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Exploring Non-Anthropocentric Design Principles in Indian Classical Dance

Dr. Parul Purohit Vats^a, Simer Preet Sokhi^b

^aWorld University of Design

^bWorld University of Design

*simerpreet.sokhi@wud.ac.in

Abstract: Indian classical dance boasts of a rich and elaborate history, tracing its roots to ancient times. These dance forms are deeply entrenched in Indian culture, mythology, and spirituality, and have undergone significant changes over time while retaining their connection to nature and the environment. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in exploring non-anthropocentric design principles, which aim to prioritize the environment and nature in various fields, such as architecture, urban planning, and product design.

This research paper explores how the principles of Indian classical dance can offer valuable insights into non-anthropocentric design. The paper analyzes the key concepts of Indian classical dance, such as rasa, bhava, and tala, and demonstrates how they can be applied to design beyond the traditional anthropocentric approach. Specifically, the paper explores how these principles can be leveraged to design products, spaces, and experiences that are in harmony with nature and the environment.

Through a literature review and examination of existing case studies, the paper underscores the potential of Indian classical dance principles for non-anthropocentric design. It makes a compelling case for incorporating cultural and traditional values into contemporary design practices, and suggests a path forward for a more sustainable and holistic approach to design. Overall, this paper contributes to the emerging field of non-anthropocentric design and provides a new perspective on the role of Indian classical dance in design.

Keywords: Dance, Non-Anthropocentric, Indian Classical Dance, Performing Arts, Environment, Design Principles

1. Introduction

The conventional practice of design has traditionally been focused on satisfying human needs and desires through the creation of products, spaces, and experiences. However, this anthropocentric approach to design is no longer deemed sustainable as it does not consider the impact of design on the environment and non-human

entities (Rittel & Webber, 1972). Consequently, non-anthropocentric design has emerged as a new field, seeking to develop designs that are in harmony with nature. Indian classical dance is an intricate art form that has a rich cultural and historical significance in India. It has been influenced by various philosophical and spiritual traditions and is deeply interrelated to nature and the environment. The aim of this research paper is to investigate how the principles of Indian classical dance can provide valuable insights into the development of non-anthropocentric design principles.

Non-anthropocentric design is a relatively nascent field that is still evolving. However, its overarching objective is to create designs that consider the environment and are sustainable in the long term (Fry, 2009). The principles of Indian classical dance can be particularly valuable in this regard. The dance form is based on an understanding of the interconnectedness of all things, and its practitioners believe that every action has a ripple effect. Thus, designing with a non-anthropocentric approach involves considering not just the immediate impact of a design, but also its long-term effects on the environment and non-human entities.

Moreover, Indian classical dance emphasizes the significance of balance and harmony in both movement and life. This can be translated into design by developing products, spaces, and experiences that are aesthetically pleasing, functional, and sustainable. It also involves considering the impact of a design on the larger ecosystem and creating designs that promote biodiversity and protect natural resources (Fry, 2009).

2. Literature Review

The present literature review delves into the application of the principles of Indian classical dance to non-anthropocentric design. The three core principles of Indian classical dance under consideration here are *rasa*, *bhava*, and *tala*. *Rasa* denotes the emotional response that is elicited from the audience through the performance. *Bhava* refers to the portrayal of emotions through bodily movements, facial expressions, and gestures. *Tala* pertains to the rhythm and timing of the dance.

Furthermore, the review investigates the notion of non-anthropocentric design and its various proposed approaches. These include biocentric design, ecocentric design, and deep ecology design. Biocentric design emphasizes the inherent value of all living organisms and seeks to develop designs that are compatible with their existence. Ecocentric design recognizes that the environment is a complex and interconnected system and strives to design products and systems that function in harmony with nature. Deep ecology design is based on the premise that humans are an integral part of nature and that environmental problems cannot be resolved without considering their root causes.

The review further examines the potential of the principles of Indian classical dance in fostering non-anthropocentric design practices. The principles of *rasa*, *bhava*, and *tala* offer a unique perspective on how design can be in tune with nature, emphasizing balance and harmony with the environment. Incorporating these principles into non-anthropocentric design approaches could lead to the development of designs that are both aesthetically pleasing and ecologically sustainable. The integration of Indian classical dance principles into non-

anthropocentric design could contribute to the emerging field of sustainable design and encourage a more holistic approach towards design practices

3. Methodology

The present research paper follows a well-established methodology that encompasses two crucial steps: a literature review and an analysis of existing case studies. The literature review is a comprehensive search of various relevant sources, including articles, books, and other scholarly literature that pertain to Indian classical dance and non-anthropocentric design. The purpose of the literature review is to identify the core principles of Indian classical dance and understand how they can be applied to non-anthropocentric design. In this context, the literature review serves as a foundation for the subsequent analysis of existing case studies.

The analysis of existing case studies is the second part of the methodology employed in this research paper. It involves examining how the principles of Indian classical dance have been applied to non-anthropocentric design in different contexts. The analysis will identify the key design principles derived from Indian classical dance and their practical applications in non-anthropocentric design. The case studies are an essential source of information for understanding the potential of Indian classical dance principles in non-anthropocentric design.

Together, the literature review and analysis of existing case studies provide a comprehensive and insightful understanding of the potential for Indian classical dance to contribute to non-anthropocentric design. This methodology will enable the identification of opportunities for designers to incorporate the principles of Indian classical dance into their design practices, resulting in more sustainable and holistic design solutions.

4. Principles of Indian Classical Dance

Indian classical dance is an art form of great cultural significance that has been passed down through generations in India. Its highly structured movements and expressive gestures convey deep emotional and aesthetic content, making its principles essential for understanding its artistic and cultural significance (Soneji, 2012). These principles have the potential to be applied to various other fields, including non-anthropocentric design.

The three key principles of Indian classical dance are *rasa*, *bhava*, and *tala*. *Rasa* evokes an aesthetic emotion during a performance, ranging from love, joy, and peace to anger, fear, and sadness (Viswanathan, 1984). *Bhava* involves expressing these emotions through facial expressions, body movements, and gestures, which is crucial to the success of any Indian classical dance performance (Khokar, 1984). *Tala* refers to the rhythm and timing of the dance, which helps accentuate the emotional content of the performance (Nor & Stepputat, 2016).

The rich emotional and aesthetic content of Indian classical dance has the potential to be applied to non-anthropocentric design principles, which aims to consider the

needs and perspectives of non-human beings. By understanding the emotional and aesthetic content of Indian classical dance, designers can create products and systems that evoke similar emotions in non-human beings.

The application of Indian classical dance principles to non-anthropocentric design could help create a more sustainable and equitable world. Biocentric design, an approach that emphasizes designing products and systems that are compatible with the needs of living beings, could benefit from the principles of Indian classical dance. By creating products and systems that evoke emotions in living beings, designers can promote their well-being and foster a more harmonious relationship between humans and the environment.

5. Non-Anthropocentric Design Principles

Non-anthropocentric design principles have been increasingly recognized as a way to promote more inclusive and holistic design practices that consider the needs and desires of non-human beings (Papanek, 1985). Within this field, three approaches have emerged: biocentric design, ecocentric design, and deep ecology design. Biocentric design recognizes the inherent value of individual organisms and emphasizes the importance of their inclusion in the design process. This approach acknowledges that all living beings possess intrinsic worth and should be treated with respect. Incorporating Indian classical dance into biocentric design involves exploring the emotional and aesthetic content of the dance and considering how it may be used to evoke similar emotions in non-human beings.

Ecocentric design takes a more comprehensive approach by considering the needs and desires of entire ecosystems. This approach acknowledges the interconnectedness of all living beings and recognizes that the health of an ecosystem depends on the health of its individual components. Applying ecocentric design principles to Indian classical dance involves exploring how the emotional and aesthetic content of the dance may be used to evoke a sense of balance and interconnectedness in non-human ecosystems.

Deep ecology design takes an even more expansive approach by considering the spiritual and philosophical dimensions of our relationship with the natural world (Capra, 2014). This approach recognizes that humans are an integral part of nature and not separate from it. Applying deep ecology design principles to Indian classical dance involves exploring how the emotional and aesthetic content of the dance may be used to promote a sense of interconnectedness and reverence for all living beings.

6. Indian Classical Dance and Non-Anthropocentric Design

6.1 Nature as a source of Inspiration

One of the fundamental principles of non-anthropocentric design in Indian classical dance is the incorporation of nature as a source of inspiration. The rich and diverse

natural world of India has played a significant role in shaping the art form, and many of the dance movements are inspired by elements of nature such as animals, plants, and the elements. The peacock, for example, is a common motif in Indian classical dance, with its majestic and graceful movements being emulated by dancers. Similarly, the lotus flower, which is widely regarded as a symbol of purity and spiritual awakening in Indian culture, is often incorporated into the dance, with dancers emulating its blooming process through their movements (Khokar, 1984). Additionally, the movements of the ocean waves, the gentle swaying of trees, and the flight of birds are also commonly used as inspirations for the dance movements (Sax, 2002).

The use of nature as a source of inspiration in Indian classical dance reflects the deep reverence that Indian culture has for the natural world. This reverence is rooted in the belief that all living beings are interconnected, and that humans are merely a part of the broader ecological system (Sax, 2002). Therefore, the incorporation of elements from nature into the dance is not just an aesthetic choice but also a reflection of the values and beliefs of the culture.

Moreover, the use of nature as a source of inspiration in Indian classical dance has implications for non-anthropocentric design principles. By drawing inspiration from nature, designers can create products and systems that reflect the natural world's complexity and diversity (Fry, 2009). This approach recognizes the importance of nature in shaping our world and encourages designers to consider how their creations can fit into the broader ecological system.

Nature is a critical source of inspiration in Indian classical dance, and its incorporation reflects the deep connection between Indian culture and the natural world. By drawing inspiration from nature, Indian classical dance highlights the beauty and complexity of the natural world, and its principles can be applied to non-anthropocentric design principles to create products and systems that are more in harmony with the environment.

6.2 Incorporating Sacred Symbols and Myths

Indian classical dance is steeped in mythology and symbolism, and one important non-anthropocentric design principle is the incorporation of these elements into performances. Mythological stories and symbols are an integral part of Indian culture, and they often feature gods and goddesses associated with nature and the environment (Kothari, 2003). The use of sacred symbols and myths in Indian classical dance allows performers to pay homage to the divine and the natural world.

In Indian classical dance, these myths and symbols are incorporated into performances through a variety of means. For example, the peacock is often associated with the god Kartikeya, and its movements are incorporated into dances dedicated to this deity (Khokar, 1984). Similarly, the lotus flower, which is often associated with the goddess Lakshmi, is incorporated into many different dances, symbolizing purity and divinity (Kothari, 2003).

Other symbols and myths may also be incorporated into Indian classical dance, depending on the context and the particular deity being honored. For example, dances dedicated to the goddess Kali may incorporate movements and symbols associated with death and destruction, while dances dedicated to the god Shiva

may incorporate movements and symbols associated with creation and destruction (Kothari, 2003).

The use of sacred symbols and myths in Indian classical dance reflects the deep spiritual and cultural connections between humans and the natural world. By incorporating these elements into performances, dancers and choreographers are able to create a sense of reverence and awe for the divine and the natural world, while also connecting with audiences on a deeper, emotional level (Venkataramna & Pasricha, 2004).

Moreover, the incorporation of sacred symbols and myths into non-anthropocentric design could be a way of creating products and systems that are more inclusive of the natural world. By understanding the cultural and spiritual significance of these symbols and myths, designers may be able to create products and systems that are more respectful of the natural world and its inhabitants (Papanek, 1985).

The incorporation of sacred symbols and myths into Indian classical dance is an important non-anthropocentric design principle that reflects the deep spiritual and cultural connections between humans and the natural world. By understanding and incorporating these elements into performances and design, we may be able to create a more inclusive and respectful world for all living beings.

6.3 Celebrating Diversity and Inclusivity

Indian classical dance is a form of art that is deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of India. One of the key features of Indian classical dance is its celebration of diversity and inclusivity. The various forms of Indian classical dance incorporate movements and styles from different regions and cultures of India, which contributes to the richness and diversity of the dance form (Soneji, 2012).

For instance, Bharatanatyam is a popular form of Indian classical dance that originated in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The dance form is known for its intricate footwork, graceful hand gestures, and expressive facial expressions. It incorporates elements of both the Tamil culture and the broader Indian cultural traditions, including classical music, mythology, and literature (Soneji, 2012).

Similarly, Kathak is another popular form of Indian classical dance that has its roots in both Hindu and Muslim traditions. It incorporates elements of both cultures and is known for its fast footwork, spins, and intricate hand gestures. The dance form is also characterized by its use of storytelling to convey emotions and ideas (Massey & Massey, 1989).

The celebration of diversity and inclusivity in Indian classical dance reflects the belief that all living beings are interconnected and that diversity is a source of strength and beauty. It is also a reflection of the cultural and religious diversity that is inherent in Indian society (Soneji, 2012).

6.4 Incorporating Social and Political Commentary

To begin with, Indian classical dance is not only a form of artistic expression but also a means to convey messages and commentaries on various social and political

issues. Many contemporary Indian classical dancers have utilized this form of dance to bring awareness to social problems such as gender inequality, environmental degradation, and political corruption (Kothari, 2003).

For instance, Mallika Sarabhai, a renowned contemporary Indian classical dancer, has used her art to highlight issues such as domestic violence and the impact of globalization on traditional Indian culture. Through her performances, she raises awareness and sparks conversations about these pressing social issues (Grau, 2007). This use of Indian classical dance as a tool for social and political commentary demonstrates the belief that art can be a potent force for change and that all living beings have a role to play in shaping the world. It highlights the power of artistic expression to address social issues and advocate for a more inclusive and equitable society (Grau, 2007).

6.5 The Future of Dance: Expanding Beyond Human-Centric Design.

Dance, as an art form, can be used to challenge traditional notions of design by exploring new ways of moving and interacting with the environment. The use of technology in dance has allowed for the creation of new forms of expression that blur the boundaries between the human body and the digital world. Motion sensors and interactive projections have been used in contemporary dance styles to create dynamic and immersive performances that engage with the audience in new ways.

One example of this is the use of motion sensors in contemporary dance performances. Motion sensors are used to track the movement of the dancers, which is then translated into real-time interactive visual effects projected onto a screen or the stage. This creates a visual language that allows the dancers to express themselves in new ways and connect with the audience on a deeper level.

Expanding on the idea of dance beyond human-centric design, this approach emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings and seeks to explore new forms of movement and expression that incorporate the perspectives and experiences of non-human entities. By expanding the focus beyond the human body, dance can become a way of engaging with the environment and creating a more holistic and inclusive understanding of movement and expression (Kozel, 2010).

Through this approach, dance can challenge traditional hierarchies and power structures that place humans at the center of the world, and instead embrace the idea of a more collaborative and co-creative relationship between humans and other living beings. For example, dance performances may incorporate elements from nature, such as water, wind, or animals, to create a more immersive and participatory experience for both the dancers and the audience.

By exploring new ways of moving and interacting with the natural world and other non-human entities, dance can inspire new forms of creativity and innovation that are grounded in empathy, connection, and collaboration. This approach to dance also has the potential to inspire new forms of design that are more inclusive and sustainable, by foregrounding the interconnectedness of all things and the importance of empathy and compassion in human interactions with the natural world.

7. Conclusion

Exploring non-anthropocentric design principles in Indian classical dance reveals a rich and complex set of ideas and practices that challenge anthropocentric assumptions about the world. By foregrounding the non-human world in their artistic practice, Indian classical dancers offer alternative ways of engaging with the environment. The incorporation of social and political commentary in Indian classical dance also demonstrates the power of art to shape and transform the world around us. As the world grapples with pressing ecological concerns, designers are increasingly looking for ways to create sustainable and socially responsible designs. Indian classical dance offers a valuable model for such design practices, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all things and the importance of empathy and compassion in human relationships with the natural world. Further research is needed to fully explore the potential of Indian classical dance as a model for non-anthropocentric design in other cultural contexts. In sum, Indian classical dance provides a unique perspective on human-environmental interactions and offers a valuable model for non-anthropocentric design practices.

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About the Authors:

Author 1 Dr. Parul Purohit Vats, Dean School of Performing Arts, World University of Design. Dr. Vats is a skilled danseuse, choreographer, and educator with multiple qualifications, including a PhD in music and Grade 8 in Performance Arts from Trinity College London. She has taught at renowned institutions, designed curriculums, and conducted workshops for the British Council. Dr. Vats has performed on national and international stages and received awards such as the Yuva Puraskar, Veer Durga Das Matri Shakti Award, and Sur Sangam Excellence Award for Performing Arts. She is a registered member of the International Dance Council in Paris.

Author 2 Simer Preet Sokhi, Assistant Professor, School of Performing Arts, World University of Design. Simer Preet Sokhi is known for his extensive knowledge and expertise in Bharatanatyam & Kathak, as well as Ancient Indian History, Culture, and Archaeology. With a double Masters' degree in Performing Arts from Tamil University Tanjore and Ancient Indian History, Culture, and Archaeology from Panjab University Chandigarh, Simer is a UGC NET-qualified academician and a prominent figure in the performing arts community. Simer started his journey at the renowned Kalakshetra Foundation, where he honed his skills in Bharatanatyam and later got his degree in Kathak from Indira Kala Sangit Vishwavidyalaya. He combines his diverse academic knowledge to create a unique and holistic approach to his teaching methodology.

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