

Exploration to the history of bollywood dance



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An Exploration to the History of Bollywood Dance In 2008, the movie “ Slum dog Millionaire” inspired a new dance craze, quickly spreading across the globe. Due to the movies, popular hit song, “ Jai Ho” and the famous choreographed dance shown in a memorable performance during the closing credits of the film, known as Bollywood dance, has exploded into dance studios, workout facilities, and films worldwide.

For decades, the infusion of song and dance has been a vital element of the Indian and Hindu film industry.

Bollywood dance is not an easy topic to discuss because it does not have exact history, definition, or style associated with it. However, it still is a recognizable dance form, which is growing rapidly across the globe. Dance is vital aspect of the Hindu and Indian culture and has been for centuries. “ Bollywood absorbs all of western dancing and combines it with popular Indian folk dances.

In India, dance is done for every occasion — when a child is born, when a name is given to the child, when the lady is pregnant, when somebody gets married — children learn dance from when they are very young (Rauschert)”.

Nevertheless, Bollywood dance takes inspiration from Indian folk and classical dances such as; Bharata natyam, Kathak and Bhangra blended with western contemporary and hip-hop. The definition of “ Bollywood” described by Gopal and Moorti, “ Frequently remarked upon by insiders and always remarkable to outsiders, song-dance occupies the constitutive limit of Bollywood cinema. It determines – perhaps unfairly but invariably – the form

itself even as it frequently escapes the filmic context to inhabit other milieus (Gopal, 1)".

Bollywood dance historical roots refer to Hindi culture short film and movie industry and cultural art originating from Bombay, also referred to as Mumbai. Mumbai is the heart and soul of Bollywood's Hindi and Indian film industry. Bollywood song and dance sequences are the basis of every famous Indian film and have been for decades. Song and music generally explain the specific story or place in the movie, and expresses the moment through an impromptu song and dance number. Sometimes, a song is worked into the plot, so that a character has a reason to sing; other times, a song is an externalization of a character's thoughts, or presages an event that has not occurred yet in the plot of the movie.

In this case, the moment is almost always two characters' that are falling in love. Songs are a mode of indirect expression whereby characters can articulate thoughts and desires which may be inappropriate to state directly (Ganti, 81)". Film censor boards maintained very strict guidelines imposed on Hindi and Indian films.

Symbolic and seductive dance sequences were used to replace sex scenes to satisfy the censor board. Before 1960, Indian films represented traditional Indian folk and classical dance. Bharat Natyam was mostly shown in south Indian films, as opposed to Hindi films that had a strong influence of Kathak, also known as the "Mujara" that were connected with the tawaifs.

Some of these influences are still practiced today, but have blended with many more dance styles and do not represent its original dance form.

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The pioneer to Bollywood dance can be classified as one of the most historical and oldest dance practices of India, is Bharata Natyam, originally known as Sadir. This dance was performed in the Hindu temples in southern India. Evidence of this dance has an Indian history stemming back two thousand years in the book of Natya Shastra. During these times, the ancient sacred literature of Hinduism called the Vedas, which included four books, with the fifth being Natya Shastra, which describes and illustrates dance steps, moves and gestures.

The Vedas is the most sacred literature of India and the earliest literary record of Hinduism.

They contain spiritual knowledge to include all aspects of our life and are the earliest scriptures of Hindu teachings. This ancient Indian text illustrates methods used in Sanskrit plays during this period. The fundamental nature of the ancient text Natya Shastra can be explained as a guide to the traditional Hindu theatre. It describes Bharata Natyam key elements, such as; mudras, specific hand movements and positions used to convey the stories, facial expressions, body movements and postures.

Additionally, explained in the Natya Shastra, the dancer must use emotions, known as “ rasas” to convey her story. There are eight basic rasas; love, humor, pathos, anger, heroism terror, disgust and wonder, added later was serenity.

Families and teachers who taught the devadasis, made a conscience effort to continue the teachings of this dance for generations through oral tradition. Originally performed for royalty and the wealthy, eventually devadasis, in <https://assignbuster.com/exploration-to-the-history-of-bollywood-dance/>

some areas, were considered prostitutes and priests were known as pimps. The devadasis reached an all time low when the British began colonization of India toward the end of the nineteenth century. They were shocked to see women singing and dancing in temples, with very little or no clothing.

In 1927, temple dancing in India was banned. However, it continued to survive, in 1934 Rukmini Devi decided to establish a school, Kalashektras, in Madras. She paved the way for a more respectable dance movement. When the school was established, Rukmini, changed the name from Sadir to Bharata Natyam, due to its negative history of being associated with prostitution.

Now, exclusively performed in a theatre setting, Bharata Natyam is considered a very respectable dance.

Costumes consist of silk, gold saris, and leggings. An abundant amount of jewelry, around ankles, head, neck, ears nose and wrists is adorns the dancers. Even now, mostly middle to upper class citizens performs the dance. According to Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, “ the Indian dancer’s pre-occupations is not so much with space as with time, and the dancer is constantly trying to achieve the perfect pose which will convey a sense of timelessness (Jonas)”.

Due to its vast range of posture and blending of “ two complementary styles of movements; abstract dance sequences that stress virtuosity and rhythmic improvisation, and expressive dance sequences that seek to interpret classical poetry through mime (Jonas)”.

Bharata Natyam dancers begin training at a very young age of around six to seven years of age. They train for many years and must master a series of positions, steps and hand gestures. It takes a great deal of focus and body conditioning. Unlike ballet dancers, Bharata Natyam dancers can dance well into their more mature years.

Ballet consists of much more stress on the dancers' bodies, than Bharata Natyam, which focuses more on the mind. During the dance, the audience will center their attention to the dancer's hands, arms, eyes and facial expression to understand the message of the story. The performer must be able to interpret the story in a poetic manner to the audience as a meaningful and emotional experience. Continually male and female dancers widely train and perform one of the most popular and widely performed dance forms of India. Another aspect of Bollywood dance known as, Kathak dance, has fascinated audiences for centuries.

The word Kathak means “ the art of storytelling (Courtney)”. Originally, from northern India, it portrayed as a major classical dance and is recognized for its graceful hand movements, fast complex footwork and swift spins. Kathak supports flexibility and toning of the whole body. “ It is derived from the dance dramas of ancient India.

When the patronage shifted from the temples to the royal court, there was a change in the overall emphasis. The emphasis shifted from the telling of religious stories to one of entertainment.

Today, the story-telling aspect has been downgraded and the dance is primarily an abstract exploration of rhythm and movement (Courtney)”.

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Storytellers communicate through song and dance tales from the great Indian classics. Their main goal was to entertain as well as to educate with the assistance of literature in Sanskrit. Dancers from India and abroad have studied Kathak for its artistic qualities, musical and expressive narrative movements.

The main goal of the dance performer is to creatively improvise and build a relationship with the audience through the story they are portraying.

To the inexperienced viewer, Kathak footwork is often an invigorating experience. The footwork is a series of flat slaps on the floor, and is comprised of a twelve steps on each foot, while the dancer wears ankle bells, it creates several different sounds that can be a mesmerizing experience. “To conclude, the Kathak dancer is a storyteller, not a mime.

He describes the strut of a peacock, but he neither mimics nor becomes the peacock; he reproduces the essence of the movement of a character or animal, yet he neither mimics nor becomes that character or animal (Kippen)”.

The dancer interprets each situation and character, symbolizes it, and puts the story into dance. The Kathak dance tradition is without doubt one of India’s finest cultural accomplishments, and with so any outstanding supporters nationally and internationally it will continue to tell its stories for many generations to come. Finally, yet importantly associated with Bollywood dance, Bhangra is a progressively popular form of dance originating from Punjab.

The moves are uniquely traditional. People traditionally performed Bhangra when celebrating the harvest.

The particular steps of Bhangra imitate the way in which villagers farmed their land. In the beginning, this dance style was generally a celebration for the harvest festival, and has now a celebration of many occasions such as; weddings, receptions, parties and New Year celebrations. History of Bhangra can be linked as far back as the 1400's.

In the beginning, this dance was solely performed by men, but now is performed both by male and female genders. " The basic steps involve raising both arms in the air and alternately lifting the knees, while lightly hopping and bouncing the shoulders.

With backs straight and chests proud, dancers swing their arms and clap their hands (Rangrass)". Bhangra music utilizes the rhythm of a dhol drum, and a single-stringed instrument known as the iktar, along with several other instruments that are combined with the rhythmic movements of the dancers. The music and dance rhythm is an extraordinary combination of the performers hand claps, and the percussion of the instruments.

Bhangra has made a tremendous popularity surge worldwide, both in its traditional form, mixture with hip-hop and reggae in the last three decades.

This folk dance has been popularized in the Western World by South Asian communities and is seen in the West as an expression of Indian and Pakistani culture as a whole. Internationally Bhangra dance still survives in many different styles and forms to include; collegiate competitions, talent

shows, pop music videos, films, and workout facilities. It is apparent that Bollywood dance is an infusion of centuries of Indian folk and classical dance forms. Originally shown in the Hindi and Indian film industry in the early twentieth century, it has now transformed into an international phenomenon. A hybrid and evolving art form, Bollywood dance like filmigiti has borrowed features from indigenous and folk traditions as well as transnational and Western dance forms (Gopal, 46)".

The growing popularity of Bollywood Dance has emerged in dance studios, stages, workout facilities across the world. " While film-inspired dance classes like, those run by Shiamak Davar's Institute for Performing Arts (SDIPA), are an increasingly frequent occurrence in the urban centers in India (Gopal, 243)". It is impossible to actually account for the exact history of this rapidly growing dance movement.