

# THE INTERRELATIONSHIP OF RASA, BHAVA, AND MUSIC IN KATHAK

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper explores the intricate aesthetic and structural synergy between Rasa (sentiment), Bhava (emotion), and Sangeet (music) within the context of Kathak, one of India's eight classical dance forms. Rooted in the ancient principles of the Natyashastra, Kathak serves as a dynamic canvas where the dancer's internal emotional state (Bhava) is distilled into a universal aesthetic experience (Rasa) for the spectator. The study investigates how music acts as the primary catalyst in this transformation. Unlike other dance forms where music may provide a rhythmic backdrop, in Kathak, the Laya (tempo) and Raga (melodic framework) are inextricably linked to the narrative and expressive elements. The research highlights the dual role of music:*

*Nritta (Pure Dance): Where the Tabla or Pakhawaj patterns mirror the footwork, creating a rhythmic Bhava of energy and precision.*

*Nritya (Expressive Dance): Where the melodic nuances of instruments like the Sarangi or Sitar, paired with Thumri or Dadra compositions, provide the emotional depth necessary for Abhinaya.*

*Furthermore, the paper examines the concept of Rasa-Nishpatti (the realization of Rasa), arguing that the dancer's ability to evoke specific Rasas—such as Shringara (love) or Bhakti (devotion)—is dependent on the "musicality" of their movement. By analyzing specific technical compositions and expressive sequences, this study concludes that Rasa, Bhava, and music do not function as isolated pillars but rather as a singular, cohesive ecosystem. The interrelationship is symbiotic: music provides the soul, Bhava provides the breath, and Kathak provides the physical form through which the ultimate aesthetic bliss is achieved.*

*Keywords: Kathak, Rasa Theory, Bhava, Indian Classical Music, Abhinaya, Taal, Raag, Aesthetic Experience.*

## Introduction

Kathak, a word derived from the Sanskrit Kathakar (storyteller), is a dance form that breathes life into the oral traditions of ancient India. While its technical virtuosity—characterized by lightning-fast footwork (Tatkar) and dizzying pirouettes (Chakkars) often captures the initial attention of the spectator, its true depth lies in the "Rasa-Bhava" theory. This paper examines how Kathak transcends physical movement to become a spiritual and emotional bridge, fueled by the indispensable engine of Indian Classical Music.

## The Theoretical Foundation - Rasa and Bhava

The aesthetic core of Kathak is rooted in Bharata Muni's Natyashastra. To understand the relationship with music, one must first distinguish between Bhava and Rasa.

### Bhava: The Seed of Expression

Bhava refers to the emotional state of the character or the dancer. It is the "becoming." In Kathak, the dancer uses Abhinaya (the art of expression) to manifest Bhavas. These are categorized into:

- Sthayi Bhavas: Permanent dominant
- emotions (e.g., Rati for love, Krodha for anger).
- Vibhava: The cause or stimulus of the emotion.
- Anubhava: The physical transitions or visible effects of the emotion.

### Rasa: The Aesthetic Flavour

If Bhava is the act of cooking, Rasa is the taste. It is the impersonal, contemplative joy experienced by the audience (Rasika). The Natyashastra famously states: "न हि रसादृते कश्चिदर्थः प्रवर्तते" (No meaningful action proceeds without Rasa).

### Music as the Architect of Emotion

Music in Kathak is not a background element; it is the structural and emotional blueprint. The relationship is symbiotic, governed by the following components:

### Melody (Raag and Swara)

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Seminar Convener: Dr. Yash Sanjay Dewale (Co-Founder: Swar Sanskar Sangeet Gurukul, Assistant Professor: MSU Baroda)

The choice of a Raag (melodic mode) dictates the emotional atmosphere.

- Morning Raags (e.g., Bhairav): Used for Shanta (peace) or Bhakti (devotion).
- Evening Raags (e.g., Yaman): Often used for Shringar (romance/beauty).

**The Role of Instruments:** The Sarangi or Harmonium provides a melodic "Lehra" (a repetitive musical phrase). This Lehra acts as a canvas upon which the dancer paints rhythmic patterns. The continuity of the Lehra ensures that even during complex technical cycles, the emotional "flavor" remains constant.

### Rhythm (Taal and Laya)

Kathak is unique for its mathematical precision. However, rhythm is also an emotional tool.

- Vilambit Laya (Slow Tempo): Ideal for deep, soulful Abhinaya and Bhava portrayal.
- Drut Laya (Fast Tempo): Evokes Vira (heroic energy) or Adbhuta (wonder).

### The Synthesis in Performance

The interrelationship manifests most vividly in specific segments of a Kathak repertoire.

#### Thumri and Dadra

In the Gat Nikas and Gat Bhava segments, the dancer interprets the lyrics of a Thumri. Here, the music provides the verbal narrative. The dancer may interpret a single line of music in ten different ways (Artha-Bhava). For example, a line about Krishna stealing butter is played repeatedly by the musicians while the dancer explores various Bhavas-mischief, fear of being caught, and maternal love.

#### The Tabla-Dancer Dialogue (Sawal-Jawab)

This is the pinnacle of the relationship between music and dance. The Tabla player issues a rhythmic challenge, and the dancer mimics it through footwork. While this is technical, it creates the Adbhuta Rasa (Wonder) as the audience witnesses the seamless mental and physical synchronicity between the two artists.

#### Technical and Spiritual Convergence

The ultimate goal of a Kathak performance is Chitta-Vritti-Nirodha (the calming of the mind's fluctuations). The repetitive nature of the Taal, combined with the evocative power of the Raag, allows the dancer to reach a state of "transcendental Bhava," where the ego of the performer vanishes, leaving only the Rasa for the audience to consume.

### Conclusion

The interrelationship of Rasa, Bhava, and Music in Kathak is an inseparable trinity. Music provides the soul and the structure, Bhava provides the human breath and effort, and Rasa provides the divine result. In the modern era, as Kathak evolves with contemporary themes, this fundamental relationship remains the anchor that prevents the dance from becoming mere gymnastics. To witness Kathak is to hear the dance and see the music.

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