

Dance: A Survey

(2) Folk Dance Forms

Indian folk dances and the dances of small forest and hill communities are simple dances, and are performed as a part of some community celebration or observance. These dances are performed for every possible occasion: to celebrate the arrival of seasons, the birth of a child, a wedding and festivals, social activities such as hunting and food gathering.

There is a large body of non-classical dance forms. The only thing common among these dance forms is their rural origins. Most of them are extremely simple with a minimum of steps or movements. But they are very vigorous and energetic – they burst with verve and vitality. Men and women perform some dances separately, while in some performances they dance together. On most occasions, the dancers sing themselves, while being accompanied by artists on the instruments. 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 skill and the imagination of the dances influence the performance.

Let us have short glimpses of some popular folk dance forms of India.

Chāū

Chāū is a popular folk dance of Bihar. Since masks form an important feature of this dance it is called Chāū, which means mask. All the Chāū performers hold swords and shields while performing. The stages are decorated and brightly lit by torches, lanterns and flickering oil lamps. The musical instruments used are

There are three kinds of Chāū based on place of origin and development: Seraikella Chāū, Mayurbhanj Chāū and Purulia Chāū. Find the states to which these belong.

the *dhol* (a cylindrical drum), *nagārā* (a huge drum) and *śahnai* (reed pipes). This dance is performed by men and boys. It is full of energy and strength. It is interesting to note that the entire body of the dancer is engaged as a single unit. This body language of the dancer has to be poetic and powerful.



Chhāu (source: www.indianetzone.com)

Bihū

Bihū is a most colourful and gay folk dance from Assam. It is an integral part of the Bihū festival which is celebrated in mid-April, during the harvesting time, and lasts for about a month. Young men and women take part and dance to the lilting music of the Bihū songs which are often mildly erotic in import. The songs consist of short couplets of love which are constantly repeated. Musical accompaniment includes the *dhol*, the *pati-tala* (cymbals), *taka* or *takka* (the bamboo clappers), *gagana* (a kind of jew's harp) and a buffalo horn pipe. The dance begins in a circle, but soon breaks up into parallel lines. The dancers execute beautiful figures of intertwined semi-circles. The drummer is the natural leader; he often utters the *bols* (mnemonics) first and then plays them on the drum, sometimes dancing with fantastic skill with his drum.



Bihū (source: www.assamspider.com)

Rauf

Rauf is also a simple folk dance of Kashmir. It is performed with a chorus by girls at spring time. The performers divide themselves into two rows facing each other. Only one step of the swinging constitutes the movement-content of the dance. The girls hold each other by putting arms around the necks of those standing next. The formation glides forward and backwards. The torsos are lightly and delicately bent forward along with the step.



Group of Kashmiri girls performing Rauf
(source: <http://eastizeast.wordpress.com>)

Padayānī

Padayānī is a popular dance of southern Kerala. It is associated with the festival of certain temples, called Padayānī or Paddenī. Such temples are



in Alleppey, Kollam, Pathanamthitta and Kottayam districts. The main *kolams* (huge masks) displayed in *padayānī* are Bhairavī (Kālī), Kalan (god of death), Yakṣaṇī (fairy) and *pakṣī* (bird).

Dollu Kunitha



Dollu Kunitha (source: www.indianetzone.com)

Dollu Kunitha is a popular drum dance of Karnataka. The songs used in this dance usually have religious and battle fervour. Large drums are adorned with coloured clothes and hang around the necks of men. The main emphasis is on quick and light movement of the feet and legs. Dollu Kunitha forms a part of the ritualistic

dances of the *dodavāsīs* of Karnataka

Dāndiyā

Dāndiyā is an energetic, vibrant folk dance originating in the state of Gujarat. The dancers use polished sticks. It represents a mock fight between the goddess Durgā and the mighty demon-king Mahiśāsura.



Ghūmar

Ghūmar is a traditional women's folk dance of Haryana. It is performed by groups of women in swirling robes. This folk dance gets its name from *ghūmanā* (the pirouetting) which displays the spectacular colours of the flowing *ghāgharā* (the long skirt of Haryanvi women). There is an amazing grace as the skirts flare slowly while the women twirl in circles, their faces covered with the help of the veil. They dance in measured steps and graceful inclinations of body, beating palms or snapping fingers at particular cadences, while singing some lilting songs.



Kābeliā

Kābeliā is performed by the women of the Kābeliā community. The main occupation of the community is catching snakes and trading snake venom. Hence, the dance movements and the costumes bear resemblance to that of the serpents. Dancers attired in traditional black swirling skirts sway sinuously to the plaintive notes of the *bīn* (the wooden instrument of the snake charmers).



(source:
elimuseum.org)

Chauñflā

Chauñflā is one of the important dances of Garhwal, Uttarakhand. It is a spinning dance performed by all sections of the community at night. This is performed by both men and women standing opposite each other. Here the movements of men and women form separate circles, moving in opposite directions. The dancers pirouette around their own axis, with a marked movement of the hip, as in a swing. Thus there is a marked rotating movement of individual dancer, and a revolving of the entire formation. In between, the dancers clap each other's hands. All dancers also sing and keep rhythm through clapping.



Chauñflā (source: www.uttarakhand.ws)

Bhañgrā

Bhañgrā is the most popular and vigorous of the community dances of the villages of Punjab, closely linked with the ritual importance given to wheat. After the wheat crop is sown, the young men gather together in some open field under the light of the full moon in response to the beat of the drum. The dancers begin to move in a circle. The rhythm of the dance is simple 2/4 and 3/4 and the song is also a simple melodic



Bhañgrā (source: www.bhavanaustralia.org)

tune. The words are couplets from Punjab's traditional oral poetry called *bolī*. The dancers begin with a slow rhythm, with an abrupt jerky movement of the shoulders and a hop step. This is followed by many vigorous movements of the whole body and the raising of both hands to the shoulders or above the head level. After the circle has been well established and the tempo of the dance has accelerated, the main dancers dance within the ring in a kind of duet. The costume is the usual dress of the Punjabi peasant, comprising a lower *tahmat* or *lungī*, a *kurtā* and a waist coat, and a colourful *pagdī* (turban).

Giddhā

Giddhā is an exclusively women's dance of Punjab, a counterpart of the men's Bhaṅgrā. It is an ancient ring dance with simple graceful movements without crisp jerks and abrupt turns and twists so characteristic of Bhaṅgrā. The dance begins with a circle, which is then broken up into two semi circles and sometimes into groups of four or six. Pairs emerge from the circle to perform different variations on a theme. The couplet describes their daily chores ranging from cleaning of the wheat to thrashing and to spinning, weaving and embroidery. The sound of the spinning wheel, the village well, the gurgling of the water, the beauty of the fields, and the tension between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, love of the brother-in-law for the sister-in-law are woven into the fabric of the song. The dance ends in women pairing to do a spin. Extend arm cross and hold the other dancer and the two together a *kikali*.



Giddhā (source:
www.indiastudychannel.com)

Garbā

Garbā is customarily performed by women; the dance involves circular patterns of movement and rhythmic clapping. It is popularly performed during *navarātri*. The word comes from 'garbhādīpa' which is translated as either light in the inner sanctum of the temple or lamp inside a perforated earthen pot which is often used in the dance.



Garbā (courtesy: Wikipedia)

Lāvaṇī

Lāvaṇī is a genre of music popular in Maharashtra and a combination of traditional song and dance, which is particularly performed to the beats of *dholkī*, a percussion instrument. Lāvaṇī is noted for its powerful rhythm and erotic sentiment. It has



Lāvaṇī (source: www.thepunekar.com)

contributed substantially to the development of Marathi folk theatre. In Maharashtra and southern Madhya Pradesh, it is performed by the female performers wearing nine-yard long saris. The songs are sung in a quick tempo.

Bamboo Dance

Bamboo dance is the heart and soul of the Nāgās. It is a participatory action performed by both men and women, dressed in traditional attire. The dance involves a gentle jump over bamboo sticks, placed horizontally in parallel spacing over the vertically placed bamboo sticks to form interface. Two persons sit on either side of the ground and slide the sticks over the vertically placed bamboo sticks. The dance is

followed with a rhythmic music as 'hih-hoh' with the help of which dancer adjust their steps. The sliding of the bamboo stripes jig the whole environment and gives a picture-perfect scene.



Comprehension

1. Enlist occasions where folk dance plays a vital role in India.
2. Describe the relevance of Bihū dance.
3. Explain the technique used in Bhaᅅgrā.
4. List down various musical instruments / accompanied in all the folk dances.
5. Classical dances strictly follow the rules, technique and grammar of dance, yet the simplicity and spontaneity of the music and songs of folk dances attract anyone to perform naturally. Comment.
6. Complete the table:

FOLK DANCES IN INDIA	
North	
South	
East	
West	

Project ideas

- Collect stamps related to folk and tribal dances of India.
- Explore and prepare a PowerPoint presentation on the costumes, jewellery and make-up of the folk dances covered in this unit.
- Invite folk dance artists of your locality to perform in your school. Request them to help your class to prepare a folk dance performance.

Further Reading

- Bharata. *The Nāṭyaśāstra, A Treatise on Hindu Dramaturgy and Histrionics*. Manmohan Ghosh (ed.). The Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1950.
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- Anand, Mulk Raj (ed.). *Classical and Folk Dances of India*. Bombay: Marg Publications, 1965.
- Ranade, G.H. *Hindustānī Music*. Delhi: S. Lal & Co. 1989.
- Vatsayana, Kapila. *Traditions of Folk Dance*. London: Faber & Faber, 1967.

Internet Resources (all URLs accessed in May 2013)

- Puruliā Chāū: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojkj37wzOnc
- Giddhā-Boliyan: www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwYWRK5TRvE
- Giddhā (Folk): www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sb_PRsqTjWM
- Dāndiyā Raas-Mer-Gujarat Folk Dance: www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBvZKMFRECQ
- Dollukuṇithagokula: www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2C_zXeJzM

