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CULTURAL DANCES OF INDIA

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Photo of Samson Manwatkar, Founding Coordinator of CDF India with first banner

India is a variety of cultures, divided in 29 states, 3 central provinces, having many languages, religions, castes and different tribal groups.

All the dance forms of India originate from temple worship to gods and celebration, including classical, folk, and tribal dances. The cultural dances of India can be found in different states and language. From this you will see that dance is an integral part of India.

Music is closely connected with the dance. The word Music comes from the Latin word 'muse' but, in India, music involves dance, drama and music. We can't separate them from one another and that is why Nagpur Christian Art Centre concentrate on these three aspects of music.

As we have understood the origins of dance forms in India, there are a few classical dances which are popular and worth watching. I have divided these into two parts, ie. North India and South India, due to the difference between the two cultures, i.e. Aryan and Davidic cultures.

The classical dances are as below:

1. **Bharatnatyam** from Tamil Nadu,
South India



5. **Odissi** from Odisa, North India



2. **Kathak**, from Northern & Western India



6. **Sattriya** from Assam,
North East India



3. **Kathakali**, from Kerala, South India



7. **Manipuri** from Manipur,
North East India



4. **Kuchipudi** from Andhra Pradesh,
South India



8. **Mohiniyattam** from Kerala,
South India



INDIAN CULTURAL DANCES

India Cultural Dances include both folk and tribal dances of India. There are many tribal communities, each with their own tribal culture, spread over almost all of India - from North to South and East to West.

Folk and tribal dances are simple dances performed to express Joy and Happiness among the community. They are performed for every possible occasion from worship to celebrating the arrival of new seasons whether its birth of a child or a marriage. They have the minimum of steps or movements. Some are specially for women and some are for both men and women. On most occasions the dancers themselves sing. Each form of dance has a specific costume. Most costumes are flamboyant with extensive jewels. While there are numerous ancient folk and tribal dances, many are constantly being improved. The skills and the imagination of the dances influence the performance.

In the modern India, western dances are mingled with the tribal, folk and classical dances. They are used in the Bollywood film industry which has much influence on the Indian society.

Popular Cultural Dances of India

Now let us see some of the popular cultural dances of India associated with their areas:

1. **Bardo chham** is the folk dance of Sherdukpens, a small community in Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh, North East India. This dance depicts the victory of good over Evil. This is a dance worth using for Evangelism.
2. **Bagurumba** is a folk dance of Indigenous Bodo Tribe in Assam and North East India. It is being accepted as the main traditional dance of Bodo People.
3. **Bhortal Nritya**, a dance from Assam, derived from the classical dance form of Assam.
4. **Bihu dance** from Assam. This dance is related to the festival of Bihu. It is performed by young men and women; traditional instruments are used.
5. **Jhumur**, a traditional dance from Bangladesh previously in the eastern part of India. Danced in Assam, by young girls, few males, using rhythm with musical instruments and vocals.
6. **Raut Nacha** is a traditional folk dance by Yadavas, descendants of Lord Krishna and used in worship to Krishna. This dance is related to the Raasleela of Lord Krishna.
7. Popular folk dance, **Fugadi and other dances** are related to the Portuguese culture of Goa.
8. **Dandiya Raas** is an energetic vibrant dance originating from the State of Gujarat North India. Often it is called the Stick dance because it uses polished sticks or Dandiya. The dance represents the fight between good and evil. The combination of Garba and Raas is a very much popular dance all over India. This dance is used for worship and celebration.



9. **Tippani dance** originates from the Chorwad region of Saurashtra of Gujarat and is used by labourers and women. Other folk dances include Siddhi Dhamal. This is the dance of an African community who migrated to India from Africa 500 years ago. They are still following their own culture. Hudo, Matukadi and Aagawa are other dance forms in Gujarat

10. **Nati** is a dance style of Himachal Pradesh, North India.

11. Dance forms of **Harayana**, North India, include: Raas Leela, Dhamal dance, were influenced by Gujarat dance forms.

12. **Dumhal** is a dance performed by the men folk of Wattal tribe of Kashmir, North India, on specific occasions. Using banners, the dancers process in a circle. Performed on set locations and occasions.



13. **Chakyar Koothu** is primarily a highly refined monologue where performers narrate episodes from Hindu Epics, stories, depicting through dance and drama, with comedy, using current political event and this can be used for Evangelism. This is a wonderful dance-drama form of dance of Kerala, South India.

14 **Duffmuttu** is a rhythmic dance form of Kerala from the Muslim community. This originates from the Arab community and uses Arabic music. Margamkali is very ancient and is the most popular artistic performance prevalent among the Syrian Christians of Kerala. It is performed by women on festive occasions specially during marriages. Oppana is another dance form specific to the Muslim community in Kerala, This is a bridal group dance, sung and danced by females of the bride's relatives, with the clapping of hands. Padayani, or Padeni in colloquial speech, is a most colourful and spectacular folk art associated with certain temples in south Kerala. Masks are worn and the dance is used for worshipping local deities. Theyyam, a Malayan word or Daivam, means God is a dance used in Temple worship. Thirayattam is a ritualistic performing ethnic art form of Kerala, It blends dance, theatre, music, satire, face painting, body painting and mask. Tgutanby dance and Thullal are the other dance forms of Kerala.



15. **Grida dance** is a dance form of Madhya Pradesh, North India. **Maanch** is a lyrical folk drama form of ballet, very popular. **Matki dance**, putting pot on head, is danced by a solo artist, supported by a group. **Phulpati dance** for semi rural or unmarried girls in M. Pradesh. **Tertali**, performed by two or three dancers on the ground. Manjiras, small metal cymbals, are tied to different parts of body and legs, the head is covered by a veil and a small sword is held.



Lavani is a combination of traditional song and danced on the beat. This dance has a powerful rhythm and portrays the erotic sentiments substantially developed in Maharashtra cultural dance forms. Very popular.



Koli dances of Maharashtra danced on the coastal sites. Used for festival and joy with celebration.



16. **Cheraw dance** form of Mizoram, North East India is a combination of rhythm and skills. Four people hold two pairs of Long bamboos across one another on the ground. Dancing is in between the bamboos. This dance form is a major attraction during all festive occasions in Mizoram.



17. **Chang lo**, also known as **Sua Lua** is dance of the Chang tribe of Nagaland, was used for celebrating victory over enemies in the earlier times. This has now become a community dance. Dramatic costumes of traditional Naga warriors and finery of womenfolk.

18. **Chhau dance** of Odisha has its base in the martial arts tradition. This dance is in the form of a stylish mock battle in which two group of dancers armed with sword and shields attack one another. GOTI PUA, where dancing boy dancers dress up as girls, comes from a background where the followers of the deity disapproved of dancing by women as a pretext for worship. To overcome this disapproval the practice of boys dancing as girls was introduced.



Baagh Naach or **Tiger Dance** is a folk dance of Odisha. The dancer paints his bare body with yellow and black stripes, like a tiger, and attaches a suitable tail. Drums and bells are also used. **Dalkan** is a tribal dance with a full orchestra of folk music instruments. **Dhap** folk dance is a dance where men of one village dance with the women of another. **Ghumra** dance was used during war to encourage soldiers. **Karma Naach** means fate in Kisi. Worship to god or goddess. **Keisabadi** is a male dance of Odisha.



19. **Garadi** is a well-known dance of Puducherry, South India, when celebrating victory over evil. This is danced for 5 to 6 hours at festivals.

20. **Bhangra** is a very popular dance form of Punjab, North India. This is a dance with music and classic style Punjabi dresses. It was originally danced in the harvest season but is now danced in all seasons for celebrations and festivals. It is mixture of many steps like Dhammal, Jutti, Fulka, Sialkoti, Dankare, Juni, Mirzi, Fumnian. Folk dances of the Punjab, like Jhummar, Sammi, are also included in Bhangra. **Giddha** is the counterpart of Male Bhangra. This is a female folk dance from Punjab. It is an energetic dance derived from ancient circle dancing and highlights feminine grace and flexibility. It is often accompanied by singing by folk couples known as bolliyan. **Malwai Giddha** dance form is only danced by male dancers. **Kikkli** is performed by two girls



21. **Ghoomar** is a traditional dance form of Rajasthan, North India, performed by groups of women in swirling robes accompanied by men and women singing together and colourful dresses, like Ghagra, with ornaments. **Kalbelia** is performed by a group of Kalbelia community of Rajasthan. **Kachchi Ghodi**, is an Indian folk dance that originates from the Shekhawati region of Rajasthan. Wearing horse costumes the dancers participate in mock fights while a singer narrates folk tales about local bandits. This dance is used during wedding ceremonies to welcome and entertain the bridegroom's party, and also in other social settings.



22. **Singhi Chham** is a masked dance of Sikkim depicting the snow lion, the cultural symbol of the State.



23. **Parai Attam** or **Thappattam** is a dance in which folks beat Parai and dance to its rhythm. This is the oldest traditional dance form of Tamil Nadu, South India, and celebrates victory and farming festivals. Kummi women folk of Tamil Nadu is performed at any time by three closely related dancers gathering in circles and clapping their hands. **Kolattam** ancient village art is performed by woman only with two sticks in each hand.

The other folk dances of Tamil Nadu are **Karagattam** (or Karagam), **Mayil Attam** (or Peacock Dance), **Paampu Attam** (or Snake Dance), **Oyilattam**, **Dance of Grace**, **Puliyattam**, **Poikal Kudirai Attam**, **Bommalattam** and **Theru Koothu**.



Hojagiri dance form of Tripura, North East India, is a reflection of the age old culture and the unique style of dance of the Reang community. Amazing acrobatic feats are the main highlight of the dance.



24. **Mayur Nritya** or **Peacock Dance** of Uttar Pradesh, North India, is danced by girls dressed as peacocks. **Charukala**, danced by veiled women, is another dance, as is **Rasleela**, danced during festivals.



25. **Gambhira** is a dance of West Bengal, North India. Gambhira comprises a few characters with dialogues in a atmosphere of music. Its themes are now contemporary social problems, deception and selfishness of people and so on. **Alkap** is a rural dance popular in many places of Bengal. This dance has no written script but scenarios based on popular love stories, songs, dances, comic and satirical sketches called **Kap**. Involves acting, dancing, singing and recitation. Ten to twelve dancers take part, under one leadership. **Domni** worship to God. Singing, supporting characters, depicts everyday life stories with dance and drama with music.



These are some of the cultural dances of India. According to our own culture we can use these dance forms giving new pictures and stories. We have to redeem these dance forms and use them for our ministry. Like Kirtan, Bhajan, singing with dance in Maharashtra can be used in sharing, telling stories from the Bible. People stay for the whole night for these kind of performances.

Here are some of the dance forms we as Nagpur Christian Art Centre have used in our ministry. Their photos, performances, videos too can be seen. We used dance competitions to tell the stories of Jesus Christ through Dances. Some pictures the competitions can be seen.

Cultural dances of India are mingled with the day today lives of our people. They say in India, two things are part and parcel of Indian community, ie. Cricket and *Indian* Cinema in which Dance, Drama and Music is involved. Based on the day-to-day life stories of people, our aim is to reach out to these communities according to their art and culture, redeeming and using the same art forms.

May the Lord inspire you all to use our local art and culture, as they are an integral part of our inner being and have power to touch our inner life. Amen.

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