

Manipuri Dance - UPSC Art & Culture Notes

Indian classical dance forms are very important for the art and culture segment of the UPSC syllabus. Manipuri is an important classical dance of India. In this article, you will learn all about Manipuri, its central themes, features, etc. for the [IAS exam](#).

Manipuri Dance

Manipuri is an ancient classical dance form that originated in the northeastern state of Manipur in India.

- Its origins can be traced back to ancient times, even before recorded history began.
 - Lai Haraoba is the earliest form of dance in Manipur, and it forms the basis of all such dances.
 - Lai Haraoba is a festival still observed in the state.
 - It has its roots in Manipur's pre-Vaishnavite era.
 - Lai Haraoba's literal meaning - the merrymaking of the gods.
 - The chief performers are the priests and priestesses, known as maibas and maibis.
- Performed as a dance-drama, its central themes are the love stories of Krishna and Radha, although other themes are also showcased.
- Manipuri culture is a combination of both Indian and southeastern cultures and this is reflected in its dances as well.
- There are essentially two divisions in the classical Manipuri dance:
 - Jagoi: Predominant in Ras Leela, this stream represents the Lasya element described in Bharata's Natya Shastra. Here, the legs are generally bent and the knees are kept together. The feet movements are not as loud and pronounced as in the other classical dances of India.
 - Cholom: This represents the Tandava form of classical dance.
- The dance streams are more or less independent of each other, and an artist spends his or her life being proficient in one or the other.
- Chief instruments used are the drum and the flute.

Features of Manipuri that distinguish it from other classical dances

- It is more restrained compared to the other dances of India.
- The artist never establishes eye contact with the audience.
- The movements are continuous and circular, merging into one another.
- The hand gestures or mudras gel gently with the overall movements.
- The facial expressions are not over the top, but rather subdued.
- Even in the more vigorous form, that is, the Cholom, these features are maintained.
- The artist does not wear bells or anklets known as ghunghru, and this is in stark contrast with the other classical dances of India.

Themes in Manipuri Dance Forms

Most of the themes are influenced by the Vaishnava theme of Hinduism.

- There are also themes related to Shaivism, regional deities and Shaktism.
- In the Tandava style, Krishna, Shakti or Shiva are portrayed as warriors.
- In the Lasya style, the theme is mainly love stories of Radha - Krishna.

Three Styles of Manipuri Ras Leela

The three styles of Manipuri Ras Leela are described below:

1. Tal Rasak: Accompanied by clapping.
2. Danda Rasak: Drums are beaten with two sticks while the position of the dancers creates geometric patterns.
3. Mandal Rasak: The character of Krishna is at the centre whereas the Gopis surround him.

Varieties of Manipuri Dance Styles

1. Raas
2. Nata-Sankirtan
3. Pung Cholam (Dancers play the pung/drum while dancing)
4. Dhola Cholam
5. Kartal Cholam
6. Thang ta (martial art form)

Music and Instruments used in Manipuri

Nat: Manipuri classical singing style. It is characterized by a high-pitched open-throated singing with a peculiar kind of trills and modulations. Very different from the Hindustani and Carnatic styles.

Sankirtan: Congregational singing accompanied by dance.

Pung: Rhythm instrument - barrel drum

Kartal: Cymbals

Pena: String instrument

Manipuri Dance Costumes

The costumes worn by Manipuri dancers are described below.

- Female artists adorn a barrel-shaped drum-like long stiff skirt with decorative embellishments. Along with this, they wear a dark-coloured velvet blouse and a veil over the face.
- Male dancers wear dhoti, kurta, white turban, a folded shawl over the left shoulder and the drum strap over the right shoulder.
- The character of Lord Krishna is always in a yellow dhoti along with a dark velvet jacket and a crown of peacock feathers.

Famous Manipuri Dancers

Some famous Manipuri dancers are listed below:

- Yumlembam Gambhini Devi
- Guru Bipin Sinha
- Darshana Jhaveri
- Nirmala Mehta

