



ICDF Networks

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Network for Cultural Dance



Welcome to the ICDF Network Newsletter for Cultural Dance where the focus in this edition is on the use of Cultural Dances in Worship. We trust that you will be inspired by the various articles and contributions.

The dance form shown in the photo above is a Punjabi dance. These dances are usually high in energy and colourful costumes make the dance more vibrant. The Punjabi dance hails from the state of Punjab in North India and it is also widely used in Bollywood and North Indian Festivals. The photo supplied by Atmiel Kumar was taken during a production last year.

During the past few months we were also struck by how many cultural dances in different countries make use of sticks and that inspired some research. We would like to add to this research so, if your country uses sticks in cultural dance and is not mentioned in the following article, please let us know at icdfworld@gmail.com

Dancing with sticks

For a long time Cultural Dance has attracted interest because of the colourful and glorious costumes and the variety of materials seen in the dances.

Flags, handkerchiefs, bells, castanets, fans, baskets, sticks and even swords are some of the props commonly used by dancers in cultural dance. Coconut shells and lights have been intrinsic to some dances I've enjoyed seeing in the Far East. One of the recent dances I saw presented by Indian ladies included the beating of short sticks by the dancers which started some of us thinking how sticks, long and short, are commonly used across the globe in cultural dances.

“Tinikling” is a national dance from the Philippines. A traditional folk dance, it originated during the Spanish colonial era. The dance involves two people, one at each end, beating and sliding bamboo poles on the ground in rhythmic fashion against each other in co-ordination with one or more dancers who step over and in between the poles in the dance. There can be three, four or more pairs moving the poles. I had the fun of trying it out a few years ago when holidaying in northern Vietnam. There was a festival in the town where we started our hike and one night we happened upon an evening of cultural dance. I narrowly missed having my ankles caught by the moving bamboo sticks!



Photo: Tinikling dance

“Stick dance” was a dance style that African-Americans developed on American plantations during the slavery times. Dancing was used to practice “secret military drills” among the slaves, where the stick used in the dance was in fact a disguised weapon.

Indian, or Dandiyan Raas, stick dance comes from the northern states of Gujarat and Rajasthan. In October there's a nine day festival where the whole community comes together and performs Raas which is fun and festive. It is associated with Hindu Stories.



Photo: Traditional dance from Ghana

In Morris dancing, which is an English folk dance, sticks, swords and handkerchiefs may be wielded or waved by the dancers. In a small number of dances for one or two people, steps are made near and across a pair of clay tobacco pipes laid one across the other on the floor. Dancers clap their sticks, swords or handkerchiefs together to match with the dance. Interestingly, a very common Irish Ulster Scots dance practised today involves a single dancer dancing over swords crossed over each other on the ground.

Similarly, a Latvian folk dance uses crossed wooden sticks to dance over.

Moving forward, some may remember at the ICDF conference in St Andrews, Scotland Andy Au came with a group of dancers using staff in a powerful presentation. The stick became a staff or pole a metre and a half long and was used creatively. Visually and audibly, as the sticks tapped the floor, the impact was strong and engaging. Andy gave testimony to God using the stick to break the yoke in someone's life as he lifted it and pointed!

Whether for fun, for message or for variety the use of sticks or props extend the impact of the dance as discovered across the world!

Alison Bourke

Every tongue and every nation

Regarding cultural dance integration in Uganda the youth have received it very well. Most of the children born in the late 90s and in 2000s have not had many opportunities to learn these dances. So when we bring these dances into contemporary forms they are amazed and challenged. Redeeming our cultural dances is so much fun. The energy and variation in rhythms is diverse and their depth in worship is so grounding.

All the dance works and choreography I am currently doing with Phaneroo Ministries International and at Autumn Studios, where I am involved in dance, have a wide range of Uganda/African movement with excitement. Dance worship has now deeper meaning and I have found it more contextualised and personal because I have learned to worship to an audience of one...God.

Acts 17:26 New International Version (NIV)

“From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.”



Photo: Maganda Dance from the central region of Uganda . Provided by Jacquynne Tumusiime

I feel, regardless of all cultural diversities, there is a reason I was born in Uganda and speak Rinyakita dialects. Everything in me has to worship God without feeling inferior to other tribes and language. I praise God for this revealed truth on the inside of me. Worship in dance for me has only gotten deeper and more meaningful.

Jacquynne Tumusiime

Bollywood versus Ballroom

If you are trained in mainly one form of dance it is interesting to try out other styles. Bollywood has always been a style that attracts me - the colour, the energy, the life in the style make it one of the most exuberant in the world. I recently attended a Bollywood class and this is what I discovered.



Photo: Peter Hothersall and Sue Sutherland

In the Bollywood style your body is very relaxed. Coming from a Ballroom background that was a bit of a challenge. I am used to moving in certain ways in the Standard and Latin styles. There is more rigidity in the body. So I found the looseness tricky to pull off. The steps are simple but, as in many dance forms, it is the way you use them that counts. There are some fast moves that require lot of steps. Fortunately I didn't trip over my own feet.

Overall a great class and I would like to try more. I just need to learn to relax.

Peter Hothersall

The Redemption of Dance

WHY DANCE

When it comes to dance, we should first and foremost keep in mind that dance was originally created as a means to praise and worship God the Creator.

Psalm 149:3 – “Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with timbrel and harp.”

These are clearly not a series of optional invitations, but rather of strong directives. It is like God himself encourages us to act out His heart’s desire, for us to dance and delight in the joy He has in store, for us to freely and fully express our worship to Him.

Sadly, however, since Lucifer fell into committing sin because he desired for himself the honour and glory that belonged to God alone, all the beauty of worship including the dance and music and singing – which had been Lucifer’s responsibility in heaven – fell into deception, too. Under Lucifer’s evil influence, dance and music and singing started to become something else other than a means of worship to God. They often became a means of worship to the devil, knowingly or unknowingly by men and women over the course of history. This has tricked many of us into believing that dance is in and by itself evil and therefore should be kept away from Christian worship life.

Basically, there is no single one of the basic dance techniques or bodily movements that is evil. Spinning and turns, foot stomps, jumps, twirls and the others are all just movements. What makes the difference is what it is expressing and to whom it is presented. What makes a dance a good dance, or a Christian dance, is the underlying spirit of worship it is expressing toward God. It is of utmost importance that we, the so-called Christian dancers, keep and nurture and develop this spirit in our dances.

HOW TO DANCE



Photo: Indonesian cultural dance as used for worship

2 Samuel 6:14-17 – “...then David danced before the LORD with all his might. ...King David leaping and dancing before the Lord. ...and David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the Lord.”

As a means of worship, the worshiper not only dances in the spirit, but also by the spirit. Just like David was taken control of by God’s Spirit who moved his body so supernaturally that those watching saw him as being possessed, we today’s Christian dancers too should let the Holy Spirit take control of our body when we worship Him with it, even though our movements may not look familiar to others around us.

Coming from Indonesia with its rich traditions, I have witnessed how at times dance has deviated and fallen from the original purpose of creation. Some spirit does take control of the dancers’ bodies, but it is not the Holy Spirit we know in God the Trinity. What comes up is then an imitation of supernatural works done by the power of the evil spirit during some rituals, not the true power of God flowing through the worship.

The Redemption of Dance ... continued

Imitations of David's supernatural dance in 2 Samuel 6:14-17:

Kuda Lumping Dance: a Javanese dance depicting a group of horsemen riding horses made from woven bamboo. Some of the dancers would be possessed by the spirits and become capable of eating shards of glass or other dangerous things without getting hurt.

Sintren Dance: another Javanese dance from the north coastal areas depicting the mythical love story of a virgin girl with a local regent's son. The virgin girl dancer would be possessed by the spirits and dancing sensual moves faster and faster until finally she becomes united with her lover, for hours without feeling tired or exhausted.

An imitation of the young men and women's dance of joy after mourning in Jeremiah 31:13b:

Sigale-gale Dance: a North Sumatran dance depicting the grief of a Batak tribe king who has lost his only son. The dance was created to console the king's grief and it uses a special life-size doll depicting the late son, which would be possessed by the spirits and move on its own as if the son comes back to life. The king would then be comforted out of his mourning by having his "son" back.

An imitation of Miriam's dance of direct communication of thanksgiving and prayers with God in Exodus 15:20-21:

Kecak Dance: a Balinese dance consisting mainly of rituals of trance and chants as a form of communication between the creation and the creator. The dance specifically does not use any music but only "monkey" chants (the dancers are depicting monkeys, the creation) and lighting fire to communicate their wishes and prayers, while listening to the spirits' (the Creator's or the ancestors' spirits) wishes and desires for the local community.



Kuda Lumping Dance

Kecak Dance

Again, we must always remember that the most important element of a dance, any dance, is the dancer. A dance is just a dance; the dancer is the one who makes it spiritually good or bad. As born-again Christians, we worship in the spirit and in truth. This means that our spirit must be always connected with God's Spirit, in order for us to spiritually listen and recognize God's desires for us. The truth is the firm standard here; whatever it is that is not in line with God's truth is simply not for us to dance, e.g. erotic poses, communication with the ancestors' spirits, sexually arousing moves for money, etc. This all include everything in the dance, like the choreography and style, song and music choice, costumes and property items, and any other element.

In practice, this all means we should rely on God himself in our dance. Constant prayer is a must. Let us always align our heart to worship Him as well as ask the Holy Spirit to inspire us to create new things, awaken long-gone godly values, and deliver His divine message for others to hear. This is what will come up as new dances, new interpretations of traditional dances, and new explorations of the existing cultures; all to the glory of God.

CONCLUSION

Redemption is not something only Jesus Christ did when He died on the cross for us, but also what we do today as His redeemed children with the passion, calling, and talents He has put in us. Worship and dance, but also take our world, our traditions, our culture, to worship and dance for the One we worship with our dance. This is the redemption of dance for our God.

Lina Lasup

Redeeming Dance in the Context of India

Dance in India is very common, very important and a very essential part of Indian Art and Culture. In all the communities of Indian people, whether urban, rural or tribal, dance is a very important part, or we could say art, in the lives of people. Over the years, dance in India has seen many changes in skill and form - classical, folk and tribal dances with many shades and colours, dresses and meanings.

According to the Bible, though, we find due to the fallen nature of mankind the dance has been damaged in different areas where Satan has used this art form for entertainment, enjoyment, etc. Many in these days are looking for the redemption of dance and other art forms so next in this article we will consider the Dances of India and how they can be redeemed for the purposes of God.

God is a Creator God and He has given to us His creativity to create dances for Him - for worship and for the fulfilment of His purposes for the coming of His Kingdom. Christianity came to India in the 1st century by the arrival of St. Thomas, the disciple of Christ. With the coming of missionaries to India our Indian art and culture got mixed up. The original dance forms were very natural and came out of Temple worship when people started knowing God by using music, drama and dances.

God is the author of all Arts, however, mankind on the basis of their knowledge about creation and thinking started using dance for entertainment and festivals, pleasure and worship. Foreign missionaries rejected the dance forms of Indian people as these dances were being used for the worship in other religions and in their place the missionaries introduced their own culture while promoting their faith.

The result is seen in the neglect of dance. Even British rulers banned Bharatnatyam in southern parts of India in 1921. This was the situation but in due time, with the influence of globalization and development of societies, films and communications, Indian art and culture became famous but not in the churches. Indian music and other Performing Art forms were accepted but not the dance.

Most dances originate from Temple worship and storytelling of their scriptures. Each one has a different style with footsteps and dresses. These dances are very powerful in their performances, are known to all the people and are famous worldwide. (A detailed article on the classical dances from India written by this author can be found on our website at ...

<https://icdf.com/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Cultural%20Dances%20in%20India.pdf>)

Now while redeeming these dances, we should think which will be acceptable in their original form. Acceptability must be considered in choosing the dance forms because you are giving the dance a new meaning from the Word of God for their situation. Specially Kathak, (means story teller) Bharatnatyam, (Bhava means emotion and feeling, Raga MELODY, Tala means rhythm). Bharatanatyam is one of the best dance forms, like Kathak, for use in Christian ministry. After all, when a Believer dances for the Lord, their dance becomes Christian dance. The main fact is that all art forms in India are useful and, with care and caution, can be used for bringing glory to God in a way that people can accept. I have used these two forms, Kathak and Bharatanatyam, in the promotion of dance in India. The response was good.



Photo: The author Samson Manwatkar

Redeeming Dance in the Context of India ... continued

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Using the cultural aspect, language, understanding the theology of dance, we can use them. In this endeavour, we should also care for self, family, community and nation.

FOLK DANCES OF INDIA....AND TRIBAL DANCES OF INDIA

There are 29 states in India, where each state has different art, culture and dance forms.

Indian folk and tribal dances are simple dances and are performed to express joy and happiness among themselves. Folk and tribal dances are performed for every possible occasion - to celebrate the arrival of seasons, birth of a child, a wedding and festivals. The dances are extremely simple with minimum of steps or movement. The dances burst with verve and vitality. Men and women perform some dances exclusively while in some performances men and women dance together. On most occasions the dancers sing themselves, while being accompanied by artists on the instruments. Each form of dance has specific costumes which are flamboyant with extensive jewels while there are humorous ancient folk and tribal dances. Many are constantly being improved. The skills and the imagination of the dancers influence the performance.

It will be good enough to mention only a few forms, i.e. Garaba and Raas Dandia (sticks) and Bhangra of Punjab which are very popular all over the world because of the flavour, movements and meaning of each dance.

In these dances, as we perform we are just giving the new meaning of its origin. People are very familiar with these dances.



Garaba



Raas Dandia



Bhangra

Tribal dances have no problem with culture as they are part of tribal life. I remember once in Bihar from outside of the village they welcomed us and took us, while dancing, to the church and in the church service people worshipped God through Dance. What an experience!

There are many tribal groups in India - including, in the North East of India, an area commonly known as the Seven Sister States or the 'Seven Sisters'. It is the responsibility of Christians to use these dance forms in worship and movement.



The photos above show tribal dances

Redeeming Dance in the Context of India ... continued

NOW HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT IT?

Actually it is very hard because Christians have not used dance for ministry so we need to teach them how to do this. Performances and workshops are an essential part and seminars should be arranged for them. For 10 to 15 years, people have been open in this area.

There were efforts made by CARAVS (Christian Association for Radio and Audio Visual Services in North India) but due to lack of expertise and vision, they closed their ministry. Likewise CACS (Christian Art and Communication), it too closed. This was through lack of vision and dedication.

WHERE DO YOU START?

Fellowships, churches, conferences, programs are a way to start. I remember I started 'Praise and Worship with Movement' in different churches and this has continued. Like in other areas of dance, competitions are best for this. For the last 20 years, I have been running dance competitions and these still continue. Praise God!

WHAT ARE THE PITFALLS?



Photo: Children dancing with sticks in India

- Our leaders have not understood the importance of Dance even though it has a reference in the Bible.
- Indian dances are still associated with idol worship.
- Western influence in the churches.

THERE IS NO SCHOOL OF ARTS THAT CAN PROPERLY TRAIN DANCERS AND USE THEM. There is no proper education in regard to dance in the Christian community.

The main issue is that there are no sponsors for the dance ministry. No one comes forward to support this ministry by funds or encouragement. If a few people or churches come forward to support dance, I assure you all my dear readers, there can be a great cultural movement in India.

Samson Manwatkar

The Network for Cultural Dance is interested in exploring:

- . the origins of our cultural dances*
- . meaning, development and change*
- . redeeming our culture*
- . integration and renewal*
- . ministry through cultural dance, sharing the gospel*
- . "breaking the rules", innovation and creativity*
- . clothing/costume*

<https://icdf.com/en/networks/cultural-dance>