

Dance as an art form

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The history of dance as an art can be traced with the emergence of cultures around the world and with the evolution of mankind. In early civilizations, dance has been a very essential part of their primitive cultures. When people asked for rain, they danced for the gods of rain. Or when they want to have a good catch, they would move as if they were pulling a net full of fishes. In essence, man expressed himself through movement when oral and spoken language was still on their nascent stage. Together with the visual arts, dance was the first mode of expression and communication.

With the progress of different societies, dance has also evolved and adapted to the changes. From religious activities to public performances, dance and other similar movements were popularized as a means of easily understanding the message. Facial expressions, activities familiar to the audience were also characteristic of this art form. As the society advanced to a more sophisticated and more interactive community of cultures, dance has also evolved and surpassed its role in the religious activities and courts of rulers. Social dancing as we know it today traces its origins in three possible foundations.

Ballroom dancing for example became popular with courtesans in the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe and not much participated by the commoners. Such exclusivity of dance to the aristocracy distanced ballroom dancing from being patronized by the greater public. It was only after the political and social reforms in the 18th and 19th centuries that the dances of the aristocracy also became popular with the masses. Thus, from being confined to a wealthy few, dance has also benefited from the economic and political victories of the lower and middle classes.

Somehow, dance became an integral part of the politicization of culture. The most popular of these ballroom dances is the waltz which originated from the Austrian courts. The dance itself represented the political trend. As the society deviated from dogmatism and rigidity so was the spirit they found in waltz. Due to its popularity, waltz as an art form began to deteriorate and was eclipsed by other dances now unconfined to the elite. The 20th century found the convergence of South American and Caribbean music and rhythm which had more primitive origins.

Social dancing evolved from its origins in Europe to a concoction of various cultures. Tap dance and folk dances also influenced the development of social dancing that through time, artistic components were added and invented or revived to produce a more vibrant variety of dances. In the course of the evolution of human societies, culture has adapted to the changes brought about by the modifications in the economic foundations of the era. Culture, as a part of the superstructure, changed through time.

The early models of human production system were a very nature-dependent system and as a result they also had a nature-themed dance or dances which depicted movements, phenomenon and mysteries in nature. Come the slave societies, dance depicted the state of the society. Though there was a lineated domain of dance. The ruling slave owners appreciated dances which exemplified their dominion over their slaves, depicted their power while slave communities dance as they intend to be liberated and break free from the bonds of slavery.

That is how society and culture works in dynamic and co-relational interactions. Different societies have different levels of appreciation for

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dance. Aesthetics can not only be solely responsible for the development of dance, utilitarian values are also of prime consideration. The emergence of a ruling class made it possible for dance to attain its position as an art in the courts of the kings and emperors. Utilized as a form of entertainment for the ruler and visiting dignitaries, dance has been appreciated more ever since for the aesthetic qualities that it had than message that it conveyed.

What was pleasant for the audience became a prime reason for the development of dances. What the ruling class appreciated as art were also the same for their subjects. Historical accounts suggest how dance reached such point beginning as early as the Egyptian civilization. Egyptian society witnessed the evolution of dance from simple hunting rituals during the ancient times. Connected with the religious aspect of their economic activities, dance was used to summon goodwill from the gods and assure bountiful keep.

As the Egyptian society progressed, dance was separated from its ritualistic character and was focused in the formal religious necessities. Evident in their movements were the daily activities of the Egyptian people. Greek culture draws its ancestry from Egypt and similarly started out as part of the religious exercises. Dance was seen incorporated to drama and dance festivities. Similarly, Greek dance expressed the activities of the people and each dance corresponds to a certain activity and character of the audience.

In Europe, the complete evolution of dance from its utilitarian concepts to an aesthetic value started to surface as early as 364 BC. Though the main purpose was really to honor the gods, dance was also used to entertain the population in times of plagues or any catastrophic events. Since then, dance

has been viewed as an art to be appreciated by the population and not only by the gods. Therefore, historically speaking, dance has served its purpose of contextualizing of human thoughts. Expression of these thoughts provided the reason for evolution.