, bought, and worn by people. Moreover, gold has a monetary value in the society and wearing jewellery is a part of a society's culture. Thus, the relationship that this art-form establishes with the society is because of its utility in the society. Carpentry, tailoring, fashion-designing, flower-arrangement or garland-making are some more of such art-forms that are by their nature *upayogi* or utility-based. They were born for the sake of serving certain requirements of the society. After birth, their growth and survival too depend upon their utility or consumption by the society. Hence for the artists of these art-forms, it becomes almost obligatory that they combine their creative inspiration and artistic expression with the requirements of the society and fulfil its consumers' demands.

### **Lalit Kala:**

*Lalit kala* on the other hand have a different, subtler kind of a relationship with the society. The word *lalit* in Sanskrit means that which is playful, loving and graceful or soft. Thus *lalit kala* or fine arts are those which are pleasing and beautiful. Indian tradition has recognised five forms of *lalit kala*. They are:

1. *Sthapatya-kala* (Architecture)
2. *Murti-kala* (Sculpture)
3. *Chitra-kala* (Drawing and Painting)
4. *Kavya-kala* (Poetry)
5. *Sangeet-kala* which is unison of the three performing art-forms namely music, dance and drama.

These art-forms are commonly explained as those which are non-utilitarian, or those which do not provide to the society any utilisable product as such. It is true that, unlike *upayogi kala*, *lalit kala* are not driven by any necessities or requirements of the society. However, they provide to society something that is different than its materialistic needs. For example music creates joy among its listeners, dance makes its audience experience what is beauty, folk dances build harmony in the social life of people, and so on. Thus what fine arts and performing arts give to society, such as joy, beauty, and harmony, is something subtler because it is non-materialistic. Hence the relationship of these art-forms with the society cannot be measured or quantified in the same way as that of *upayogi kala*. The artists who pursue these art-forms need not be bound by the requirements and demands of the society. Unlike *upayogi kala*, the nature of *lalit kala* is such that the artists can have more freedom to express their art, without feeling any

obligation towards the society for acceptance, partial acceptance or a complete non-acceptance of their art by the society.

### **The Changing Relationship between *Lalit Kala* and Society:**

The absolutely non-utilitarian, non-consumerist way of relationship between *lalit kala* and the society is visible in the art-works of ancient India. The architecture of South Indian temples, sculptures carved in stone and painted in the caves of Ajanta-Ellora, the devotional poetry created by saints like Mira and Kabir are only few of such countless examples. Such art-works show that the sole and essential purpose of *lalit kala* is nothing but artistic expression itself. This is starkly opposite to the aim and purpose of *upayogi kala*. However, today *lalit kala* have found concrete ‘utilities’ or domains of application in the society. For example, the originally fine-art-form of architecture (*sthapatya-kala*) has become a professional career for building and decorating residential and commercial complexes for people. The architects today are known more as professionals than as artists. Exhibitions are held where sculptures and paintings are displayed and sold. Drawing-experts who can also use computer-software are hired by the animation industry. Poets are hired for writing lyrics for the songs for Bollywood cinemas. So too are composers, singers, dancers, choreographers, dialogue-writers and actors. Such artists are recognised by their awards and accolades. Additionally, for each of the three branches of performing arts, the delivery of theatrical performances has become their professional service to the society. To add further, CDs and DVDs of various pieces of music, dance and drama find a substantial market today. Thus in the modern world, *lalit kala* have become more utility-based in their purpose and relationship with the society, than before.

### ***Lalit Kala*, Technology and Formation of New Art-Forms:**

One main factor that has brought transformation in the realm of fine-arts in the modern world is the birth and development of science and technology. In some cases the association of technology with certain fine-art-forms has become inseparable. For example for making animation movies the techno-artistic coupling of the computer technology with the art of drawing and painting is inseparable.

Technology has also given rise to altogether new art-forms. One such art-form is photography. The history of photography shows that its birth in the 19th century was a techno-artistic invention of those times. It has taken close to two centuries for the art to develop from the stage of chemical photography to today’s digital photography. Today photography is considered to be a well-formed art-form. Its medium of expression is similar to that of the art of drawing and painting. However for expressing this art, the photographer depends upon the camera-technology. Thus the camera becomes an indispensable instrument of expression. A photographer’s understanding and intelligence of expressing beauty, his creativity and photographic skills thus become not merely artistic, but rather techno-artistic. Photography has in turn given rise to yet another art-form that is cinematography. It has brought along with it few more techno-artistic domains such as editing, art-direction, sound-engineering and so on.

In terms of their relationship with the society, these art-forms can neither be classified wholly as *upayogi kala* nor wholly as *lalit kala*. Rather as we see them today, they are the derivatives of both, with the hand of technology as a connecting link. For example, photography in its essence is a derivation from the fine art of drawing and painting and yet at the same time it is a utility-based professional career. For example, people go to studios and get them photographed, or they hire photographers for cultural ceremonies, and so on. Similarly, cinematography in its essence is a derivation from *sangeet kala* (unison of drama, music and dance), and yet while a film is in the process of getting created, it cannot avoid taking care of its prospects in the commercial consumer market. Hence one may say that such art-forms are both *lalit* as well as *upayogi*. Rather the collaboration of art and technology has become so strong that they comprise a third category of art-forms and can be called as 'technological art-forms'.

### **Dance and Dance-Forms:**

As mentioned earlier, art is an end product as well as the process. It is 'that' which is finally expressed as well as the 'way' it is expressed. The same is the case with dance. 'What' is ultimately expressed in terms of bodily movements is called as dance, as well as, the 'process' and the 'manner' in which it is expressed is also called as dance. The former meaning of dance indicates more precisely a dance-item or a dance-production. However, it is the latter meaning of dance that has gradually given birth to various dance-forms. In other words, various artistic processes by which dance-items get created by artists and the variety of manners in which those dance-items are danced have contributed to formation of several dance-forms.

Today we find established in the world many distinct dance-forms. They are recognised by names such as Ballet, Kathak, Hip-hop, Bhutoh, and so on. They are also recognised by their nature such as classical, folk, modern and post-modern dance-forms. Lastly they are also recognised by nation or community where they originated, such as Latin American, African, Australian and Indian dance-forms. Thus a dance-form is an entity which is usually distinguished from others on the basis of certain parameters. Some of such parameters are its nature or its association with a nation or a community. Such parameters give general information about a dance-form. However the term dance-form has a meaning deeper than a classification like this.

At a deeper level, a dance-form is that entity of which the very manner of dancing is distinct than the others. This manner can be described in terms of certain features that are vividly seen as they are intrinsic to that manner of dancing.

For example Kathak is a classical dance-form that was born and developed in India. It imbibes traits that come from Indian culture. Similarly Ballet is also a classical dance-form that originated in Italy and later developed in France and Russia. Although both Kathak and Ballet are classical by their nature, the manners in which they both are danced are totally distinct. One can easily make out the difference between the two by merely watching and comparing the respective dance-items. For example, classical Ballet involves pointed toes (*pointes*) on which the whole body is balanced, whereas in Kathak feet are put flat on the ground and are tapped to create melodious sounds. Ballet has a distinct feature of taking spins (*pirouettes*). Kathak is also known for its high-speed spins,

but they are taken in a manner that is totally different than the Ballet-pirouettes. In this way, every dance-form has its own distinct imagery of how it would look and feel in space and time.

Additionally, a well-formed dance-form has a certain structure or a framework that describes the manner of its performance. For example, classical Ballet is performed as a group dance where different dancers play different roles or characters to build a story. This story is performed as a dance-drama where various scenes unfold one after the other. On the other hand, Kathak being traditionally a solo dance-art, its story-telling aspect is taken care of by a single dancer who performs all the roles or characters involved in the story. Here the story is presented mainly with the help of *abhinaya* that involves facial expressions and meaningful hand-gestures. Unlike classical Ballet, story-telling is only one aspect of dancing classical Kathak as it also has other manners for depicting *abhinaya*. Moreover, a well-formed dance-form like Kathak has a unique feature of *taal-prastuti* that is not found in any other classical Indian dance-forms. A *taal-prastuti* is a systematic elaboration of a time-cycle of a chosen number of beats. This elaboration of a *taal* is full of various dance-numbers that have rhythmically complex musical syllables. It incorporates a detailed structure and a sequence of presenting various 'intra-forms' [i] of a *taal* in a Kathak performance. A complete Kathak performance has *taal-prastuti* as well as story-telling or *abhinaya*. This shows that a well-formed dance-form such as Kathak or Ballet has not only a special, unique manner of dancing but also its own distinct structure of performance. Such artistic aspects of a dance-form give every dance-form its own unique identity.

### **Conclusion:**

Based on the aforementioned analysis, this article can now be concluded as follows;

- There exists essentially only one art of which the various art-forms are a derivation. This essential single art is both the end-product of an artist's expression as well as the process and the manner of that expression.
- Various art-forms differ from each other based on 'medium of expression' and 'instruments of expression'. The artistic expression further changes its quality depending upon the artist's artistic inspiration and creativity.
- Art-forms are born during the course of human civilisation and their formation is a gradual process.
- Collaboration of art with scientific technology has given rise to newer art-forms such as photography and cinematography.
- 'Technological art-forms' is the third category found in the present scenario of artistic world, where the boundary of distinction between the conventional categories of art-forms (*upayogi kala* and *lalit kala*) is blurred.
- Dance is an art-form. The gradual process by which various dance-forms get created and developed includes various social, cultural, political and historical factors. However the most predominant factor which makes a dance-form unique and distinct from all other dance-forms is the creativity of the artists who work for developing it. In case of some dance-forms such as classical Kathak and Ballet, this

creative work of artists spans across many years, requiring the artistic effort of many generations of artists.

- Lastly, when a dance-form gets fully formed and also gets well-established in the society, it culminates into a unique identity of its own that enjoys a long-lasting relationship with the society.

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### **Endnotes:**

- i. The term 'intra-form' is used by Dr S K Saxena in his book *Swinging Syllables: Aesthetics of Kathak Dance*.

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