

# Bhangra history



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Throughout the semester our class has been opened up to experiencing the Vancouver Bhangra Community. Bhangra is a folk dance that originated in Punjab but started in Vancouver during the 1970's and usually was performed with half guys and half girls, however the girls were Caucasian. Also, in Vancouver around the same time when there were labor rights strikes the Dhol become really popular because it was used in the strikes to receive fair wages. The 70's and 80's were when the Bhangra scene in Vancouver was blossoming and creating an identity for itself; However, it was a male dominated dance form with very little involvement from females.

Even in the 90's female Bhangra dancers were only on coed teams until the first all girls team in Vancouver, the UBC Girls Bhangra team in 2002. After hearing experiences from the UBC Girls team it was clear to see the change in the overall involvement of girls in the Bhangra competitive area. At first the UBC girls were not seen as equal to the male teams because Bhangra was considered a male dance form and even judges would tell them that they were not as the same level as the males because there were girls and could not perform in a manly enough way.

They were also told it was inappropriate for girls to dance in such a manner but the UBC girls didn't let that stop them. They continued on to dance regardless of the criticism they were getting and actually went on to win many first places, even at Vancouver International Bhangra in 2005, 2006 & 2007. The culture behind Bhangra is one of a conservative nature and any change usually takes a while but as we can see after the UBC girls more and more girls are freely joining Bhangra teams and even competing. The

negative stigma that was behind girls in Bhangra is slowly going away to make it a more accepting dance form for males and females.

I personally think the Bhangra Community in Vancouver plays a huge role in promoting a good outlet for younger children and all age group since schools and other outside of school organization teach it. Even our class at SFU is one of the first credit based Bhangra classes in North America and the reason why SFU is willing to offer such a class is because of how far Bhangra has come from its starting days in the 70's in Vancouver and the following it has generated not only in the Punjabi community but in a multicultural sense.

Bhangra in Vancouver has truly created a name for itself and cemented a foundation in the community as a popular form of dance. Not only are there numerous Bhangra classes and workout routines now there are also many Bhangra competitions that allow dancer of any skill group to partake. Another amazing thing for Bhangra in Vancouver would also be the exhibit called Bhangra. Me at the Vancouver Art Gallery coming this May. This exhibit shares the story of Bhangra here in Vancouver along with a dance along video for everyone at the exhibit.

The identity of Bhangra has really become that of interest to a lot people and this exhibit helps showcase how culturally filled and vibrant Bhangra can really be. The event that I choose to view to add to my understanding of Bhangra was SFU's Punjabi Night Live. The event took place on March 19th at Massey Theater and showcased SFU Elite Bhangra, many skits and a fashion show. The show was fully of comedy, color and of course Bhangra. One of our class members Bunti Gill was also performing with the Elite team.

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Watching their routine one could easily pick up the energy and charisma brought on to the stage by the team. The team wore huge smiles and added head shakes and personality to all moves. The routine was very entertaining to watch; However, at point Bunti's necklace broke off while performing but he didn't let it affect his performance and continued on like nothing had even happened. I think that continuing to perform even after his necklace broke is a really good quality in any dancer. Also through the show most of the outfits had a lot of vibrant colors and added to the overall performance.

Bhangra is a dance form that originated on the farm but has become something so amazing and lively with a huge fan base. It has come along way from being just a male dominated dance form to an open for all form of dancing. It is an important part of what makes the Vancouver Community diverse and adds such colorfulness, identity and personality to the Community. Bhangra dancing is no longer just a traditional form of dance on the farm and has really created a name for itself on a global level.