

✓ Definition of dance and General Introduction to Classical, Folk and Traditional dance

Dance is a type of art that generally involves movement of the body, usually rhythmic and to music, performed in many different cultures and used as a form of expression, social interaction and exercise or presented in a spiritual or performance setting.

Dance may also be regarded as a form of nonverbal communication between humans, and is also performed by other animals (bee dance, patterns of behavior such as a mating dance). Gymnastics, figure skating and synchronized swimming are sports that incorporate dance, while martial arts kata are often compared to dances. Motion in ordinarily inanimate objects may also be described as dances.

Definitions of what constitutes dance are dependent on social, cultural, aesthetic, artistic and moral constraints and range from functional movement to virtuoso techniques such as ballet. Dance can be participatory, social or performed for an audience. It can also be ceremonial, competitive or erotic. Dance movements may be without significance in themselves, such as in ballet or European folk dance, or have a gestural vocabulary / symbolic system as in many Asian dances.

Classical dance of India has developed a type of dance-drama that is a form of a total theater. The dancer acts out a story almost exclusively through gestures. Most of the classical dances of India enact stories from Hindu mythology. Each form represents the culture and ethos of a particular region or a group of people.

The criteria for being considered as classical is the style's adherence to the guidelines laid down in Natyashastra, which explains the Indian art of acting. The Sangeet Natak Akademi currently confers classical status on eight Indian classical dance styles: Bharatanatyam (Tamil Nadu), Kathak (North, West and Central India), Kathakali (Kerala), Kuchipudi (Andhra Pradesh), Odissi (Odissa), Manipuri (Manipur), Mohiniyattam (Kerala), and Sattriya (Assam). All classical dances of India have roots in Hindu arts and religious practices.

The tradition of dance has been codified in the Natyashastra and a performance is considered accomplished if it manages to evoke a rasa (emotion) among the audience by invoking a particular bhava (gesture or facial expression). Classical dance is distinguished from folk dance because it has been regulated by the rules of the Natyashastra and all classical dances are performed only in accordance with them.

India is a land of varied cultures and traditions. Diversities in all spheres make the Indian culture quite unique. Indian folk and tribal dances are product of different socio-economic set up and traditions evolved over ages. In India, we have festivals and celebrations virtually every day, and dances are performed to express joy and festivity. This has added to the richness of Indian culture. Since every festival is accompanied by celebration, folk dances have become an integral part of our social milieu. There are numerous folk and tribal dances, and almost all of them have continuously evolved and improvised.

Folk dances are performed for every possible occasion - to celebrate the arrival of seasons, birth of a child, a wedding and festivals, which are a plenty. The folk dances are extremely simple with minimum of steps or movement. Indian folk dances are full of energy and vitality. Some dances are performed separately by men and women while in some performances men and women dance together. On most occasions, the dancers sing themselves, accompanied by artists with instruments. Each form of folk dance has a specific costume and rhythm. Most of the costumes, worn for folk dances, are colorful with extensive jewels and designs. Let's have a look at folk dances of India.