



# CIRCLE DANCING AS A SYMBOLIC FORM: CULTURAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

MPHTH 18.07.65

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## CIRCLE DANCING AS A SYMBOLIC FORM: CULTURAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

### Abstract:

Dance is a natural part of religious ceremonies and the main form of the human communication with God, as well as the highest form of expression of inner experience, the search for unity divine. In the dance of early man, planetary and cosmic rhythms and processes had taken, showed and expressed. Connection in a dance is a symbolic form of culture with magic rituals. Circle dancing as means of expression of the collective identity and communication with the spirits of nature. Ancient's thoughts about the world, which develops by circle. Symbolism of the circle dancing. Explanation of the gestures and movements in circle dancing of the nomads. Dance as an art. Ritual dance. Symbols ritual dance contained the law as its construction idea of animism. Sacred meaning of dancing and magic nomadic rituals in Kazakh art.

**Keywords:** circle dancing, symbolic form, ritual dance

### Introduction

Gesture, movement, dance - are the first language that had arisen long before the written language and even music originated. Individually or in a group, people expressed and lived through various internal states of motion. Before the invention of written languages, dance was a more important method of passing stories down from generation to generation.

Circle dance, also known as circle

dancing, is a style of dance done in a circle (open or closed) to musical accompaniment, such as rhythm instruments and singing. Circle dancing is probably the oldest known dance formation and was part of community life from when people first started to dance.

Dancing in a circle is an ancient tradition common to many cultures for marking special occasions, rituals, strengthening community and encouraging togetherness. The dance can also be

njoyed as an uplifting group experience or as part of meditation. Circle dances are choreographed to many different styles of music and rhythms.

Circle dancers are in physical contact with each other; the connection is made by hand-to hand, finger-to-finger or hands-on-shoulders. It is a type of dance where anyone can join in without the need of partners or qualification. Generally, the participants follow a leader around the dance floor while holding the hand of the dancers beside them. The dance can be gentle or energetic.

### **Methods**

Circle dancing is prominently found in the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Southern Europe. Modern circle dance mixes traditional folk dances, mainly from European or Near Eastern sources, with recently choreographed ones to a variety of music both ancient and modern. There is also a growing repertoire of new circle dances to classical music and contemporary songs.

Dance symbols had archetypal nature, since their content had been contained mythological concepts expressing the unity of Man with Mother Nature, where the feminine principle personified by the earth, and the masculine by the sky. With the help of dance, people were talking with animated forces of nature, with sacred world of the ancestors for them, with the spirit of the tribal totem. Using the symbolic language of ritual dances people were trying to put natural chaos under control, update and purified world order. In this case, the individual didn't separate himself from the community and accepted as surely that whole system of its verbal and nonverbal communication with the world

as his own. Symbols of the ritual dance contained the law as its construction idea of animism, animation of all nature and, accordingly, expressed a message directed to the spirits of nature [1, p. 8].

The ancients believed that everything in the world was developing in a circle. Each thing had its beginning and an end, but these polar concepts were related to continuous circle of life. Earth plane death turned into birth in the beyond, and otherworldly death had continuation in the form of birth on the Earth. Symbolically, this process was visible Sun movement from Earth. Such allegorical representations of the Sun are still preserved today in some cultures.

Dance as a symbolic form of culture has its ontological foundation in primitive man's being, who had been completely dependent on nature. Hence, the origins of dance associated with the mystical forces of nature. Levi-Brull called kind of connections, which had been established by myth as a mystical connection. Mystical communion - is associative-psychological and semantic connection perceived and experienced as a way of real interdependence of things and phenomena. There are no things and animals in our understanding where everything was dominated by the mystical connection.

Myth is the kingdom of universal lycanthropy: the thing is not only thing, but at the same time and animate being; sun is the same fireball that we see in the sky every day, but at the same time is severe god who gives fertility and drought. For primitive man these ideas had something original and not a result of the connection (association) of the two images [2]. Thus, the myth as a way of

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<sup>1</sup> The work is carried out within the framework of the research project of the Science Committee of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan "The Role and Place of Cultural Monuments in the Kazakhstani Modernization in the Context of 2050 Strategy."

human life and attitude is entirely based on the semantic twinning of Man with the world. Man perceives the psychological sense as the original properties of things here, considering and experiencing the phenomena of nature as animate entity. Animism, antropomorfism, sociomorphism, mythological worldview conditioned the natural circulation of individuals using the expressive body language to the mighty forces of Mother Nature with a specific message.

Symbolic language of human movements differs from the language of movements of animals to be associated with a higher form of reflection of reality - with consciousness. The evolution of forms of reflection in the wildlife has resulted in the evolution of language movements. Using this language of the movement of animals pass each other necessary information for their existence, carry a "tag" and "display". It is connected with the exercise of their biological needs for nutrition, self-preservation, reproduction. Therefore, the same way, bee, which has found nectar, makes "dance" returning to the hive, and thus directs the other bees to a food source. There are so-called "marriage dance" of animals and birds. Biologists cite examples of "dancing" perpetrated by beavers in preparation for the construction of their buildings in the water. "People are the highest of all living entities, using signs. Of course, not only people, but also animals react to certain things as signs of something else, but these signs do not reach that complexity and perfection, which are found in human speech, writing, art... Human civilization is impossible without signs and sign systems, the human mind is inseparable from the functioning of signs – and possibly even the intelligence to be identified precisely with the functioning of signs." [3, 45 p.]

Regardless of affiliation to a particular religion, nationality, profession or social type - we all remember and know the language of the circular dance. Going back to the simplicity and wisdom, we release a deep potential strength and joy. Melodies themselves suggest the right steps, and hands of the partners do not give a stop on random errors.

Circle dances repeated movement of the Sun in the Sky, and may close, enter and represent the holy place itself. When the dance is performed around an object, at the same time closing and concluding it in a magic circle, protecting and giving strength. If there was a girl in the center the purpose of the dance would reach the center of the object and that acquire meaning either initiation or gaining paradise. In Islamic dervishes whirling in dance, imitate the movement of the planets around its own axis and around the Sun.

## **Results**

Initially ritual and dance ritual was always a circle dances, manifesting in a circular pattern, which enclosed the space of the sacred, protected area. We introduce the notion of the Circumambulation: concentration on a single point, which is the center of the circle.

Circumambulation (from Latin circum around + ambulātus to walk) is the act of moving around a sacred object or idol. Circumambulation of temples or deity images is an integral part of Hindu and Buddhist devotional practice (known in Sanskrit as pradakṣī ā). It is also present in other religions, including Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

In the Catholic Church, a priest sometimes circumambulates an altar while incensing it with a thurible. In addition, at some Catholic shrines, it is a tradition to

circumambulate around the cult object of the place, usually relics of a saint or an image of Jesus or the Virgin Mary. Often this is performed three times, as a reference to the Trinity.

In Romania, there is the custom for Easter to circumambulate the church three times by singing priests leading the people, just before finishing Easter Mass. It symbolizes the funerary procession of the Jesus Christ burial.

Tawaf is one of the Islamic rituals of pilgrimage. During the Hajj and Umrah, Muslims are to circumambulate the Kaaba (most sacred site in Islam) seven times, in a counter-clockwise direction [4]. The circling is believed to demonstrate the unity of the believers in the worship of the One God, as they move in harmony together around the Kaaba, while supplicating to Allah.

In addition, the Kaaba is the most circumambulated structure in this world. Pilgrims constantly circumambulate the Kaaba at all times except for the time of prayers, when small birds and angels are said to circumambulate the Kaaba [5].

In Judaism and Christianity, one has the circumambulation of Jericho by the Israelites in the Book of Joshua. The Jewish faith uses circumambulation during Hoshanah Rabbah at the end of the Festival of Sukkot, and a Jewish bride circumambulates the groom during the wedding ceremony. Incensing the altar is in the tradition of the priestly rites of Moses and Aaron.

In many Hindu temples, the temple structure reflects the symbolism of the Hindu association of the spiritual transition from daily life to spiritual perfection as a journey through stages. Ambulatory passageways for circumambulation are present through which worshipers move in a clockwise direction, starting at the

sanctuary doorway and moving inward toward the inner sanctum where the deity is enshrined. This is a translation of the spiritual concept of transition through levels in life into bodily movements by the worshipers as they move inwardly through ambulatory halls to the most sacred centre of spiritual energy of the deity.[7] Circumambulation is done in a clockwise direction and in an odd rather than even number of times. Circumambulatory walking around the shrine, by keeping time, is a common form of Hindu prayer. The circumambulatory pathway made of stone around the shrine is called the Pradakshina path [6].

In Zen Buddhism kinhin is the walking meditation that is practiced between long periods of the sitting meditation known as zazen. Practitioners walk clockwise around a room while holding their hands in shashu, with one hand closed in a fist, while the other hand grasps or covers the fist. During walking meditation, each step is taken after each full breath.

In Zen Buddhism, 'jundo' can mean any ritual circuit or circumambulation. At Tassajara each morning, the Doshi visits four different altars on his/her way to the zendo, to make bows and offerings of incense. This jundo begins with the first rolldown of the Han, and ends as the Doshi enters the zendo with the third rolldown. After offering incense and bowing at the altar, the Doshi walks around the zendo behind the meditators, in what is called the 'kentan', or 'inspection of the sitting platform'. As the Doshi passes, each resident raises his/her hands in gassho without bowing; this joins Doshi and sitters in mutual acknowledgement.

In Levan Pheras, which is performed during wedding ceremonies, the four rounds of pheras symbolize the warding off of evil by circumambulating a purifying and

transforming object, in this case the holy book, the GranthShib.

### **Discussion**

The Semachiah dance has Turkic origin; it came to Anatolia with the Central Asian nomads and had few changes for Sufi ritual [7]. The origin of the circular dance is lost in prehistoric depth. They naturally, spontaneously arose in the heart of the people. Festive and simple it was timed to mark events of the year: for sowing and harvesting - meditative and fervent, performed for a spell elemental spirits of the sun and rain, to bring happiness and peace. Circle dance served as a special language to communicate with nature, gods, men, and with his own nature. Distinctive culture and national traditions had added to the music and dance of different places its unique local charm. Nevertheless, with all variety of characters, people of different countries united by the structure of the dance circle. People hold hands and dance enhances energy, directing it into the mainstream of intuitive knowledge [8].

Clockwise movement shows the desire of realization and anticlockwise - movement about spiraling back into the realm of the unconscious. Center is creative metamorphosis. Movement around the center, outlining the center, directs the energy into the center. This sacred process helps to reinforce a sense of control and security [9]. Healing nature of folk dance culture can make a significant contribution to the establishment of peace in the world, human health, and society as a whole.

Movement of all dances were very simple, being based on the original motion of folk dances from different countries, music, usually also national. However, with the development of the system, it includes

more and more modern and classic tunes.

The symbolism of the circle represents the image of infinity and perfection. Circle dance is mystery where all participant identify themselves with the infinite power of life that symbolizes own immortality at the same time. Various embodiments of the circular dance are known to all nations without exception. The purpose of the dance to bring yourself to a state of ecstasy, thereby bringing the vision of the shaman. When the body is left by the physical strength, it is replaced by the power of the spirit, which calls ecstatic experiences. The man begins to perceive the other incarnation of life, meet with spirits, confers with the long-dead ancestors, etc.

There is no separation in the circle. All participants are equal. The circle depends on the contribution of each of its members: each is important and each is necessary to the working of the whole. So, while there is connection, there is also individual movement and personal expression of the steps. The atmosphere of the dance is experienced differently by everyone. Thus we find that there is unanimity but not uniformity; we are all expressing the same dance but in our own unique way.

Similarly the goal in life is not uniformity but unanimity. In any group, to achieve a common spirit with one another and a sense of unity is a powerful experience. We have all touched the same place within us, a common place, and from each of us that flows through the coloured glass of our own personality. This is the dance of life. In Sacred Dance, we experience this unanimity and know that it is possible in a more global sense. We all move towards the center of the circle - symbolising the spiritual goal - we each approach differently but the intention is the same.

The circle gains a momentum of its

own. It becomes a single entity and the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. The essence of Sacred Dance is felt when as individuals we can allow ourselves to be danced. The head no longer tries to remember the steps or the pattern; the memory is in the body and the dance becomes a meditation. It flows and weaves in a kaleidoscope of movement and energy. We all move together in harmony and the simplest dance becomes a powerful expression of that greater unity.

In the dance, we are united, yet we retain our uniqueness, we are each a part of the integrated whole while maintaining our individual integrity. This is a direct expression in form of the nature of our association with each other on this planet and with Divinity. We are like the dancers in a circle - moving together for the common good, yet each playing our own part. We all have a role to play, and the whole is not complete unless we do it to the best of our ability. A circle that is broken is disjointed and does not flow. We have to cooperate with each other to create the correct environment in which to experience the depth and meaning of the movement.

We all attempt to dance the same steps, yet it is the flow of the movement, which is so vital. It is advisable for practical reasons to all move in the same direction; on a spiritual level this is translated into the intention to work towards the same goal -- that of creating an atmosphere of peace and harmony, joy and vitality. It is as if the dance becomes a microcosm of our journey in life: if we flow with each other a feeling of well-being and connection is generated; if we resist or fight against our neighbour, disharmony and tension are in evidence.

One aspect of Sacred Dance that has always fascinated me is the mirror-image effect. When I am teaching I warn people

on the opposite side of the circle that they must reverse the movements they see me make. It appears to them as though I am doing the exact opposite of what I am asking them to do! How true of life. When it seems as though someone is moving in entirely the opposite direction to you, look again and decide whether they are just 'on the other side of the circle' doing the same steps and in fact moving in the identical direction. Maybe they are not in opposition to you but merely at a different point of the circle of life.

Features and basic principles of the sacred circle dance were to give joy of association to each dance participant, regardless of their ability, or lack of experience;

Simplicity and naturalness of movement;

The most important part is not intended for the audience, but not the performance and demonstration; dancing together - to feel and to have experience together;

There is no "master" and "slave", good and bad dancing, all are united in their desire to common joy;

Common language in terms of different nations, the common human manifestations that have been planted by nature.

Circle dances are widespread on the territory of Kazakhstan. Ritual hunting dances, war dances constituted an essential aspect of the way of life in traditional societies such as the American Indians and in many African tribes and nations are known. On the territory of Kazakhstan during Sak` s period there were military dances, to stimulate the rise of the military spirit, providing a successful outcome of battles. War dances were used to develop a collective will and strength, inspiration to great deeds. They formed a visually courage ideals. Ceremonial

dances of shamans took an important place in the nomadic Turkic culture. They were called Baksy and of course played great role of healers of various kinds. Baksy`s were manipulating spirits, urging them to help. For the sake of the sacred purpose, Baksy tried to perform ritual dances as more expressive and figurative as they could trying to reach technical virtuosity dances. Thus Baksy`s sought to convey the meaning of his message turned to the spirit through the language of dance. According to Emile Durkheim and contemporary Kazakh, culture expert B.G. Nurzhanov ritual preceded the religion. [10] Based on these statements, it is possible to make judgments about what dance is preceded by the world religions.

Thus, the source of subjects and the meaning of the eastern classical dance - Egyptian, Indian, Chinese, and Japanese - was mythology tells of the pagan gods and heroes. According to Hindu mythology, Shiva - the patron god of dance. Many awesome features and appearance of Shiva cult due to the fact that in the Hindu triad (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva - three faces of Brahman), he is the God-destroyer the world at the end of each period (Kalpa). This cosmic dance of Shiva is called 'Anandatandava,' meaning the Dance of Bliss, and symbolizes the cosmic cycles of creation and destruction, as well as the daily rhythm of birth and death. The dance is a pictorial allegory of the five principle manifestations of eternal energy – creation, destruction, preservation, salvation, and illusion. According to Coomerswamy, the dance of Shiva also represents his five activities: 'Shrishti' (creation, evolution); 'Sthiti' (preservation, support); 'Samhara' (destruction, evolution); 'Tirobhava' (illusion); and 'Anugraha' (release, emancipation, grace). Dance understood as embodiment of

energy of Shiva.

Dance transformed into art separated from myth and at the same time overcoming it. Sociocultural framework of the dance form as we have mentioned above mythological ceremonies and rituals where people inspired life as the embodiment of divine powers and he becomes the embodiment of it. With the help of the symbolic language of the dance man communicated with divine powers. However, these rituals were not the art of dance in the true sense of the word, because they were primarily a magical character and were not aimed at the aesthetic and mystical, and at the same time had very practical goal: to connect to the pagan gods to ask them for a change in the weather, luck on the hunt. One of the significant start in dancing was a dance as a game. S. Sh. Tleubayev defines the beginning of the game as a clan and genetic dancing. [11] The game is always associated with the work, with the birth of beauty and a sense of beauty, it brings the participants enjoyment, pleasure. It is a characteristic of the art of dance.

Saka tribes becoming members of Uisun, Kangyuy, and Alan associations have kept their own ritual and folk art traditions, including the shamanic ones. Emotional value of the rhythm kindered the beginning of practice of the ancient Kazakh Kom (Bucks-Shaman) with Middle Eastern Sufi folk dances of dervishes - Bektashi. Late Usun culture took a lot from Saks culture abounding magical elements. Known ethnographer U.D. Zhanibekov wrote: "Although many of the canonical forms of ancient dances did not reach us, their story subjects remained in people's memory, traditional hobbies of many generations' ideals of dance plastics. This kind of art of the Kazakhs was never limited to certain system of the gestures, movements and

“mechanics” of the dance. Studying of folklore, artefacts, written sources, and the lexicon of the Kazakh language gives reason to believe that dance, be it shamanic, or dance-game accompanied the whole process of development of Kazakh society from ancient times to the present day enriching its spiritual culture” [12].

The meaning of dance movements’ had a utilitarian character: it expressed a message about the expectations of people facing Mother Nature, to Spirit Totem of the Patron and to the Spirits of Ancestors. Magic rituals pursue direct, immediate objectives. In critical periods of life, such as when a long drought could lead to crop failure and threatened extinction of the tribe, there were performed a magic crisis ritual - A Rain Dance. [13, p.3] Returning to the logic of Losev’s reasoning on signs in characters as the original and primitive pointing out an object, we can say that in ritual dances gestures, rhythm, movement, facial expressions, the corresponding face painting and body, costume elements, spoken sounds, humming songs were used as signs.

J. Frazer cites numerous examples of what rainmaking rituals during a prolonged drought in most of the tribes accompanied by dancing. Thus, the women of the tribe Barong Bantu in South-East Africa after six months of drought specifically perform Rainmaking dance, wearing themselves in herbal belts instead of the usual clothes, headbands and short skirts leaf creepers. In this form, they emit sharp criticism and singing obscene songs, bypass wells, purifying them from dirt. Then they go to the house with a newly born twin, who were believed to have the ability to control the weather. Here women are sprayed with water from the mother of twins. Then they go on their way, shouting

and singing songs unbridled indecent dances. In our view, this form of symbolic - provocatively erotic behavior based on archetypes of the collective unconscious, they tried to attract the attention of the sky as machismo to the ground as the female principle, whereby it had started to rain. In South-Eastern Europe, particularly in Thessaly and the Macedonian Greeks, Rainmaking also resembles the above ritual Bantu Barong tribe. Serbs during the drought dress a little girl instead of the usual clothing grass, plants and flowers. Her face was also hidden under a blanket of green living. She was given a name Dodola. Accompanied by the girls she goes through the village. The procession stopped in front of each house. Dodola never ceases to spin in dance. The host pours a bucket of water on it [14].

### **Conclusion**

The most ancient ritual dances were very simple, they expressed timeless archetypes of the universe: circle, square, spiral, line, point. Each event of individual life or the life of the tribe was understood as a reflection of Cosmic processes in individual space. Human body is a living form of manifestation of the Cosmic forces through himself. The embodiment of a cosmic principle through movement. There was no division between social and ceremonial dances - people’s thinking was “religious”, but the entire culture and way of life reflected the desired Location in the Universal.

The genesis of dance as a symbolic form of culture was associated with magical rituals, where it was used as a means of expression of the collective consciousness and communication with the Spirits of Nature. Mythological worldview as animism and hylozoism - recognition of all that existed in nature as



a live, anthropomorphism - the transfer of human qualities to nature, sociomorphism - transfer characteristics of the nature of society were reflected in the language of ritual dances. An orderly manner of the animated nature was embodied in dance

constructing, visible and invisible worlds were merged into one. The meaning of movements, gestures, postures, facial expressions, body or appropriate coloring apparel were directly related to the mythological picture of the world.

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#### **АЙНАЛМАЛЫ БИ МӘДЕНИ РӘМІЗДІК ФОРМА: МӘДЕНИ-ФИЛОСОФИЯЛЫҚ ТАЛДАУ**

#### **Андатпа:**

Би – діни әдет-ғұрыптардың табиғи бөлігі және адамның Құдаймен қарым-қатынасының негізгі түрі, сондай-ақ ол ішкі тәжірибені білдірудің, Құдайдың бірлігін іздеудің жоғары түрі. Ертедегі адамның биінде планетарлық және ғарыштық ырғақтар мен үдерістер алынды, көрсетілді және бейнеленді. Ол өзін үлкен, тірі ғарыштың бір бөлігі ретінде сезініп, табиғат рухымен байланысқа түсті. Би байланыстары магиялық рәсімдік мәдениеттің рәміздік қалпы ретінде көрініс табады. Айналмалы билер ұжымдық бірегейлікті білдіру және табиғат рухымен қарым-қатынас жасау құралы ретінде көрініс табады. Шеңбер бойынша дамиды әлем туралы ежелгі ойлар архетиптік санада сақталған. Шеңбер бидің рәмізділігі және көшпенділердің шеңберлі билеріндегі ишара мен қимылдарды түсіндіру маңызды. Би өнер ретінде өзіне салттық биді де қамтиды. Салттық бидің рәміздері анимизмнің құрылымдық идеясы ретіндегі бейнені өзіне жинақтады. Қазақ өнерінде көшпенді салт-дәстүрдегі би мен магия киелі мәнге ие.

**Тірек сөздер:** айналмалы би, рәміздік форма, рәсімдік билер, архетиптік сана

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## **КРУГОВЫЕ ТАНЦЫ КАК СИМВОЛИЧЕСКАЯ ФОРМА: КУЛЬТУР-ФИЛОСОФСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ**

### **Аннотация:**

Танец является естественной частью религиозных обрядов и своеобразной формой общения человека с Богом, а также высшей формой выражения внутреннего опыта, поиска божественного единства. В танце раннего человека были выражены планетарные и космические ритмы, процессы. Человек входил в контакт с силами природы, ощущая себя частью огромного, живого космоса. Танец как символическая форма культуры тесно связан с магическими ритуалами. Известны круговые танцы как средство выражения коллективной идентичности и общения с духами природы. Это своеобразные мысли древнего человека о мире, который развивается по кругу в символизме кругового танца. В круговых танцах кочевников наличествует донесение мысли через жесты и движения. Танец есть искусство, ритуал. Символы ритуального танца содержали в себе информацию как структурную идею анимизма. В казахском искусстве танец имеет сакральное значение, таит в себе магию кочевых обрядов.

**Ключевые слова:** круговые танцы, символическая форма, ритуальные танцы, архетипы

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