

Bhangra

The exuberant folk dance from Punjab



Bhangra, the exuberant, uninhibited dance of the Punjab is synonymous in India with good times and celebrations. It now enjoys a very widespread popularity in India, such that, across North India, people spontaneously assume one of the Bhangra poses and shake their shoulders and sway to a Bhangra beat at joyous time or to celebrate a sudden victory. While Bhangra began as a part of harvest festival celebrations, it eventually became a part of such diverse occasions as weddings and New Year celebrations. Moreover, during the last thirty years, Bhangra has enjoyed a surge in popularity worldwide, both in traditional form

and as a fusion with genres such as hip-hop, house, and reggae. As Bhangra continues to move into mainstream culture, an understanding of its history and tradition helps to appreciate it.

The birthplace of Bhangra is the Punjab. Translated, the name "Punjab" means the "Land of Five Rivers." The people of the Punjab are called Punjabis and they speak a language called Punjabi. The three main religions in the area are Sikhism, Hinduism, and Islam. The region has been part of many different empires and has seen settlement by many races, including the Aryans, Persians, Greeks and Mongols. Around the time of the 15th Century, Guru Nanak Dev founded the Sikh religion, which quickly came to prominence in the region. The 19th Century saw the beginning of British rule, which led to the emergence of several heroic freedom fighters, the subject of many Bhangra songs. Finally, the Punjab was split between Pakistan and India at the end of British rule in 1947.

Although Bhangra has possibly existed since as long ago as 300 BC, over the past forty years it has experienced new highs in popularity and innovation. Around the 14th or 15th Century, Punjabi wheat farmers danced and sang songs about village life to help pass the time while working in the fields. With time, these became part of harvest celebrations at Baisakhi, the Punjabi harvest festival celebrated on 13th April every year, as the sight of their crops growing invigorated the farmers. From here the dance quickly moved through all divisions of class and education, eventually becoming a part of weddings, New Year parties, and other important occasions.

Bhangra has developed as a combination of dances from different parts of the Punjab region. The term "Bhangra" now refers to several kinds of dances and arts, including Jhumar, Luddi, Giddha, Julli, Daankara, Dhamal, Saami, Kikli, and Gatka. Jhumar, originally from Sandalbar, Punjab, comprises an important part of Punjab folk heritage. It is a graceful dance, based on a specific Jhumar rhythm. Dancers circle around a drum player while singing a soft chorus.

A person performing the Luddi dance places one hand behind his head and the other in front of his face, while swaying his head and arms. He typically wears a plain loose shirt and sways in a snake-like manner. Like a Jhumar dancer, the Luddi dancer moves around a dhol player. Women have a different but equally exuberant dance called Giddha. The dancers enact verses called bolis, representing a wide variety of principally domestic subjects - everything from arguments with a sister-in-law to political affairs. The rhythm of the dance depends not only the drums, but also on the handclaps of the dancers.

Julli is a dance associated with Muslim holy men called pirs and is generally performed in their hermitages. Typically the dancers dress all in black, and perform Julli in a sitting posture, but it is sometimes also done around the grave of a preceptor. Julli is unique in that one person, alone, can perform the dance if he so desires. Daankara is a dance of celebration, typically performed at weddings. Two men, each holding colorful staves, dance around each other in a circle while tapping their sticks together in rhythm with the drums.

Dancers also form a circle while performing Dhamal. They also hold their arms high, shake their shoulders and heads, and yell and scream. Dhamal is a true folk-dance, representing the heart of Bhangra.

Contd.

Cultural Calendar for March 2007

March 5

Kesariya Rang de - To mark the Holi festival a Bhangra dance programme by a ten-member Bhangra troupe led by Miss Sukhvir Kaur from Punjab, India.

Venue & Time: ICC Garden 6.00 p.m.

March 9

Film: Junoon

Language: Hindi

Directed by: Shyam Benegal

Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration : 3 hrs

March 13

Film: Chandni (with English subtitles)

Language: Hindi

Directed by: Yash Chopra

Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration : 3 hrs

March 16 - 18

"Segar's Exhibition" An exhibition of serigraphs by Segar

Venue & Time: Inauguration - 16th March at 6.00 pm

(Exhibition will remain open 17th - 18th March from 10.00 am - 6.00 pm.

March 21

Nav Prathibha 2007 - a display of new talent in Indian classical music and dance, a performance by the students of the Indian Cultural Centre

Venue & Time: Bishops College Auditorium, Perahera Mawatha, Colombo 3 at 6.30 pm

March 23

Bharatha Natyam Recital by Ms. Yamuna Sivaparan, Director - Shivaamruthaalayaa school of dance

Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.

(Admission to all programmes is free on first come first served basis except March 21st programme.)

Women of the Sandalbar region traditionally are known for the Saami. The dancers dress in brightly colored kurtas and full flowing skirts called lehengas. Like Daankara, Kikli features pairs of dancers, this time women. The dancers cross their arms, hold each other's hands, and whirl around singing folk songs. Occasionally four girls join hands to perform this dance.

Gatka is a Sikh martial art in which people use swords, sticks, or daggers. Historians believe that the sixth Sikh guru started the art of gatka after the martyrdom of fifth guru Guru Arjan Dev. Wherever there is a large Khalsa Sikh population, there will be Gatka participants, often including small children and adults. These participants usually perform Gatka on special Punjabi holidays.

In addition to these different dances, a Bhangra performance typically contains many energetic stunts. The most popular stunt is called the *mor*, or peacock, in which a dancer sits on someone's shoulders, while another person hangs from his torso by his legs. Two-person towers, pyramids, and various spinning stunts are also popular.

Traditionally, men wear a lungi while doing Bhangra. A lungi is a colorful piece of cloth wrapped around the waist. Men also wear a kurta, which is a long Punjabi-style shirt. In addition, men wear *Pagris*, or turbans - to cover their heads.

Women wear the traditional Punjabi dress, salvar kameez. A salvar kameez is composed of a long colorful shirt and baggy, vibrant pants. Women also wear duppattas, colorful pieces of cloth wrapped around the neck. Many Bhangra songs make references to the duppatta.

Many different Punjabi instruments contribute to the sound of Bhangra. Although the most important instrument is the dhol drum, Bhangra also features a variety of string and other drum instruments.

Contd.



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SANDESH

The monthly newsletter of the Indian Cultural Centre, Colombo

Kesariya Rang de -
Bhangra performance to celebrate Holi

Exhibition of Serigraphs
by Segar

Nav Prathibha 2007

and other programmes - details inside

March 2007

Surya Prakash, Untitled, 2005

Past Events

5th January

Manipuri Lecture cum demonstration
By Shri Hemanta Kumar Yaikhom



Shri Hemanta Kumar Yaikhom, Senior Lecturer from the Vishva Bharathi, Shanthi Niketan, India presented an

informative and interesting lecture cum demo at the Centre. He explained the basic steps in Manipuri dance. He was accompanied on drum by Mr. K.H.P.Premjit who also demonstrated the various styles in playing drums for Manipuri dance. Ms. Jawanthi Panibharatha, a pupil of Shri Hemanta Kumar Yaikhom, also assisted.

10th January

World Hindi day celebration at the Indian Cultural Centre



The World Hindi Day was celebrated at the Indian Cultural Centre on 10th January 2007. The ceremony was inaugurated by H.E. Shri Alok Prasad, the High Commissioner of India in Sri Lanka. A colourful ceremony followed in which most of the Hindi institutes of Sri Lanka participated. The students put up plays in Hindi, sang songs in Hindi, gave speeches in Hindi and danced to Hindi songs. Some of the participating universities and institutes were The University of Kelaniya, Hindi Nikethan, Hindi Sansthan, Sri Lanka and Erandathie Kalayathanaya.



19th January

"Thiagarajar Aradhana" – Carnatic Music Festival



The Indian Cultural Centre organized "Thiagarajar Aradhana" – Carnatic Music Festival on 19th January. Musicians from various parts of the Island gathered at the Centre to sing & play Sri Thiagarajar's compositions as homage to the great musician. The programme commenced with a speech by the Director of the Centre, Smt. Nagma Mallick followed by an introduction to the festival by Kalasoori Arunthathy Sri Ranganathan. This is an important annual event for Carnatic musicians the world over.

25th – 30th January

"Harshotsav" - Performances
by Geetanjali Lal & her troupe from India



Renowned Kathak dance exponent Smt. Geetanjali Lal & her dance troupe from India performed in Sri Lanka to celebrate the 58th Republic Day of

India, captivated the Sri Lankan audience with their performances. Their visit to Sri Lanka included performances in Colombo at the Ananda College, India House, Indian Cultural Centre & the Vishaka Girls School and in Kandy at the Trinity College Auditorium. Smt. Geetanjali Lal & her troupe's visit was sponsored by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi and supported by Taj Samudra Colombo & VSNL Lanka Ltd.



LIBRARY

Recent Library Accessions

Discovery of Sanskrit Treasures : Philosophy and Religion Vol.5

Shastri, S.V.
New Delhi : Yash Publications, 2006, 198p.
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891.2SHA

Discovery of Sanskrit Treasures : Southeast Asian Studies Vol.6

Shastri, S.V.
New Delhi : Yash Publications, 2006, 237p.
002610
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Discovery of Sanskrit Treasures : Society and Culture Vol.7

Shastri, S.V.
New Delhi : Yash Publications, 2006, 198p.
002611
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A Call to Honour : In service of Emergent India

Singh, Jaswant
New Delhi : Rupa & Co, 2006, 426p.
002713
341.5SIN

Travels in Transoxiana : In lands over the Hindu-Kush and

Across the Amu Darya
Singh, Jaswant
New Delhi : Rupa & Co, 2006, 153p.
002726
910.4SIN

Lahore : A sentimental Journey

Nevile, Pran
New Delhi : Penguin Books, 2006, 207p.
002724
910.4NEV

Films in March



Junoon (with English subtitles)

An overwhelmingly powerful film by Shyam Benegal. Junoon is a bittersweet love story set in the period of the revolt of 1857. The ethos and mores of the Pathan community of UP is brought out along with masterful depictions of the battles and the politics of that era of turmoil. The performances remain eternally haunting.

Language: Hindi - **Starring:** Shabna Azmi, Nafisa Ali & Shashi Kapoor

Directed by: Syam Benegal

Chandni (with English subtitles)

A classic Yash Chopra love story - the story of how love takes the lives of three people and weaves them together - softly lyrical and throbbingly beautiful.

Language: Hindi - **Starring:** Rishi Kapoor, Sridevi, Vinod Khanna & Waheeda Rehman - **Directed by:** Yash Chopra



History of Bhangra .. Contd..

The primary and most important instrument that defines Bhangra is the dhol. The dhol is a large, high-bass drum, played by beating it with two sticks. The width of a dhol skin is about fifteen inches in general, and the dhol player holds his instrument with a strap around his neck.

The string instruments include the tumbi, sarangi, sapera, supp, and chimta. The dhad, dafli, dholki, and damru are the other drums. The tumbi, famously mastered by Amar Singh Chamkila, a famous Punjabi singer, is a high-tone, single-string instrument. Although it has only one string, mastering the tumbi takes many years. The sarangi is a multi-stringed instrument, somewhat similar to the violin. The sapera produces a beautiful, high-pitched stringy beat, while the supp and chimta add extra, light sound to Bhangra music. Finally, the dhad, dafli, dholki, and damru are instruments that produce more drum beats, but with much less bass than the dhol drum.

Bhangra lyrics, always sung in the Punjabi language, generally cover social issues such as love, relationships, alcohol, dancing, and marriage. Additionally, there are countless Bhangra songs devoted to Punjabi pride themes and Punjabi heroes. The lyrics are tributes to the rich cultural traditions of the Punjabis. In particular, many Bhangra songs have been written about Udham Singh and Bhagat Singh. Less serious topics include beautiful ladies with their colorful duppattas, and dancing and drinking in the fields of the Punjab.

Bhangra singers usually employ a high, energetic tone of voice for singing. Singing fiercely, and with great pride, they typically add nonsensical, random noises to their singing. Similarly, often people dancing to Bhangra will yell phrases such as "Hey hey hey," "Balle balle," or "aripa" to the music.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, several singers from the Punjab set the stage for Bhangra to become a mass phenomenon. These singers, some of whom are still active today, include Kuldeep Manak, Amar Singh Chamkila, and A. S. Kang. Other artistes that had a huge influence on the growth of Bhangra are Bhujangy, Asa Singh Mastana, Surinder Kaur and Parkash Kaur, Lalchand Yamla Jat, K. Deep and Jagmohan Kaur, and Alam Lohar. The use of Bhangra dance and music in Hindi films gave it an India-wide appeal. Bhangra continues to be danced and shown in Hindi films and steps from this repertoire have been incorporated into the general Hindi film dance.

It was not until the early eighties that Bhangra moved from "secluded halls and homes to the bright lights of the clubs and cities of England." First generation Asians were intrigued by their musical heritage, and helped bring Bhangra to the mainstream in their new country.

One of the biggest Bhangra stars of the last several decades is Malkit Singh - known as "the golden voice of the Punjab" - and his group, Golden Star. Several other influential groups appeared around the same time, including Apna, from Birmingham, and the Bhujangy Group. Apna, most famously known for their hit Mera Yaar Vajavey Dhol.

Bhangra took massive steps toward mainstream credibility and popularity in the 1990s, especially among youths. At the beginning of the nineties, many artists returned to the original, folk beats of Bhangra, often incorporating more dhol drum beats and tumbi. This time also saw the rise of several young Punjabi singers. Bhangra competitions have been held in the Punjab for many decades. However, now universities and other organizations have begun to hold annual Bhangra dance competitions.

Beginning as a form of lively folk music performed at harvests in the Punjab, Bhangra has evolved remarkably over the past five hundred years. The music now fully represents the culture of the Punjab region, and the struggles of its people in their long and storied history. Moreover, the music still evolves today, incorporating elements of many different kinds of music from around the world, while still existing in its traditional form. Thanks to this diversification, Bhangra now reaches a larger audience than ever, all over the world.

Source – Web Authors: Clint Kelly and Jasjeet Thind