

Tales-At-A-Glance

*Exploring Dance Movement Therapy through
the Lens of Indian Dances*



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Together*
- by *Chirmi Acharya*

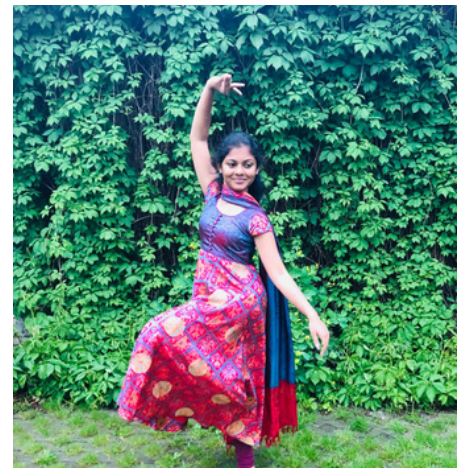


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Readers' Digest-
What's New?



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Fun Section

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From the Editorial Desk

**DANCE...HOLDING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER
BY CHIRMI ACHARYA**

— THERAPEUTIC MOVEMENT FACILITATOR, CHAIR, CMTAI NORTH ZONE —



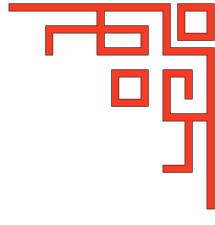
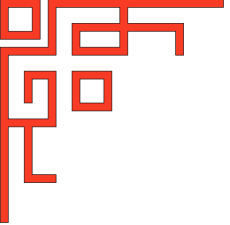
"The smile is the dance of the face. The dance is the smile of the limbs."

- Dame Ninette de Valois

The history of movement and dance is as old as time. Boas (1858–1942), an American anthropologist acknowledged dance as a universal human phenomenon and an important part of the culture. The reasons for why or when people began dancing surely predate the findings, but dance seems like something that was in-built into us and tied to our cultural identities and evolution. Dance became a way to celebrate, make merry, enjoy, seduce, pray, and entertain.

India being a country of diverse beliefs, practices, faiths, cultures, and terrains, is also, home to numerous dance forms – folk, classical and tribal. Indian culture includes a treasure of a variety of dances and movement practices to mark various occasions like harvest, religious ceremonies, war, birth and even death.

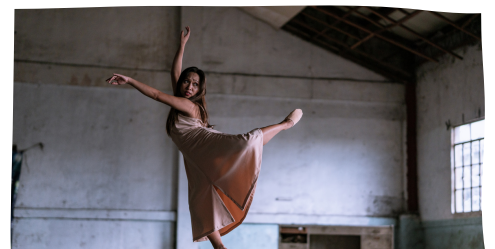
Indian classical dances are dances of the mind and soul and are extremely traditional. These dances are a form of communication that brings out the innermost feelings and at the same time depicts the cultural aspects of civilization (Sudhakar, 1994). They present a spectacular and gorgeous aspect of the magnificent and continuous Indian dance tradition.



The diversity in culture and tradition is reflected in the variety of Indian folk dances too. Basically, folk dances are much more related to Indian history (Dutt, 2008). They are the dances of the common folk to celebrate every festive mood and it brings all participants in a complete forum. As many of these dances are generally group dance forms, it also helps the dancers to feel togetherness and it in time reflects the unity among the diverse kinds of people of India (Chatterjee, 2013).

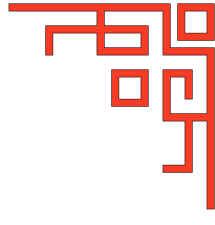
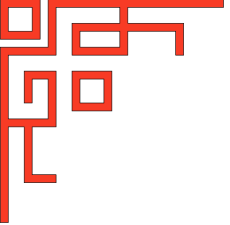


Sculptures from all over India and from many different historical periods, many before A.D. 1000, illustrate the importance of dance in Indian cultural history and the richness of its traditions. Many classical forms of dancers are based on ancient sculptures. Dance is believed to have evolved from cultural and religious rituals, and shamanic practices.



Dance is a cultural staple that creates cohesion, yet diversity, in India. Every state in India has its own folk and/or classical dance style. People in India dance on several occasions such as during social events, religious events, or community engagement. Indian dances are closely linked to emotions and resemble a perfect harmony between classical music and bodily movement.

According to Bhavanani (2001), “In India, classical dance and music pervade all aspects of life and bring colour, joy and gaiety to a number of festivals and ceremonies. In fact, dance and music in India are tied inextricably to the festivity of any kind”.



Dance is the most fundamental art involving direct expression of oneself. The body, mind and spirit are in a gestalt. Dance movements are used as a psychotherapeutic process promoting the emotional and physical integration of a person. Dance has been one of the most gracious mediums of self-expression since time immemorial. And when this art form not only serves as a platform of entertainment but also relieves physical and emotional worries, it evolves as dance therapy. When dance and movement are used psychotherapeutically it helps in psycho-somatic and emotional integration, catharsis, self-awareness and a source of healing.



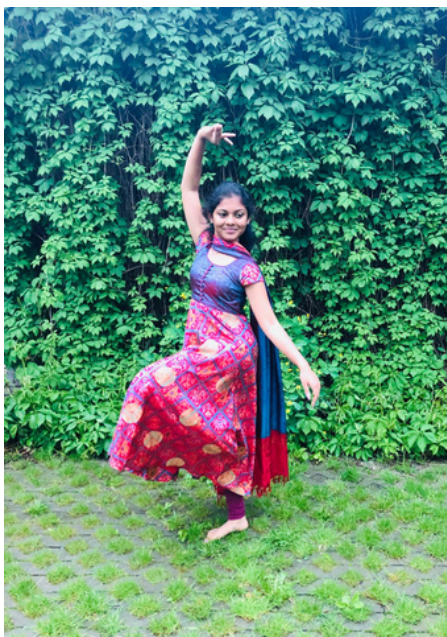
Movement is fundamental to our life, one that has existed since the beginning of time. This edition helps us delve into the Indian dances and connects us with the dance forms, and how it has been a source of therapy since time immemorial. Our ancestors understood the value of dance and let us take a plunge into the world of dance and bask in its therapeutic strength.



Readers' Digest- What's New?

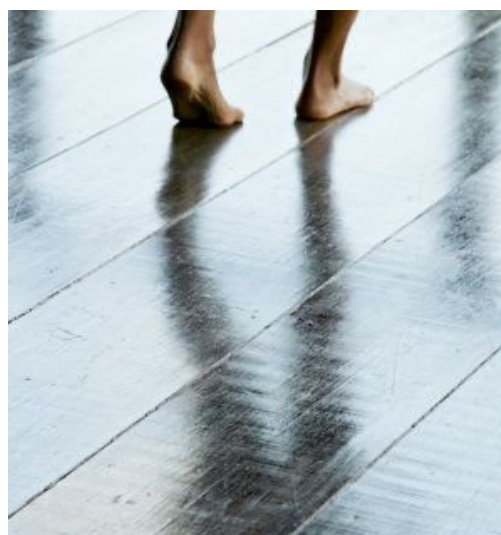
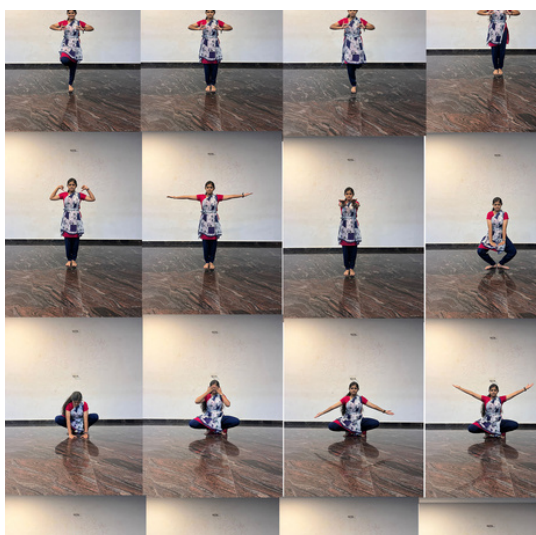
Interconnection Between Bharatanatyam and Dance/Movement Therapy Practice in the Context of Grounding.

BY KANISHKAA SENTHILNATHAN
Dance Movement Therapy Trainee



My journey as a Bharatanatyam dancer started when I was in the 6th grade and I gained a handful of knowledge all through my life experiences. My perspective about Bharatanatyam evolved after started equipping myself as a Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT) practitioner in training. My interest in understanding Bharatanatyam through the lens of DMT started when I started reading books and articles by Tripura Kashyap and this opportunity is one such chance to deepen my knowledge. This article is to explore what could be the possible common factors between Bharatanatyam and DMT regarding the goals of grounding and exploring rituals. This is being explored in the context of Namaskaaram and various DMT terms such as physical grounding, ritual and rhythm.

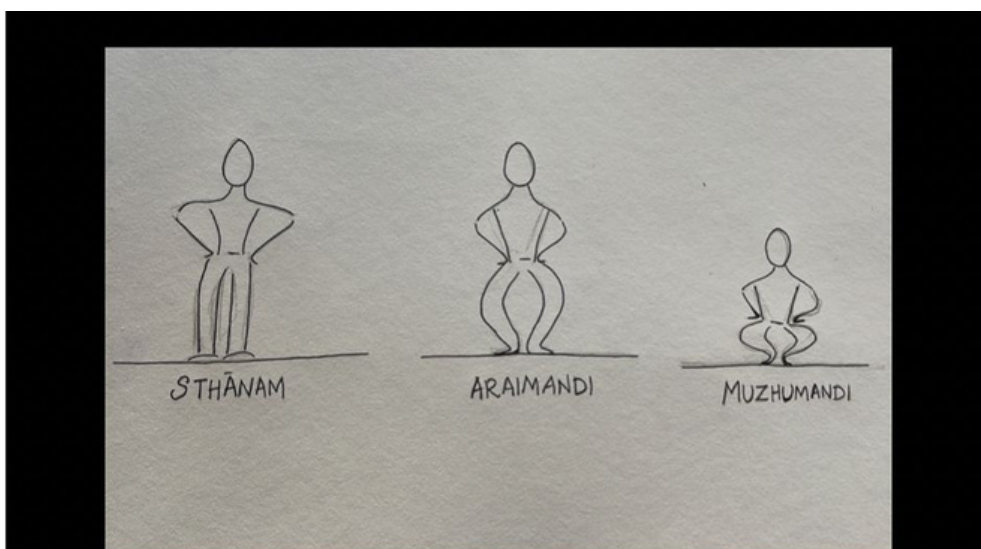
I view grounding as the tool which could bring us to the present moment and connect us with the breath and reality. According to Meekums (2002), grounding can be described as one's ability to perceive and to live in 'the here and now', and as one's contact with the ground.



Grounding can be used to help individuals manage difficult emotions, thoughts, or experiences. Grounding techniques are designed to help individuals who are experiencing intense emotions or are feeling overwhelmed to connect with the present moment and their physical surroundings (Naveen, 2022). Grounding is the ability to find the centre of gravity in one's self. This could be the centre of their essence and presence. The people who have lost focus towards their centre can be pulled back with the rope of grounding techniques. In the physical grounding, the use of earth elements can be a major source of support since they would be lacking stability and strength. In spiritual and healing traditions, grounding is associated with the earth element, which represents stability, solidity and strength. (Naveen, 2022). Psychologically, grounding can be understood as "a person who is present with him/herself, at home in his/her own body/mind" (Hackney, 2002, p. 236), and who has an active relationship with the earth.

The DMT experiential such as exploration of polarities, different textures and body percussion can play a major role in grounding. Moving to a rhythm can also support being in the here and now. The force of rhythm and percussion grounds or anchors us because "experiencing rhythm builds up orientation in the here and now" (Bräuninger, 2014a, p. 143).

"Language is important even though art therapy is a nonverbal therapy. But the person feels more secure if you speak in their language"



The guided visualisation using the metaphor of a person growing from a seed to a plant, frequently used in DMT, can help in creating feelings of solidity and connecting to the "roots" of the plant, grounding in stillness, paying attention to our feet, legs and body weight as well as breathing, (Meekums, 2002, p. 67 & 68). Similarly, in Bharatanatyam, we can find the essence of grounding in practices such as *Adavus*, *Bhedhas*, experiencing *Navarasas* and creating *Korvai* patterns to perform a choreography which in fact plays a major role in physical, emotional, sensory, and social grounding. The main focus of the 'here and now' is on physical grounding.

In bharatanatyam, the namaskaaram at the beginning serves this purpose where the dancer surrenders, respects and seeks support from the ground to dance. The *Bhoomika shloka* from *Natyasastra* explains this as:

*Samudravasane devi parvathasthana mandalae |
Naatyam Karisya Bhudevi paadaaghattam ksamasvame lol*

Meaning : O' Bhumidevi, you who wears the oceans as your attire and the mountains as your breasts, please forgive my stamping, as I dance.

The *Bhoomi Pranam* or *Namaskaaram* starts with the dancer tapping the right and left feet on the ground and stretching their hands to the front and then to the sides. They then take their hands down to Mother Earth while their legs widen as the pelvis slowly goes down, as if it is being pulled by a thread from the ground. The dancer then places their hands in union with the ground pouring all their respect and surrender. They then slowly start with the *Anjali Hasta* which involves placing the *Mudra* above their head to thank god, then by their forehead to thank their guru, and lastly by their heart to thank the audience. The centering of the dancer's essence, that is to dance, happens seamlessly. This happens while the Guru uses her/his *nattuvaangam* (a percussion instrument) and recites the *sol*. This, when performed in order, brings in a sense of rhythmic grounding. Voice, drums, and barefoot dancing are used to achieve a sense of support (Margariti et al., 2012), thereby fostering rhythmic grounding. Similarly, the grounding techniques in DMT can center the client in the present moment to be able to deal with issues and work on them with clarity and calmness.

Jête-à-Jête

WITH DEVIKA MEHTA KADAM

BY NISHTHA AGARWAL

Expressive Arts Therapist, LMHC, CMTAI Co-Founder

What does dance mean to the Indian diaspora, Indian culture and healing?

The interconnection between the mind, body, spirit, and nature have never been separate in the Indian indigenous communities. Colonization created systemic distancing with movement rituals and movement traditions under the garb of civility by naming these as savage or uncivilized. Ancient Indian healing systems and folk dances always gave importance to how the body felt, its impact on the mind and vice-versa. Dance was and continues in many adivasi cultures as an expression of divinity, as a means of coming together, as a community during times of celebration, changing seasons, cycles of birth, death and life transitions, and to continue their deep connection to nature. Dance is an important way of storytelling in our culture.



Could you share a little about your movement journey?

My mother introduced me to various forms of dancing at a very early age. Bharatnatyam was the first official training that I received in dance but folk dances were a part of how we celebrated life.

When I did my masters in DMT in the UK, I felt connected deeply to my homeland every time I engaged in folk movements at Indian festival celebrations and felt disembodied when I didn't engage in them. Upon coming back, folk movements very naturally integrated into the work I did with my groups, my self care and even understanding myself and my identity.

What difference do you notice between training in Dance and DMT training?
My training in Indian Classical Forms was really focussed on learning and performing the techniques , the choreographies in a way that was aesthetically pleasing and designed by my guru. They were focused only on communicating or catering to a specific audience who understood its cultural history and narratives of emotions and/or mythological enactments.

My training in Indian folk forms was fairly gentler, more embodied, and more about unison and unity at different levels. Living and learning from the Adivasis right from what, how and why the dance was performed connected me very differently to these various forms I was exposed to. Both my core dance trainings involved learning everything about those dance forms and scriptures associated with them.

DMT on the the other hand was very non directive with an expectation to not only be able to connect and feel what the techniques or theories did for me but also learning simultaneously on how to facilitate this for others of various intersectionalities.

Are there any similarities between the two in your experience?

I do believe that at the core of dance lies the power to heal and create reflexive experiences. I am coming across more and more dance trainings now that I believe in the power of the body and movement to process emotional materials and express that in choreographies. Trainings like these are similar to my training my DMT.



As DMTs practising in India, how can we use aspects of Indian classical dance into the therapeutic space?

In my own experience we can use different permutations of *nritya*, *natya* and *abhinaya* based on client or group needs. These can be achieved through using elements of Indian classical forms to meet goals which can tap into the physical, social, emotional or cognitive domains of healing. For example, engaging in storytelling through the whole body, allows one to reframe an experience and offer the body a different experience. Using specific movement combinations of *adavus* from Bharatnatyam can help to meet cognitive goals at an embodied physical level.



Do you feel if DMTs in India use more aspects of Indian classical dance in the therapeutic space, the resistance to move will reduce?

I think using culturally familiar movement forms create a space of comfort. I don't think it is just related to using classical dance forms. In fact, folk forms reduce resistance further due to its focus on the collective movement, and rhythms that are familiar to our ancestors and thereby in our bodies Intergenerationally. Its distance from technique, intermodal experience of music and visual imagery make them even more easier to engage with. If we look at therapeutic factors that the group process tends to build on, we can use these forms to reduce resistance and create cohesion and universality, using collective symbols to move, create synchrony etc.

Can you share about your work of using Indian dances in healing/therapeutic practices?

My initial works started with using folk forms with people with Parkinson's in 2009. The age group, gender choices and preferences in the movement led me to start banking on Indian folk forms to even warm them up to the idea that movement can be their friend and DMT can be the beneficial therapeutic approach. This was then carried into underresourced and oppressed communities as a means of communication and taking space. Creating and valuing movement rituals that come from our cultural dances, created spaces for grounding, healing and expanding their movement repertoire. As my confidence increased in using folk forms, I even used them as tools for the neurodivergent and queer folks. I am grateful that my experience of being able to weave folk forms and DMT frameworks has led me to my current PhD interest in using indigenous art forms for identity exploration in preadolescence. I am hoping this sheds some light on decolonising our own bodies while anchoring in cultural forms.

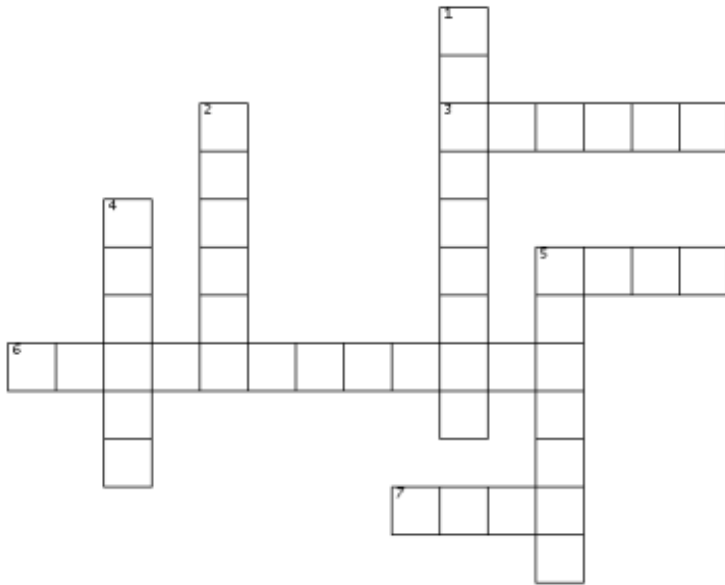


All photo credits go to (www.synchronyindia.com).

About Devika Mehta Kadam:

Devika is a licensed Dance Movement Psychotherapist. She is the Program Head for the Post Graduate Diploma in Expressive Arts Therapy at St.Xavier's College, Mumbai and faculty in DMT. She is the Co-Founder of Synchrony. She is the founding board member and Elected Treasurer of the India Association of Dance Movement Therapy. She is the Regional Director of Asia for the International Association of Creative Arts in Education and Therapy. She is also a past advisory board member for CMTAI.

Fun-da-mental



DMT CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 3. A strong, regular and repetitive pattern of movement or sound
- 6. Detailed treatise on Indian dance, music and drama
- 7. The emotions experienced by the audience evoked by the expressions of the dancer. They are 9 primary ____s.
- 8. When you're happy and you know ____ your hands

DOWN

- 1. A group of people coming together in a common space
- 2. Hand gestures used in Indian Classical Dance forms
- 4. Spins or pirouette in Kathak
- 5. A Gujarati folk dance, where the community dances together in circles

Send your answers to newsletter.cmtai@gmail.com and win a lucky draw to feature in the newsletter as the winner of the Crossword and Wordsearch

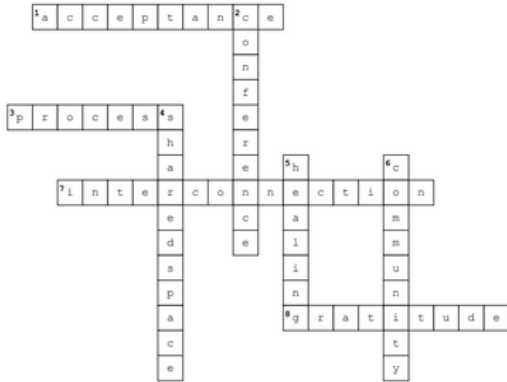
WORDSEARCH

- Bhedas Grace
- Circles Grounded
- Dandiya Odissi

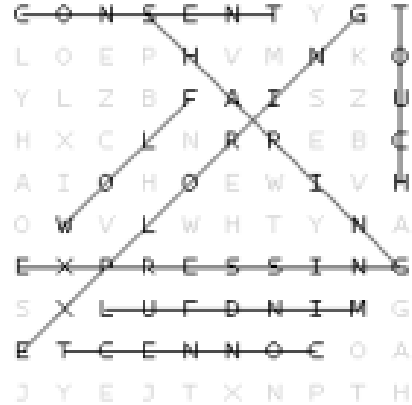
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Answers of Last Issue

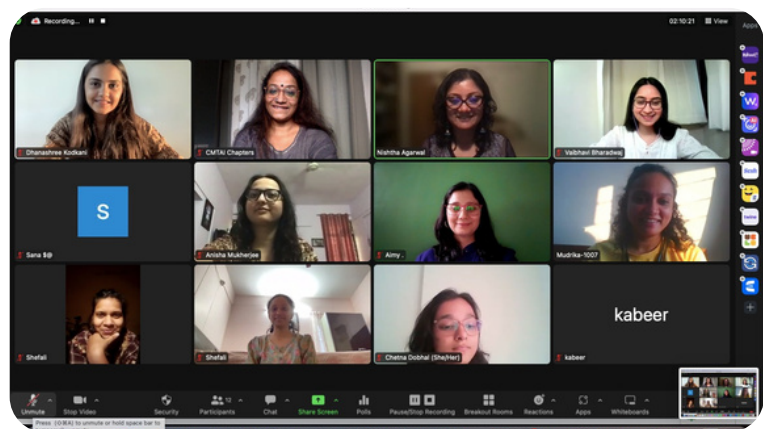
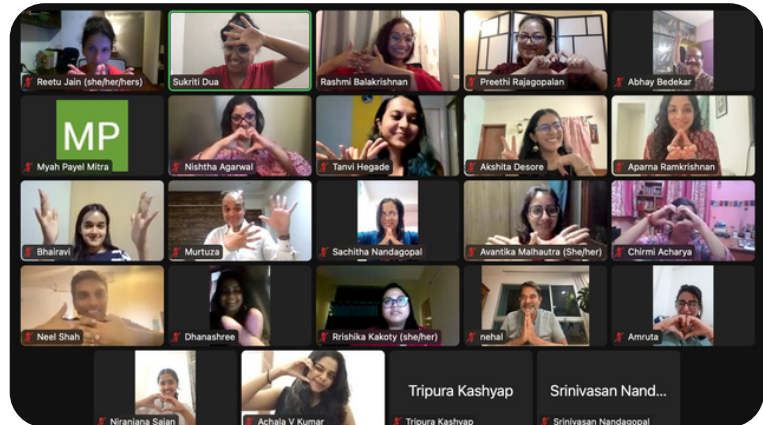
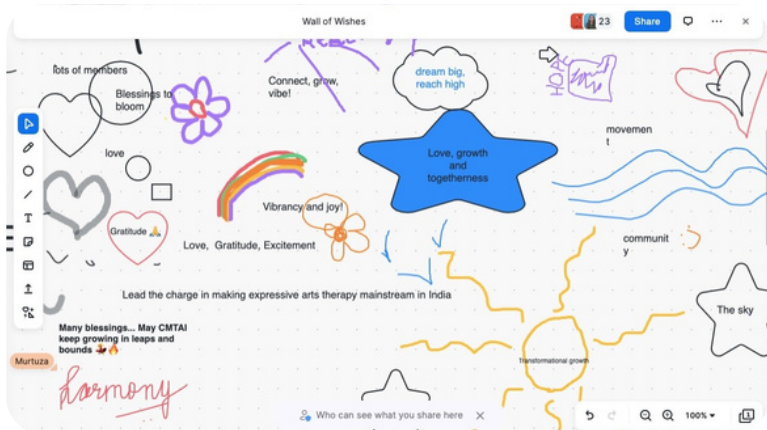
DMT CROSSWORD



WORDSEARCH



Photobooth



Some Photos from CMTAI's 9th Anniversary Celebration & the Pan India Event facilitated by Nishtha Agarwal

A glimpse of our 6th Biennial Creative Exchange in Goa-April 28th-30th



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Click on the article titles below to read the articles.

Articles:

[The Therapeutic Value of Indian Classical, Folk and Innovative Dance Forms](#)

[Recreational folk dance: A multicultural exercise component in healthy ageing](#)

[The Health Benefits of Kuchipudi Dance](#)

[Effect of Indian folk-dance therapy on physical performances and quality of life in elderly](#)

[Bridging The Gap: Exploring Indian Classical Dances as a source of Dance/Movement Therapy, A Literature Review.](#)

What's on the calendar?

CMTAI Conference goes Biennial
Next Conference in 2024!

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What's on the calendar?

- *CMTAI's Biennial Creative Exchange in Goa*

April 28th - 30th 2023

**CMTAI Conference goes Biennial
Next Conference in 2024!**

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We will feature you on our instagram stories

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