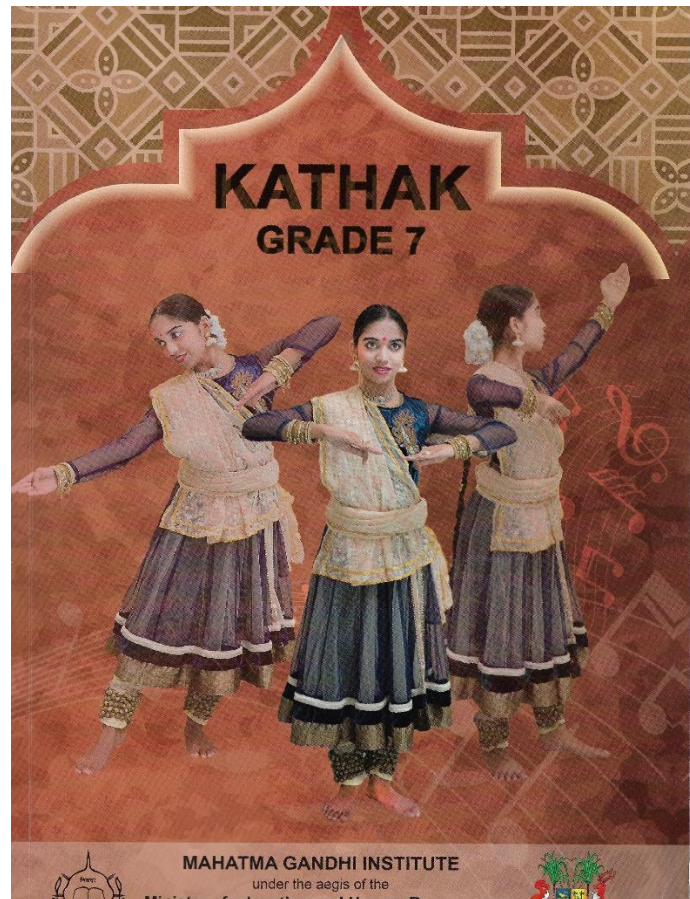


**Grade 7 Textbooks to Learn Indian Classical Dances**  
*Kathak, Kuchipudi and Bharata Natyam*  
Published by the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Mauritius  
Project Coordinator: K. Mantadin

**A Review by Swarna Thirumalai, M.A.**

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**A Unique Series**

A unique and brilliantly illustrated textbook set for 7<sup>th</sup> grade dancing class students produced by the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Moka, Mauritius. The men and women on the Team – the Project Coordinator (Mr. K. Mantadin), the Panel Coordinator (Ms. S. Dabee), the Writing Team (P. D. Luchman, Mrs. A. Dwarka-Bania and Ms. V. Naynan) and all the other Team Members have done a tremendous job of bringing out text books on three out of the many

classical dances of India, *Bharata Natyam*, *Kuchipudi* and *Kathak* for the children of Mauritius – to the Grade 7 students, with much hard work, imagination and devotion.

Each book is well-written, with detailed introduction to the specific dance, for which the illustrators have selected and added the appropriate photos, pictures, diagrams and designs. The beautiful, elegant graphic designs enhance the value and usefulness of the books to a very great extent. Some graphics look simple but are full of beauty and meaning. I take my hat off to these talented graphic artists.

These textbooks are intended for students for use in their classrooms and performance theatre. Yet these are designed in a manner and with a structure that are directly useful also to the educators, teachers of dance, and volunteers/private tutors of Indian Classical Dances. In other words, the creative imagination of K. Mantadin and his Team has taken into account not only the needs of formal instruction but also the demands of ever-growing non-formal learners of Indian dances. There cannot be a real and wholesome substitute to the actual/physical dance trainer who imparts beautiful rhythmic body movements, hand movements, and as dedicated dancers would say, make the dancer one with the dance. And yet dance learning and performing becomes more systematic and absorbing with guidance through such well-designed textbooks as the series under review here.

There have been no books like these in India, either in colleges and universities where dance is taught, or in Institutes where students pay large sums to come and learn dancing. This is a pioneering effort of the MGI Team under the project coordinator K. Mantadin – something others in the world who teach these dances could make use of.

### **General Outline/Structure of the Textbooks**

The textbooks are divided into several chapters. Every chapter as its own teaching and learning points given in simple English. Each chapter has its own exercises based on the information presented in that particular chapter. **Points to Remember** section gives a brief summary of the salient points described and discussed in the chapter.

The following division of chapters presented in the textbook on **Kathak** may be taken as the illustration of chapter divisions in the other two books also. However, emphasis in chapters differs from one textbook to another based on the needs to describe and practice particular variety of the dance form.

#### **Grade 7 Textbook Kathak**

##### **Chapter 1 Concept of Dance**

##### **Chapter 2 Dance in Mauritius**

##### **Chapter 3 Indian Classical Dances**

##### **Chapter 4 Kathak**

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**Chapter 5 Namaskar**

**Chapter 6 Body Conditioning Exercise**

**Chapter 7 Invocation**

**Chapter 8 *Taal* and *Laya***

**Chapter 9 *Tatkaar* and *Chakkaar***

**Chapter 10 Basic Movements**

**Chapter 11 Notation System and *Padhant***

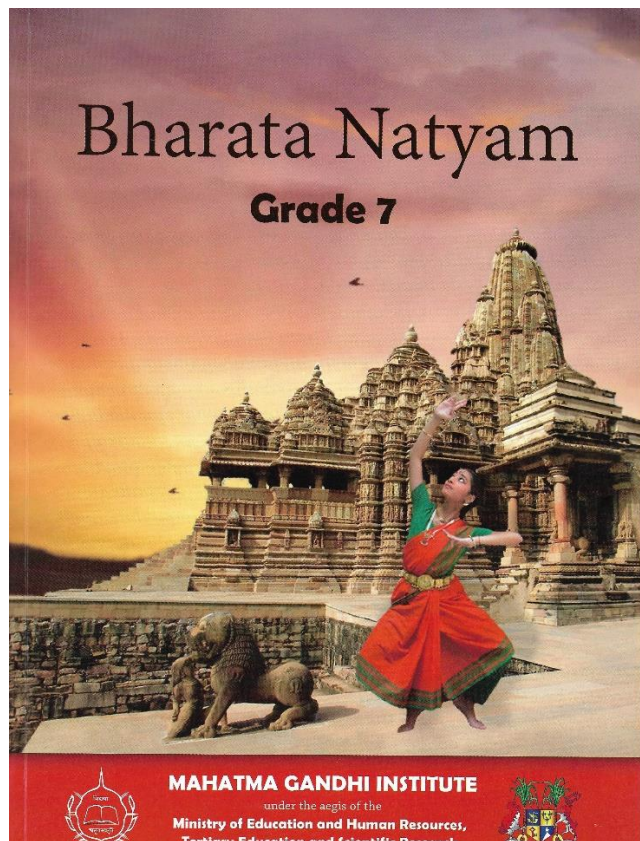
**Chapter 12 Compositions**

**Chapter 13 Talking Hands**

**Chapter 14 Creative Exercise**

**Glossary of Items**

**Appendix**



**Reviewing Some Select Chapters**

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In the book on Bharata Natyam, chapter 10 presents crucial information for learning and teaching about Rhythm in humans, in Nature and in Dance. It is a scholarly presentation in simple English of the *adavus* and musical instruments as well as *Tala, Kala* and *Laya*.

Chapter 8 on *Talking Hands* describing *hastas* and *mudras* is very enlightening. The chapter is useful not only to the teachers and learners of dance but also to millions in the audience who watch and enjoy the dance. Enlightened watchers are an important part of any dance program. Because of audience participation through facial expressions, nodding, and smiles and so on, the performers and producers get wholly encouraged. It is true that an ideal dancer may dance for her or his own pleasure, etc. Yet, art is not merely individualistic, it is also part of social life. This chapter is a great tool for teachers to use for teaching the hand movements of Bharata Natyam.

Chapter 11 is a very interesting chapter about the pioneers of Bharata Natyam. One can learn about two great performers of Bharata Natyam – E. Krishna Iyer and Rukmini Arundel. With much dedication, they brought Bharata Natyam to higher levels of artistic achievement.

Chapter 2 on **What is Dance?** is a short but comprehensive study of world dances and teaches why and how dance came into being from ancient times. Pictures are put in place which show the body movements in early days which became later dance poses. It is amazing to learn so much from that small chapter. The chapter ends with a note on **Benefits of Dance**. Once again, a fund of knowledge is handed over to us about dance and dancing.

Chapter 12 is on **Dances in Mauritius**. It is full of historical facts, and many relevant and interesting facts about the colourful dances of various kinds prevalent even now in Mauritius. The same chapter is found in the other two books also and carry some other facts ideas and pictures.

There is a chapter on **Body Conditioning** and it is something all students in all schools could be given training in, before starting dance or sports. Many school students need good posture, good breathing skills and stretching activities. I would highly recommend school libraries in India to buy and keep this set of books on their shelves for their teachers to make use of for their students. Not only the students but the teachers also should learn some of these exercises to stay healthy and strong!

### **Theoretical Perspective**

Mrs. Gyan, GOSK, the Director-General of Mahatma Gandhi Institute says in her Foreword,

“... to provide a pedagogical space when the young will be able to explore their own affective responses to forms of artistic expression, to develop sensibility, while acquiring a whole set of skills, including not only spatial awareness, pattern recognition, or movement coordination, but also the benefits of group and team work, of joint effort, higher level creative thinking, and

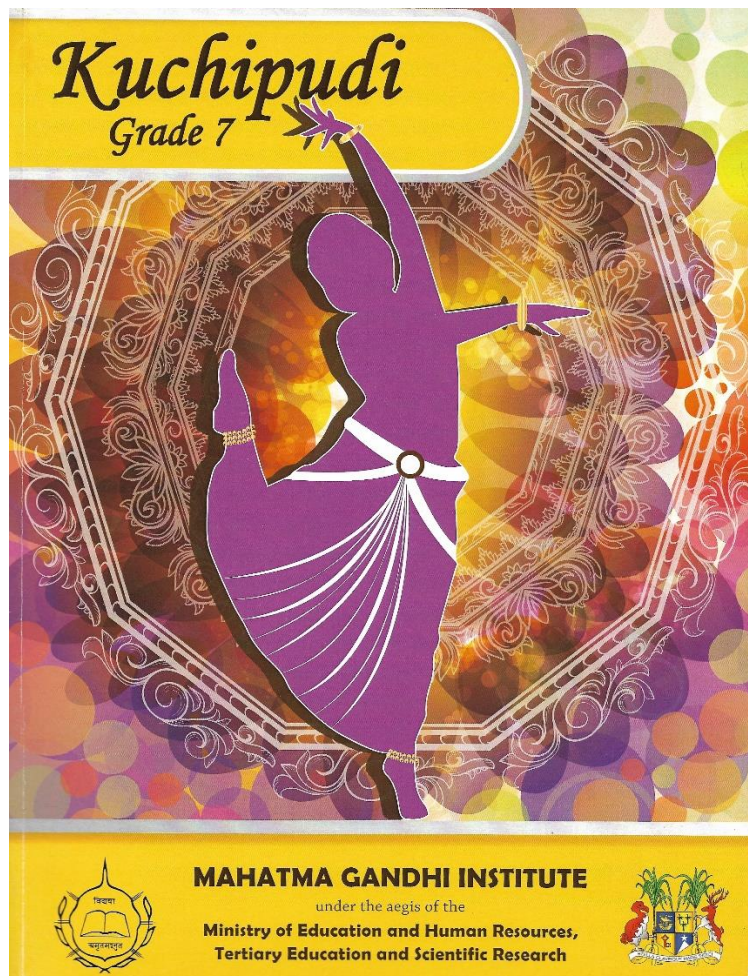
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expression, as well as an overall sense of shared pleasure and excitement. This is what emotional intelligence is all about.”

We see in these words the theoretical perspective and justification, justifiably going well beyond enjoyment and performance of arts. While artistic expression could be individualistic, its social purpose as well psychological benefits should not be missed. Insightful words of Mrs. Gyan’s understanding should help us to go beyond the purposes of learning these Indian Classical Dances to maintain ethnic or national identity and to look as well into other personal and social benefits of the curriculum and syllabus for dance teaching in Mauritius schools.

## Kuchipudi



This set has so many gems of knowledge to offer about all features of dance. In **Kuchipudi** textbook, the fourth chapter discusses Dance in Mauritius. This is a very insightful and useful chapter with a historic perspective. Chapter 10 talks about **Tala**, **Kala** and **Laya**. But, in this textbook on **Kuchipudi**, one can learn about percussion instruments also. One can read

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and gather much interesting information about the *tabla*, *mridangam* and other instruments. The description of **adavus** in each book has much to offer to students of dance.

The photos of group dances are scintillating and refreshing.

I have seen the **Tarangam** as a little girl when film star and dancer Raja Sulochana danced on the brass plate edge – it was such a splendid performance I can even now see the way she walked on stage and danced so gracefully and performed *Bama Kalabam* with other artistes.

Chapter 6 is another one having a fund of information on Indian Classical Dances. The best photographs with great colours have been chosen to present dance poses.

## **Kathak**

In the book on **Kathak** also, Chapter 2 talks about **Dances in Mauritius** with much information and great pictures. Chapter 8 talks about **Taal** and **Laya**. These are very well described and explained with diagrams, charts and designs.

The books are filled with questions and exercises for students to work on. At the end of each book, a chapter talks about how to “Practice” the dance – a very important and essential part of all training.

## **Collaborative Learning**

The Project Coordinator and Head of the Department of Percussion Instruments, Mr. K. Mantadin, has this apt analytical statement in his Preface on page 5 of the Bharata Natyam textbook: “We are aware that children construct knowledge in their own way and have different learning styles. The textbook has been designed to cater for such needs. Special features and a generous number of illustrations, pictures, concept maps and activities have been included to promote collaborative learning and other additional skills like team spirit, cooperation and understanding diverse nature of learners. These would help teachers to organize their interactions at classroom level. Teachers may give more activities, depending upon the availability of resources and time.”

## **To Conclude**

Indeed, traditional art forms, originally intended perhaps mostly to maintain identity of Indian nationality and culture, are now placed on a strong scientific footing which will help generate creativity, even as these help provide entertainment and psychological and social support.

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