



A Study on Basic Technique of Manipuri Raas Leela

(A Classical Dance of Indian)

Dr. Pukhrambam Lilabati Devi

Assistant Professor,

Department of Dance & Music,

Manipur University, Canchipur, India.

Abstract :

Technique is perceived as the basis of all fundamentals of Dance inclusive of essential parts such as forms, posture, skills, movements and styles etc. Postural alignment, flexibility, core strength and artistic expression are to be well defined towards study of dance technique (Jazz). Mastery over wide ranges of dance like exercises, expressive performance, warm up and cool down, rhythm, timing, gesture, space and motif are equally to be well crafted under choreography activity for impressive continuity and presentation. Manipuri RaasLeela bring a sacred dance form playing outwardly as natures shringarRas but inwardly embarking an all Rasas, the divine qualities, is embodied by strict composition of techniques and styles. These sacred techniques which have brought up the dance to the status of the few classical dances of India, shall be aimed to explain elaborating at the scholar's best capacity.

Key words : *Dance Technique, flexibility, posture, quality, choreographic skills – Sacredness of the Dance.*

Introduction :

It is not an exaggeration to say that when learning Manipuri dance it is inevitable for the students to learn the different positions of the hands, feet, and the various body postures and movements. Being a dancer it is also important to know where the hands should be the eyes should look. The paper highlights some body movements along with physical exercises which ultimately will be part of Manipuri dance. This paper is written to introduce some of the movements I have learned from my teachers.

Objectives :

To learn dance without the knowledge of the importance of the bodily movements is like learning to speak a language without knowing its alphabet. In other words, it is like learning to construct a sentence without the knowledge of grammar. This paper is written to share some of the dance movements like those of the hand and feet gestures and placements with the hope that it will be of some benefit to the young dancers.

Hypothesis:

Being a dancer or a student of the dance we cannot take the art lightly. Dance is not very easy subject. There are various qualities required in a person to learn dance. However, the area I am here dealing with is just a little part of the entire art of dance. Some select physical exercises are discussed in other to help the dancers in areas concerned with the use of the feet, the placement of the hands, the movement of the neck, during a dance performance which will help us to make our body flexible. This is an effort to introduce some of the dance rules taught to us by our teachers for the benefit of the young dance students. Mastering the knowledge of these rules will help and enable a dancer to choreograph new dance items without distorting the original rules. Whether being a dancer or a teacher, we will be a deserving person if we strictly follow the teachings of our teachers and gurus.

Area of Study :

Techniques of the Manipuri RaasLeela, before knowing the technique of Manipuri RaasLeela , As a dancer we should understand what the position of hands, wrists, fingers, position of Head, movement of waists, and legs, eye movement, should before clearly showing them the twirling posture, intertwining of fingers, legs movements etc.

Now at the beginning learning technique of Manipuri RaasLeela it is considered a basic exercise to learn along with being a part of the Manipuri RaasLeela technique. Some of the example

1. Flexibility of wrists,
2. Tenderness of Fingers,
3. Exercise of Legs,
4. Striking surface with Toes,
5. Pushing of the Chest,
6. Side to side body movements,
7. Flexibility of the Body, etc.

Flexibility of wrists:

The person should stand straight and then stretch her hands along horizontal lines parallel to the earth and then fingers tighten to form a fist. This is to create a form in the upper part of the body. Now, the person should twists slowly towards the body. This same exercise is done repeatedly until it becomes habitual. This particular exercise helps find flexibility and plasticity in the wrists.

For tenderness of fingers:

This exercise is for both flexibility and tenderness of the fingers. Here the hands are in the same positions as they were for the first exercise. This fingers then key straight with the open palm and starting from the index finger the fingers move towards the body in sequence. And then starting again from the index finger, all the binding fingers move back in the original positions in sequence. Then the palm curls in to an upside down position and the fingers would be as they were before. Starting with the index finger all the fingers move in and then out again and again until exercise almost becomes something born out of heredity. It is practised by keeping the palm in both up and down positions.

Exercise of Leg:

In this exercise the students slowly touch the ground with the tips of their toes. This helps in maintaining this posture with ease when actually performing. To attain the straight required, the person has to keep his body straight, raise his or her first set of toes which can either be left or right or then raise the toes of the other leg until he or

she achieves a position where the whole body is just balanced on one set of toes. This is done in the opposite direction too. It is repeated until such time that it becomes a part of their movement naturally. It is one of the most important steps and is performed carefully.

Striking surface with toes:

When performing this exercise, hands are put at the sides of the waist while the body stands straight up. And then it would be followed by stepping of the toes of the right leg, slightly raise up and front bringing the right side of the body in and the toes of the left foot are then be kicked out. When the flex or part is kicked out. The waist is brought down and the head inclines to the right side. This exercise is repeatedly practiced until it becomes a habit to the dancer.

Pushing of the Chest:

Putting the hands on the waists while the right toes slightly touch the ground forms this posture. After this, the right chest is brought forth to the front: the flexor part of the left leg slightly rises up while the right toes are still touching the ground. In the same manner the flexor part of right leg raise up at the same time when the left toes pre touching the ground and the chest is brought towards the left.

Side to side bending movements:

The body at first is kept straight up. Then, one hand hangs down straight that almost attaches the body to the same side and the other hand is pulled up straight up towards the middle of the head. The body is bent down at maximum capacity at the left and right sides and the same is repeatedly practised.

Flexibility of the Body:

The body at first is kept straight up and the hands tightly crossing and fastening to each other, is put slightly over the head. With this form, the body is kept down and then is bent on the right side. The hands are brought down along with the right hands ankle going towards the left arm. Simultaneously the waist is kept down. When bringing down both the waist and the whole body, the face is kept lightly away towards right and looking down beyond the shoulder. Following this pattern, the waist is bent on the left side, eye looking beyond the left shoulder. In regards to bending the waist when the waist bends towards the

right side, the chest is pushed swiftly towards the left and when bending towards the left side, the chest is pushed quickly towards the right side. Then the body posture returns to the first position of standing straight. This form of exercise following the sequence of body movement is repeatedly practical.

With the proper knowing of the some basic exercise a dancer can learned technique of the Manipuri dance be perfectly kicked off.

Posture (Phirep) of the Manipuri RaasLeela:

The first and foremost body posture in the Manipuri RaasLeela is sagolphirep(Horse Posture). It is believed that this specific posture has been derived or drawn from that of the posture of a Horse. In this posture one side of the body bends slightly. Before making this slanting posture one must stand straight. The distance between two legs of a particular dancer depends on the feature of the dancer. And, the heels will kept apart at a distance that has the measurement of the breath of the index and middle fingers combined of the dancer. This makes the tips of both the feet projected slightly away from each other's direction. After that, Leg of the dancer left or the right foot will fold or bend towards the sole. The folded legs will then be brought back to normal and the corresponding leg will bend a little in the knee. Now, both the hands will be placed in such a manner that the thumbs will touch the distance of the index fingers which are further positioned at the level of the waist; the arms will be slightly bent in the elbows. The approximate angle of the armpit when the arm bent in the elbows is 30 degrees. The hand will also be delicately bent in a direction corresponding to the leg that is not bent. Here, the eyes will be looking at a direction that can see an ala (Natonnakchiunayengani) of the nose. Another common body posture associated with the Manipuri RaasLeela is the ' TribhangMurti'. This posture is similar to say how Lord Krishna stands with his legs crossed while playing flute. In this posture, the body is bent in three different parts, namely the knee, the Waist, and the neck.

Position of Hands :

The cornerstone of the dances of the Manipuri RaasLeela is the Chali Dance. In this dance form, a dancer will raise the arms to the level of the shoulders and projected in the front with a slight bending in the elbows. The palms of both the hands will be displayed in this position. Further, angle of the armpits must be approximately 60 degrees.

Movement of the feet and the legs :

The following is a description of the terminologies and techniques used in the Manipuri RasLeela regarding the various styles of the movement of the legs and the feet.

Putting of the feet (KhongKaothokpa) :

Here the heel of a leg will be pressed on the ground with the front part of the sole raised above. This is done so in front of the middle toe of the other foot.

Thumping of the feet (KhongThinba):

Here, in front of the middle toe of a foot, the tip of the other foot will be pressed on the ground with the heel raised.

Raising of the heel (KhongningKangba) :

Raising of the heels while the tips of the feet remain on the ground.

Crossing of the legs (Khongkaranchanba):

Here, one leg will be brought across the other leg in the front in such a way that the little toes of both the feet lie next to each other.

Steps of the Female Artists :

The female dancers do not raise their feet above the level of the ankles.

Steps of the Male Artists :

The male dancers raise their feet to the level of the knees but not above that.

Waddling steps (Khongkupunakupnathangba) :

With both the heels raised, the dancer will waddle with the tips of the feet.

The technique of Circular steps (chakra leiba) :

Here, the dancer will sit in a posture similar to squatting. The body will be bent a little and both the hands will press on the ground. Then, the heel of the left foot will be raised while the right foot moves circularly in anti- clockwise direction.

Clapping (Khubakkhuba) :

Both the hands will be brought in the front at the level of the waist keeping a distance of about the width of the palm from the body. The dancer will then do the steps of clapping in the said posture.

Flexing of the wrist (Khujengleibi) :

Both the hands will be brought to the level of the chest keeping a distance of about the width of a palm. Then, the dancer will twirl the wrists gracefully.

A style of salutation (Khurumba) :

The right leg will be brought behind the left leg or even without doing so; the dancer will bow the head a little.

Conclusion :

The above mentioned steps and movements are a few among the variety of techniques and styles associated with the Manipuri RaasLeela. The above discussion mentions matters related with RaasLeela of Manipuri dance. Teachers and gurus recommend teaching dance with proper knowledge of the various body gestures and movements. Being a dancer and a teacher it is highly important to project and follow the teachings of our teachers and gurus. Teachers do not teach dance only they also teach us good manners, behaviours and characters. The RaasLeela is an important part of traditional Manipuri culture and its uniqueness can be seen in every aspect of the dance form, be it the costume, movement, expression etc.

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