



## DANCE AND ENVIRONMENT: A UNIQUE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE AND NATURE

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### ABSTRACT

Dance is undoubtedly a great health exercise which needs a healthy body. Dancers have a unique perspective on the relationship between the body and the natural world, and their training and practice can lead to a deeper understanding of the environment. So a proper food system is required for the dancers. Staying in a polluted area, inhaling a high amount of CO<sub>2</sub> or such unhealthy gases will cause a risk for a dancer. So definitely we need a strong eco system and an interest in green technology. But what does the dance or dancer do for this? First of all, a dancer can spread awareness in society through their dance productions. Dance can be a powerful tool for raising environmental awareness by allowing audiences to experience the emotional and physical impact of environmental issues in a kinaesthetic way, fostering deeper understanding and connection to the problem.

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### Introduction

Dance can be used to highlight the unequal distribution of resources and the impact of environmental issues on marginalized communities. Choreographers are using dance to fight for climate action and raise awareness about environmental issues (Chatterjee and Dutta, 2016). The future-oriented pedagogy allows for play-based, creative, and exploratory dance practice. Within this format there is a need for identified intentional teaching moments that support students in questioning and revising their current ideas (Dasgupta, 1932). Considering how our environment sustains life, how we may be connected to that ecosystem, and observing any emerging patterns within that environment, help to guide the students as they become immersed in their explorations of place (Hiriyanna, 1995). Environmental sustainability, as defined by the United Nations Brundtland Commission, is about "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet

their own needs". Dance can play a role in sustaining the Earth by raising awareness about environmental issues, fostering cultural change, and encouraging sustainable practices through its inherent ability to connect people with nature and inspire action (Antez, 1985).

### **"Biswa Tanute Anute Anute Kanpe Nrityarochhaya"- Rabindra Nath Tagore**

Dance is a very familiar word with us. If we find a definition of dance then definitely, it is the movement of the body in a rhythmic way, usually to music and within a given space, for the purpose of expressing an idea or emotion, releasing energy, or simply taking delight in the movement itself. But for individuals it can be a way by which they can express their nature, or for few people it is a way of meditation even dance is a therapy too. Cause "Dance is the hidden language of the soul" (Martha Graham). On the other hand, the environment is a very important thing or issue. If we want to live perfectly then we have to keep our

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environment safe from pollution, destruction etc (Antez, 1985).

But does dance plays an important role in keeping the environment safe? The answer is yes, it plays. Dance, environment, and nature are deeply interconnected because dance is often inspired by natural movements, rhythms, and elements of the environment. In fact every dance form imitates natural movements, such as the swaying of trees, the flowing of water, or the flight of birds. Traditional and indigenous dances often embody these elements. Several cultures around the planet use dance as a way to honour nature, seasons, and the environment. For example, rain dances, harvest dances, and animal-inspired performances celebrate the natural world (Chatterjea, 1996).

Some dance performances take place in outdoor spaces, blending human movement with the landscape. This creates a harmonious relationship between the dancer and the environment. Dance can be used as a medium to raise awareness about environmental issues, portraying themes of climate change, conservation, and ecological balance (Chakraborty, 2020). The rhythms of nature such as waves, wind, and heartbeats; mirror the rhythm of dance, making movement an extension of the natural world. Nature and the environment have played a significant role in shaping various Indian dance styles, influencing their *bol*, movements, themes, costumes, and expressions. Many Indian classical and folk-dance forms mimic natural elements like animals, birds, rivers, and trees. If we want to find the relation between the Nature and the Indian Classical Dances then I must say that this research will be very interesting (Kirkham, 2024).

#### How is dance similar to nature?

**As a Language:** Dance, like nature, uses movement and rhythm to communicate ideas and emotions without words. Nature also communicates through movement (wind, water, animals), rhythm (seasons, tides), and patterns (sunlight, constellations) (Kumar, 2022).

**Connection and Rhythm:** Dance is a physical art form that connects us to our bodies and the rhythms within them. Experiencing nature can also connect us to our bodies and the rhythms of the natural world (sun, moon, various seasons). Both dance and nature often exhibit rhythmic patterns, whether it's the beat of music in a dance or the ebb and flow of the tides (Kumar, 2022).

#### What characteristics do dance and nature have in common?

Dance and nature share the characteristics of movement, rhythm, and the ability to express emotions and stories, often through the use of natural elements and forms.

**Expression of Emotions and Stories:** Dance, like nature, can be used to express emotions and tell stories. Dance can evoke a wide range of feelings through its movements and music, while nature can inspire awe, wonder, and a sense of connection through its beauty and power (Allen, 1987).

**Natural Elements and Forms:** Dance can incorporate natural elements and forms, such as water, fire, earth, and air, to create a more immersive and expressive experience. For example, a dance piece could mimic the movement of waves or the flow of a river, or use costumes and props that evoke natural imagery (Kishore et al., 2018).

**Improvisation and Creativity:** Both dance and nature allow for improvisation and creativity. Dancers can create new movements and choreographies based on their own interpretations and emotions, while nature's processes are constantly evolving and changing, offering endless possibilities for observation and inspiration (Balslev, 2009).

**The relation between the Indian Classical Dances and Nature:** According to Dasgupta (1932) the Indian classical dances collectively are sometimes also believed to be a representation of the five elements of nature when regarded together. *Kuchipudi* and *Odissi* are believed to be Earth and Water respectively, with *Mohiniyattam* being Air, *Bharatnatyam* being Fire, and *Kathakali* the Sky. The movements themselves give a nod to these representations-with *Odissi's* sensual and graceful nature like the rippling of rivers, *Bharatnatyam's* sharp and swift extended movements like those of flames, and *Mohiniyattam's* feminine and agile nature reminding the viewer of gusts of wind. *Kathak* is a dance form with very smooth moves, where steps segue from one to another, and the eyes express every emotion. At the same time, it includes extensive and fast footwork. This in itself symbolizes nature as nature has two sides: the caring side and the destructive one (Antez, 1985).

**Bharatanatyam** (Tamil Nadu): Bharatnatyam's *abhinaya* is also quite renowned for narrating themes of nature, with extensive use of *hasta mudras* to depict the same. From the *Simhamukha mudra* depicting a

lion, or sometimes a deer, to *Kapittha*, *Kapota*, and *Ardhachnadra* used to show the moon-these *mudras* require expressive storytelling skills for a solo dancer to portray an entire story of nature singlehandedly on the stage. *Bharatanatyam* (Tamil Nadu) includes movements resembling the graceful swaying of trees, fluttering of birds, and flowing of rivers (Lal, 1998).

**Odissi (Odisha):** *Odissi* is known for its *tribhangi* (three-bend posture), which is believed to be inspired by the gentle curves of nature. The dance form also constitutes a heavy connection to the ground and the Earth itself, with grounded movements such as *chowka*. Numerous '*pallavis*', or pure *nritta* compositions set to *raagas*, depict themes such as rain, peacocks dancing, the composition of trees and forests, the gait of animals, and likewise, which are enmeshed with ancient legends in classical dance.

**Kathak (North India, UP):** The footwork is often inspired by the sounds of nature. "*Bols*" include words like "*jhan-jhan*", which conveys the sound of a river or water. Kathak dancers wear "*ghungroo*" around both their legs, which generate pleasant sounds synonymous with the harmony and synchrony of Mother Nature. One can also see many "*tukdas*" or pieces being about different aspects of nature as well for instance, the '*parmelu*', which synthesises various sounds of nature like the cuckoo bird and the sound of thunder.

**Kathakali** (Kerala) includes dynamic movements influenced by the strength of elephants and the agility of tigers.

**Manipuri** dance (Manipur) often portrays scenes from Lord Krishna's life, including playing near the Yamuna River and in lush forests.

**Mohiniyattam** (Kerala) incorporates slow, swaying movements that resemble the calm waves of Kerala's backwaters. Dancers wear materials sourced from nature, such as silk, cotton, and natural dyes.

**Yakshagana** (Karnataka) uses elaborate headgear and vibrant costumes inspired by the colors of forests, rivers, and the sky.

**Folk dances** are closely linked to harvests, monsoons, and other environmental cycles. *Bihu* (Assam) celebrates spring and agriculture, incorporating fast-paced movements resembling farmers' joyous celebrations. *Garba* (Gujarat) and *Ghoomar* (Rajasthan) are performed during seasonal festivals

(Krishna, 1992). Several tribal and folk dances serve as rituals honor the land, rain, and deities associated with nature. *Chhau* (Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal) incorporates martial movements and animal-inspired postures. *Kummi* and *Kolattam* (Tamil Nadu) are performed in rural areas to express gratitude to nature. Major Indian dance styles evolved based on regional landscapes (Kishore et al., 2018). In coastal regions, movements are fluid and graceful (*Odissi*, *Mohiniyattam*). In mountainous regions, dances involve energetic footwork (*Ladakhi*, *Himachali Nati*). Thus, Indian dance forms are deeply connected to the environment, embodying the rhythm of nature in their art, movements, and traditions (Kirkham, 2024).

### How can artists use nature for choreographic inspiration?

Inspiration for dance making comes from many sources. The natural world provides numerous cues that nudge us into intuitive improvisations and creative dance compositions. Observing Nature's Movements and Rhythms, Animal Behaviour, Natural Phenomena, Plant Growth help to translate Nature into Choreography like- Dance Sequences, Costumes, Stage Design, Music etc. (Rayapureddy and Rayapureddy, 2017).

**Davalois Fearon: Considering Water Scarcity-** "*As part of her work Consider Water, two dancers randomly distribute cups to audience members and a third pours water into some of the cups. The symbolism allows other audience members to glimpse what it feels like to be denied a resource, overlooked and ignored.*" (Mohanty et al., 2016).

**Jill Sigman: Disrupting Disposability-** "*Jill Sigman, whose The Hut Project involves building huts out of scavenged materials, creates spaces that disrupt people's expectations of disposability, reuse and value.*" (Mohanty and Saha, 2018).

**Jennifer Monson: Exploring Ecological Phenomena-** Jennifer Monson said "*I pay attention to those subtle movements by dancing, not just by observing,*" she says. Cultivating this kind of embodied knowledge helped Monson think about climate change in terms of creativity and improvisation rather than fear (Radhakrishnan, 1929). In *Gitanjali* Tagore observed, "*The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.*" Tagore believed that man is supposed to live in harmony with Nature and recognise that divinity prevails in all elements including plants and animals; otherwise, if he wished

to walk upon the single way of human development, he would lose his balance (Yang and Zang, 2023). From his extensive writings about the relation of man to Nature, we discover that the experience of the world is not isolated from the experience of Nature. Along with her beauty and appeal, Nature's meaning and purpose were equally important to him where both were indispensable elements. Nature was not merely a showcase of objects but a habitation wherein man's place was splendid and significant. Nature without man would be a 'broken arch' and man without Nature a 'deserted land'. At Santiniketan, classes were held outdoors because he believed that "*nature [is] the greatest of all teachers*" and that "*children should be surrounded with the things of nature which have their own educational value.*" (Norton-Smith, 2010).

### **The integral relationship between environment and dance from the perspective of Earth Day**

The relationship between environment and dance is deeply intertwined, as dance has historically been a way for humans to connect with nature, express ecological awareness, and celebrate the rhythms of the Earth (Ross, 2025). From the perspective of Earth Day, this connection becomes even more significant, as dance can serve as both a form of environmental advocacy and a reflection of our relationship with the planet (Mallik et al., 2011).

**Dance as a Reflection of Nature:** Many traditional and indigenous dances are inspired by the natural world, imitating the movements of animals, elements, and celestial bodies. For example: Native American hoop dances reflect the cycles of nature and life. The Balinese dance incorporates movements inspired by water, wind, and animals. *Butoh*, a Japanese dance form, often embodies themes of decay and renewal, mirroring ecological processes. On Earth Day, such dances can serve as a reminder of the deep wisdom embedded in these traditions and the need to protect the ecosystems they celebrate (Page, 1933).

**Dance as an environmental advocacy tool:** In contemporary contexts, dance has been used as a powerful medium for raising awareness about environmental issues. Through eco-performance art, dancers communicate messages about climate change, deforestation, pollution, and sustainability. Choreographers create works that depict the effects of industrialization on nature. Using dance as a call to action can urge and inspire ordinary people to adopt more sustainable lifestyles. Incorporating natural settings (forests, oceans, deserts) as a performance space, promotes merging art with activism (Norton-Smith, 2010; Ross, 2025).

On Earth Day, performances of eco-dance can serve as a direct appeal for environmental justice and conservation.

**Dance and sustainable spaces:** The places where we dance matter. Many Earth Day initiatives encourage sustainable practices in the performing arts, such as: using outdoor performances to highlight the beauty of natural spaces; and designing eco-friendly stages with recycled materials. Furthermore, promoting zero-waste costumes and sustainable production techniques help in spreading environmental awareness. By emphasizing environmental consciousness in dance events, we align artistic expression with ecological responsibility (Radhakrishnan, 1958).

**Dance as a ritual for healing the Earth:** Many cultures use dance in ceremonies to honour the Earth and seek harmony with natural forces. On Earth Day, community dances can: serve as collective rituals to express gratitude for the planet. Dance can inspire movements that symbolize renewal and environmental restoration. Bringing people together to physically embody the urgency of protecting our world can also be successfully achieved (Thobani, 2017).

Dance is an essential, expressive, and transformative tool for reconnecting with nature and advocating for a healthier planet. On Earth Day, it can serve as a vibrant call to action, reminding us that just as dance is shaped by its environment, our well-being is deeply linked to the health of the Earth. Through movement, we can honour, protect, and celebrate the rhythms of nature, ensuring a more sustainable future for generations to come. So, Dance can be used to educate the public on environmental concerns, allowing people to connect with issues on an emotional level, which can encourage action. Choreographers can use dance to explore themes of climate change, environmental justice, and the relationship between humans and the natural world. Dance can help people reconnect with nature and understand the interconnectedness of ecosystems. Dance can be used to raise awareness about the impact of human activities on the environment (Saha et al., 2013).

### **How can dance advocate for environmental change?**

Dance can powerfully advocate for environmental change by translating complex issues into emotionally resonant, accessible performances, fostering empathy and engagement with the natural world through movement and storytelling (Kirkham, 2024).



Here's how dance can be used to advocate for environmental change:

- **Emotional Connection and Empathy:** Dance, with its ability to express emotions and tell stories through movement, can create a powerful emotional connection between audiences and environmental issues, making them more relatable and tangible (Thobani, 2017).
- **Raising Awareness:** Choreographers can create works that directly address environmental themes, such as climate change, pollution, or deforestation, raising awareness about these issues and inspiring action (Saha et al., 2013).
- **Cultural and Historical Context:** Integrating cultural symbolism and historical narratives within dance performances can connect environmental issues with cultural heritage and foster a deeper understanding of the relationship between humans and the environment (Mohanty and Sahay, 2018).
- **Promoting Sustainability:** Dance performances can showcase sustainable practices and inspire audiences to adopt more eco-friendly lifestyles, both in their personal lives and within the dance community itself (Ross, 2025).
- **Community Engagement:** Dance can be a tool for community engagement, bringing people together to discuss and address environmental challenges, fostering a sense of collective responsibility and action (Page, 1933).
- **Reconnecting with Nature:** Dance can help audiences reconnect with the natural world, promoting a sense of awe and appreciation for the environment, which can lead to a greater desire to protect it (Norton-Smith, 2010).
- **Using Dance as a Vehicle for Change:** Dance can be used as a platform for activism, with choreographers and dancers using their art to advocate for environmental policies and inspire social change (Mallik et al, 2011).
- **Embodied Awareness:** Dance can foster an embodied awareness of the environment, helping people understand their impact on the planet and the importance of sustainable practices (Vatsyayan, 1992).

#### Examples:

- Vertigo Dance Company uses sustainable practices in its operations and artistic approaches,

including an Eco-Arts Village built with recycled materials and renewable energy.

- Lena Guslina raises awareness on environmental destruction through dance, inspired by her experiences with flooding in her city.
- KT Nelson's production "Dead Reckoning" demonstrates how humans are navigating blindly through environmental damage.

#### Environmental Dance:

Environmental dance is a dance form that explores the relationship between the body and the environment, often seeking to promote ecological balance and raise awareness about environmental issues through movement and performance (Yang and Zang, 2023). The interactive website [environmental-dance.com](http://environmental-dance.com) combines knowledge of the earth's climatic changes with traditional and contemporary dances from around the world that reflect human beings and their integration into nature (Samanta et al., 2012). The aim of Environmental Dance is to make climate change tangible and visible on different levels, using dance, scientific data and personal testimonies from many countries around the world (Ross, 2025).

#### Conclusion

Ecology and natural harmony have played a crucial role in the evolution and stylization of dance across cultures (Kirkham, 2024). The relationship between humans and their natural environment has influenced movement patterns, aesthetics, and even the purpose of dance. Ecology and natural harmony has shaped dance by providing inspiration, themes, and movement vocabulary (Sharma, 2000). They foster a deep connection between humans and the natural world, ensuring that dance remains a reflection of life's organic rhythms and the environment that sustains it (Yang & Zang, 2023).

1. **Imitating Nature in Movements:** Many traditional dances mimic the movements of animals, birds, trees, or natural elements like water and wind. Example: Classical Indian dance forms like *Bharatanatyam* and *Odissi* incorporate movements inspired by animals (e.g., peacock, deer, snake).
2. **Cultural Reflections of Environment:** Indigenous and folk dances often arise from ecological settings. Example: Hawaiian *Hula* dance tells stories of nature, volcanoes, and ocean waves, preserving ecological wisdom.

3. **Seasonal and Agricultural Influence:** Many dance forms are connected to agricultural cycles, celebrating planting and harvest seasons. Example: *Bihu* dance of Assam (India) marks the arrival of spring and harvest.
4. **Rhythms and Patterns from Nature:** The rhythm of natural sounds, like rain, animal calls, or rustling leaves, inspires dance beats and movement flow. Example: African and Latin American tribal dances incorporate drumming that mimics the heartbeat of the earth.
5. **Spiritual and Ritualistic Harmony:** Many traditional dances are performed to honour natural elements-sun, moon, rain, and earth. Example: Native American rain dances invoke rainfall to sustain crops and ecosystems.
6. **Eco-conscious Modern Dance:** Contemporary choreographers create performances reflecting environmental concerns, Climate Change, and conservation. Example: Earth-cantered dance projects use movement to advocate for sustainability and ecological balance.

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