Bharatanatyam is an ancient dance form said to be based on the Natya Shastra, the ancient Indian text of performing arts, compiled around 200 BCE by the sage Bharata. According

to the Natya Shastra, dance and the performing arts are an expression of spiritual ideas, the

message in the scriptures, and human virtues. The Shastra also lays down the theories of how to express these messages through rasa (aesthetics that evoke emotion), bhava (emotion or mood conveyed), expression, gestures, acting techniques, basic steps, and standing postures, all of which are part of Indian classical dances.

There are eight Indian classical dance forms, namely, Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kuchipudi, Odissi,Kathakali, Sattriya, Manipuri and Mohiniyattam. These different dance forms belong to different regions and have music and oral compositions either in the local language or in Sanskrit. Despite the diversity of styles in the costumes, expressions and movements, these dance forms are representative of a commonality of basic ideas. Bharatanatyam is one of the earliest major classical dance forms of India. Originating in Southern India, it is a dance traditionally performed with the accompaniment of a team of singers and musicians. One can find historical and cultural references to dancers and dance elements related to Bharatanatyam over the centuries in scriptures, temple carvings and sculptures.

Today Bharatanatyam circulates in ever-expanding directions. The form has moved well beyond its twentieth-century epicenter, the city of Chennai (formerly Madras), and its pulse can be felt in every major urban centre around the world. Post-colonial and hybrid diasporic identities have given new impetus to the form. In North America, elements of Bharatanatyam dance have interfaced with contemporary dance and new kinetic vocabularies have been created by prominent second and third generation artists of Indian origin. Professional Bharatanatyam training and performance has also extended to include practitioners of non-South Asian origins, and this too has moved the dance in highly innovative directions. The form has also been used to address social issues such as displacement and violence, contemporary issues such as climate change and human rights and has been thoroughly institutionalized and professionalized, especially in the UK, Canada, and the United States.

This classical Indian dance is highly revered in the United States for a variety of factors. Here are some crucial details emphasizing its significance:

**Cultural Exchange**: Bharatanatyam serves as a bridge between Indian and American

cultures, promoting cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. As an integral part of

Indian heritage, it offers Americans an opportunity to experience and engage with the rich

cultural traditions of India.

**Artistic Expression**: Bharatanatyam is a highly expressive dance form that combines

intricate footwork, hand gestures, facial expressions, and body movements. Its grace,

beauty, and emotive storytelling captivate audiences, fostering artistic appreciation and

providing a unique form of entertainment.

**Physical Fitness**: Bharatanatyam is a highly expressive and physically

demanding dance form. It involves intricate footwork, rhythmic movements, and

various postures that require strength, flexibility, and endurance. Regular practice

of Bharatanatyam can contribute to improved fitness levels, body coordination,

balance, and overall physical well-being. The dance form provides a wonderful cardio workout, improves blood circulation, tones muscles and is good for improving bone density.

**Mental Stimulation**: Bharatanatyam involves learning complex rhythmic patterns,

sequences, and compositions. Practicing this dance form requires concentration,

memory retention, and mental agility. It can enhance cognitive skills, improve

focus, and provide a mental workout that contributes to overall mental

stimulation and development, suppress ignorance, memory problems and epilepsy. No wonder that, the world over, Dance Movement Therapy is practiced to address and alleviate autism and ADHD.

**Diversity and Inclusion**: Bharatanatyam, along with other Indian classical arts, contributes

to the diversity and inclusivity of the American cultural landscape. It adds depth to the

tapestry of performing arts available in the country and provides a platform for artists from

diverse backgrounds to share their talent and stories.

**Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration**: Bharatanatyam has influenced and been influenced by

various other art forms. In the United States, it often collaborates with other dance styles,

music genres, theater, and visual arts, resulting in innovative productions that blend

different cultural traditions and create unique artistic experiences.

**Professional Opportunities**: Bharatanatyam has gained popularity in the United States,

leading to an increase in professional performance opportunities for practitioners.

Renowned Bharatanatyam dancers regularly perform at prestigious venues, festivals, and

cultural events across the country. These opportunities not only provide exposure but also

help sustain and grow the art form.

**Preserving Tradition**: The presence and practice of Bharatanatyam in the US contribute to

the preservation and promotion of this ancient dance form. By establishing dance schools,

organizing workshops, and nurturing young talent, the Bharatanatyam community in the US

ensures the continuation and evolution of this traditional art form for future generations.

Bharatanatyam is an amazing language to break through walls of prejudice, walls of fear, and also walls of patriarchy. Bharatanatyam’s complex mudras allow for almost anything to be conveyedwith help from facial expressions and other uses of the body, allowing artists to find their voice and present work on any number of topics that they deem important. This freedom of expression and limitless possibility for invention within bharatanatyam’s movement vocabulary is a major aspect of why bharatanatyam continues to thrive today.