

Tallinn University

research paper

# Folk Dance

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# 1 Folk dance

The term folk dance describes dances that share some or all of the following attributes:

- ❖ They are dances performed at social functions by people with little or no professional training, often to traditional music or music based on traditional music.
- ❖ They are not designed for public performance or the stage, although traditional folkdances may be later arranged and set for stage performances.
- ❖ Their execution is dominated by an inherited tradition rather than by innovation (although like all folk traditions they do change over time)
- ❖ New dancers often learn informally by observing others and/or receiving help from others.

More controversially, some people define folk dancing as dancing for which there is no governing body or dancing for which there are no competitive or professional performances. (Wikipedia, 2011)

## 1.1 Terminology

The term "folk dance" is sometimes applied to dances of historical importance in European culture and history; typically originated before 20th century. For other cultures the terms "ethnic dance" or "traditional dance" are sometimes used, although the latter terms may encompass ceremonial dances.

There are a number of modern dances, such as hip hop dance, that evolve spontaneously, but the term "folk dance" is generally not applied to them, and the terms "street dance" or "vernacular dance" are used instead. The term "folk dance" is reserved for dances which are to a significant degree bound by tradition and originated in the times when the distinction existed between the dances of "common folk" and the dances of the "high society".

A number of modern ballroom dances originated from folk ones.

The terms "ethnic" and "traditional" are used when it is required to emphasize the cultural roots of the dance. In this sense, nearly all folk dances are ethnic ones. If

some dances, such as polka, cross ethnic boundaries and even cross the boundary between "folk" and "ballroom dance", ethnic differences are often considerable enough to mention, e.g., Czech polka vs. German polka.

Not all ethnic dances are folk dances; for example, ritual dances or dances of ritual origin are not considered to be folk dances. Ritual dances are usually called "Religious dances" because of their purpose. (Wikipedia, 2011)

## 1.2 Europe

Types of European folk dance include:

- Polonez (Polish),
- clogging,
- English country dance,
- international folk dance,
- Irish dance,
- Maypole dance,
- Morris dance,
- Welsh Morris Dance,
- Nordic polska dance,
- Ball de bastons,
- square dance, and
- sword dance.

Sword dances include Longsword dances and rapper dancing. Some choreographed dances such as contra dance, Scottish country dance, and modern Western square dance, are called folk dances, though this is not true in the strictest sense. Country dance overlaps with contemporary folk dance and ballroom dance. Most country dances and ballroom dances originated from folk dances, with gradual refinement over the years.

People familiar with folk dancing can often determine what country a dance is from even if they have not seen that particular dance before. Some countries' dances have features that are unique to that country, although neighboring countries sometimes have similar features. For example, the German and Austrian schuhplattling dance consists of slapping the body and shoes in a fixed pattern, a

feature that few other countries' dances have. Folk dances sometimes evolved long before current political boundaries, so that certain dances are shared by several countries. For example, some Serbian, Bulgarian, and Croatian dances share the same or similar dances, and sometimes even use the same name and music for those dances.

Although folk dancing was historically done by the common people of the local culture, international folk dance has received some popularity on college campuses and community centers within the United States and other countries. (Wikipedia, 2011)

### **1.3 Asia**

Most famous folk dance styles in Asia are: Dances of the Middle East, Indian dance, and Persian dance.

But following styles are also well known:

- Attan - The national dance of Afghanistan
- Azerbaijani dances
- Kurdish dance
- Assyrian folk dance
- Georgian Folk Dances
- Mtiuluri
- Bhangra a Punjabi harvest dance and music style that has become popular worldwide.
- Ghoomar a traditional Bhil tribe women's folk dance of Rajasthan, India.
- Ghumura Dance: War Dance from Kingdom of Kalahandi, Orissa, India
- Kalbelia is one of the most sensuous dance forms of Rajasthan, performed by the kalbelia tribe.
- Israeli folk dance (Wikipedia, 2011)

#### **1.3.1 Middle Eastern dance**

The traditional dances of the Middle East (also known as oriental dance) span a large variety of folk traditions throughout North Africa, Southwest Asia, Central Asia (Greater Persia), sometimes also to the inclusion of the Balkans and South Asia (Greater India).

"Belly dance" is a western term properly applied to raqs sharqi, which is the Arabic for "oriental dance", but strictly a style developed in the interbellum period for professional performance in cabarets and the early Egyptian film industry on the basis of traditional Egyptian dance, by Samia Gamal, Tahiya Karioka, Naima Akef and others..

- Raqs sharqi (Arabic: رقص شرقى; literally "oriental dance") is the style more familiar to Westerners, performed in restaurants and cabarets around the world. It is more commonly performed by female dancers but is also sometimes danced by men. It is a solo improvisational dance, although students often perform choreographed dances in a group.
- Raqs baladi, (Arabic: رقص بلدي; literally "dance of country", or "folk" dance) is the folkloric style, danced socially by men and women of all ages in some Middle Eastern countries, usually at festive occasions such as weddings.
- Ghawazi, traditional performative dance of the Egyptian Dom people
- Çiftetelli, Turkish folk dance found in the core territories of the former Ottoman Empire
- Persian dance
- Traditional dance of Central Asia (Wikipedia, 2011)

### **1.3.2 Dance in India**

Dance in India covers a wide range of dance and dance theatre forms, from the ancient classical or temple dance to folk and modern styles.

Three best-known Hindu deities, Shiva, Kali and Krishna, are typically represented dancing. There are hundreds of Indian folk dances such as Bhangra, Bihu, Ghumura Dance, Sambalpuri, Chhau and Garba and special dances observed in regional festivals. India offers a number of classical Indian dance forms, each of which can be traced to different parts of the country. The presentation of Indian dance styles in film, Hindi Cinema, has exposed the range of dance in India to a global audience. The gods and goddesses are invoked through the religious folk dance forms from good old times. Mention may be made of Ram-lila Nach, Kirtaniya Nach, Kunjvasi Nach and Naradi Nach, Bhagata Nach, Vidapat Nach and Puja Art Nach in this category. Minimum use is

made of musical instruments and dancer performs the dances without humming the tune. (Wikipedia, 2011)

### **1.3.2.1 Classical dance**

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 by the sage Bharata Muni, which explains the Indian art of acting. "The date and authorship of the Bharata Natya Shastra [Figure 1] are both in dispute. The book has been variously dated from the 2nd century B.C to the 3rd century A.D, but there is even less certainty about the author. 'Bharata' originally meant a dancer-actor so that the title could mean simply 'A Shastra on Drama for the Dancer-Actor'. On the other hand 'Bharata' is also a name, and so it is possible that the title means 'A Shastra on Drama by Bharata'. However, for practical purposes, whatever his real name might have been, the saga of the Natya Shastra is called Bharata". Acting or natya is a broad concept which encompasses both drama and dance. (Wikipedia, 2011)



**Figure 1 Classic Indian dance (Wikipedia)**

Those who worship Vishnu are considered Vaishnavas. The dance style performed by Sri Krishna (an Avatar of Vishnu) and the gopis in Vrindavan is called Rasa-Lila, and is considered as a form of devotional dance. Many other Indian classical dances are used to illustrate events from the Puranas related to or describing Vishnu.

The national Sangeet Natak Akademi currently confers classical status on nine Indian dance styles: Bharatanatyam (Tamil Nadu), Gaudiya Nritya (Bengal), Kathak (North India), Kathakali (Kerala), Kuchipudi (Andhra Pradesh), Manipuri (Manipur), Mohiniyattam (Kerala), Orissi (Orissa), and Sattriya (Assam).

### **1.3.2.2 Kathakali**

The origins of the Kathakali come from Kerala, one of the smallest states of the Indian Union. This is where traders from other countries first came, for the Malabar coast has the longest history in India of contact with different lands. The Kathakali is, in fact, the result of a marriage between the pre-Aryan Dravidian dances and the later ones which were introduced by the Brahmins. It combines the consciousness, the religious practices and the techniques of these two cultural streams in perfect harmony and balance. In the dance, the Chakkyiar was accompanied on a large copper drum called a mizhavu, by a drummer who was always of the Nambiar caste, and also by a woman who played a pair of small brass cymbals. She was of the same caste but was known as a Nangiar. He beat out the time solemnly, for she was expected to remain serious and straight-faced, no matter how amusing the performance of the Chakkyiar. This solo performance had two other names, Pradhanda-kuttu and sometimes Kathaprasangam Manthrakam. (Wikipedia, 2011)

### **1.3.2.3 Ottan Tullal**

The Ottan Tullal means, literally, “running and jumping.” It was created by the poet Kunjan Nambiar in the mid-eighteenth century. According to one story, Nambiar was a member of a troupe maintained by the Raja of Ambalapuzha. One particular performance he was, it seems, overlooked for a part, which he felt, was in accordance with his talent and experience. However, he satisfied his ego by taking an artist's revenge. On the day of the performance he stationed himself opposite the palace and began to sing at the top of his voice as he danced to the accompaniment of the loud drumming. The content of his song was satirical in its criticism of the establishment. He attracted crowds, and Ottan Tullal was born. In the second account, Nambiar is said to have been playing the drum for a performance of Chakkiyar-kuttu and at one point made a mistake. Embarrassed at this public rebuke, Kunjan resolved to prove his worth and redeem his good name. The next day the Chakkiyar was performing as usual in his corner of the temple, with an attentive and admiring audience around him, but this time he had competition. In another part of the temple stood Kunjan Nambiar. He was dressed in an entirely new kind of costume, his singing and dancing too were quite different from anything the people had ever seen. At first they turned to him from



sheer curiosity but gradually as they listened, they became absorbed in this novel exposition until finally Chakkiyar was left with hardly anyone to pay attention to him. Ottan Tullal has now become known as “the poor man’s Kathali”. This is because, in comparison, with that dane-drama, it is cheap to put on. There is only one performer, who plays all the parts in turn. The musical accompaniment is also simple, for it requires only one drummer, who plays on an elongated drum called the maddalam, one cymbal player who keeps the tal on his little cymbals, and sometimes a singer. The singer assists and occasionally takes over the singing from the dancer, who normally does at least some of the singing himself. The technique of the dance is also very similar to the Kathakali, but not quite as formal and inflexible.. There are also no settings, no props, not even a curtain. The make-up of the dancer is not very intricate and though the costume is very colorful, it is not as elaborate as that of Kathakali. (Wikipedia, 2011)

#### **1.3.2.4 Dasi Attam**

The home of Dasi Attam is in the south, in the area covered by the States of Tamil Nadu, Andhra and Karnataka. Like all the other classical dances of India, Dasi Attam too has its roots in the Natya Shastra of Bharata. It derives its name from its chief exponents in ancient times who were the devadasis or woman in the service of the gods, and so Dasi Attam means "the dance of the devadasis". Relatively recently the term "Bharata Natyam" has come into general use for the dance hitherto known as Dasi attam. This change may well have been made in an attempt to dissociate the art from the devadasis who had come to be regarded as disreputable practitioners. (Wikipedia, 2011)

#### **1.3.2.5 Mohini Attam**

Mohini Attam is named after the seductress supreme of Hindu mythology who appears in several stories. But the original, far from being a mortal woman, was in fact the god Vishnu who had assumed feminine form. The gods and asuras, it is said, once churned the oceans, in order to extract Amrita, the elixir of life. All went well until the elixir had been extracted, but then there arose a dispute as who was to have it the gods or the demons? Since the gods considered that the demons were being unfair, Vishnu decided to take the matter into his own hands. Accordingly, he assumed the form of the most beautiful woman imaginable. This Mohini had the graceful curves of a vine, her limbs shone with the full bloom of

youth, her face enchanted all who looked upon it. As soon as the asuras saw Mohini they desired her. She fled and they followed. In this way the asuras were enticed away from Amrita and the gods carried it off. From stories such as these, the name Mohini came to be synonymous with the essence of feminine beauty and allurement, and Mohini Attam is a dance which displays just such qualities. It is a solo dance, reserved exclusively for woman. Its history is not very certain. What is known is that it was patronized about 150 years ago by a prince of Travancore, and became very popular. In technique it lies somewhere between Dasi Attam and the lasya aspect of was eminently suitable for use by loose woman, and was frequently used by them to attract would-be clients. This led to its unpopularity and eventual decline at the beginning of the century. (Wikipedia, 2011)

### 1.3.3 Persian dance

Persian dance [Figure 2] refers to the type of dancing from Iran. Persian dance is very sensual, circular and slow which makes it a dance that is unique to Iran amongst all other Middle Eastern dance forms.



Figure 2 Persian dancers from 17th century (wikipedia)

Persian dance is almost entirely performed to 6/8 time signatures and is the only dance that is performed and known by all Iranians regardless of ethnicity, the dance itself is highly individualistic and also heavily relies on solo improvisation performances much like all other Iranian art forms such as music, etc.

Other Iranian dances include regional folk dances which are always performed in group settings whereby men and women dances are performed in group based ensemble settings.

Usually in Persian dance the upper body motion is emphasized, with hand motions, hip undulations and facial expressions being points of attention.

Although often compared to Arabic dance, Persian dance is actually very distinct, due to its signature hand movements, slow and sensual circular hip movements as opposed to the rapid hip movements used in bellydance. As the Muslim rulers at the Mughal courts invited many Persian dancers during their rule of the Indian subcontinent, some elements of Persian dance were absorbed into Kathak, a North-Indian classical dance style.

Often, Persian dance will be performed at relatively informal gatherings, such as family meetings, where everyone will sit in a circle (especially on rugs) and a couple will dance in the middle, sometimes accompanied by a Persian drummer playing beats. Persian dance is also used more formally at various social events, like weddings.

Persian dance appears in American pop culture in the 2004 film *Alexander* performed by the eunuch Bagoas at the ceremony where Clitus dies.

Iran has also Bandari dance, mostly in the South and belly dance itself Raqs Sharqi.

Among most notable ensembles of regional Iranian folk dance is Afsaneh Ballet. Among notable dancers are Jamilah, Azar Shiva, Foroozan, Farzaneh Kaboli, Mohammad Khordadian. (Wikipedia, 2011)

#### **1.4 Latin America**

Baile folklórico, literally "folkloric dance" in Spanish, is a collective term for traditional Latin American dances that emphasize local folk culture with ballet characteristics - pointed toes, exaggerated movements, highly choreographed. As mentioned below, baile folklórico owes its inception to Amalia Hernandez. Baile folklórico differs from danzas and regional bailes. "Folk dances", that is, "dances that you will find in the villages, not on stage" were researched and disseminated by Alura Angeles de Flores. A good rule of thumb is if the woman raises her hands about her head (thus showing her legs), it is folklórico. Each region in Mexico, the Southwestern United States and Central American countries is known for a handful of locally characteristic dances. (Wikipedia, 2011)

### 1.4.1 Mexico

The state of Jalisco [Figure 3], for example is especially known for its jarabe Tapatio, son and el baile de los sonajeros which accompany its famous mariachi. One of the most popular songs is "La Negra". The state of Jalisco.



**Figure 3** Woman dancing Jalisco (Wikipedia)

The state of Guerrero is known for its sintesis and tixtla. Michoacán is known for its huetamo and “Historia del Traje de la Mujer Michoacana,” a dance which depicts a local folktale Alegria, 1995. Though the dances differ from region to region, the basic steps and style of dance are similar. Traditional bailes in Vera Cruz are characterized by a basic set of steps called zapateados which involve percussive heel-stomping. (Wikipedia, 2011)

Costumes in the southwest United States are characterized by denim and western shirts while costumes of the Federal District of Mexico reflect a stronger traditional Spanish influence and those of the Yucatán reflect indigenous traditions. In the folk dances of Northern Mexico, men generally wear black Pants with Galas on each side of the leg, accented with a red tie and belt and a black wide-brimmed hat. The woman wear tighter fitting and shorter skirts and either white or black boots. The costumes from Jalisco entails the Women to wear brightly colored ruffled skirts trimmed with ribbons whose colors are local signifiers, shoes with heavy clog-like heels and ornate hair pieces. Shoes vary in color but usually they are either black, white, or red, depending on the song and region. For the region of Vera Cruz, the women wear beautiful white dresses that is full of lace. they use white shoes, and a small apron with a bandana that hangs off the side of the dress. Depending on whether the woman is married or not, will determine what side the bandana will hang and which side the floral head piece will lay. Married means that it would be on the left side and single is on the right.

Sinaloa, from the coastal region, wear lighter dresses and more colorful.

(Wikipedia, 2011)

Amalia Hernandez pioneered baile folklórico in the 1950s with her establishment of and leadership of the Ballet Folklórico Mexico. Additionally, she founded a school in Mexico City for the study and practice of classical and folkloric dance techniques.

Prior to the explosion in popularity among student and community groups, bailes folklóricos were (and currently are) performed as a part of large parties or community events. The mariachi musicians generally stand in a line at the back of the performance space and perform without written musical notation, while the dancers perform in couples in front of the mariachis. Now days there are both private and public Folklórico groups that get together and compete, for example the USA Ballet Folklórico Nationals. There is also the website <http://www.Folklóricoonline.com> which is similar to Myspace but is focused only on Folklórico. It is a great way to communicate with other folklorico lovers and share ideas and tricks of the trade. (Wikipedia, 2011)

#### **1.4.2 Central America**

Central America has many Bailes Folklóricos. One typical dance from Costa Rica is the Punto Guanacasteco.

## 2 Folk dance in Estonia

Folk dance is very popular in Estonia. There are many folk dance groups all around Estonia.

Oldest folk dances were only for men [Figure 4]!



Figure 4 Estonian dance for men

Most folk dances are ment for groups there dancers are in couples [Figure 5].

Dance involves some unique steps, jumps, running etc.



Figure 5 Typical Estonian Folk Dance

Following table illustrates, how many people are practicing folk dance in Estonia.

COUNTY	population	total folk practitioners	folk dance practitioners
Harju maakond	526505	24468	5079
Hiiu maakond	10032	1075	271
Ida-Viru maakond	168656	4460	1048
Jõgeva maakond	36671	3181	929
Järva maakond	36058	2974	730
Lääne maakond	27366	2417	826
Lääne-Viru	66996	4844	1344

COUNTY	population	total folk practitioners	folk dance practitioners
maakond			
Põlva maakond	30889	3373	870
Pärnu maakond	88428	6632	1742
Rapla maakond	36620	3181	910
Saare maakond	34644	3285	942
Tartu maakond	150074	10650	2002
Valga maakond	34048	3444	771
Viljandi maakond	55447	5461	1403
Võru maakond	37693	4345	1000

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