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21st Century : Indian Classical Dance in Indian Cinema

Even though making cinemas which feature classical dancing is considered a major risk to take, there have been many examples where these cinemas became blockbusters. The directors and actors of these cinemas continue to enjoy the fame for life. These great cinemas and dance sequences in them are here for us to cherish for many decades to come. Applause to all those dancers who made history and to those who are yet to make history by bringing millions of people close to the great art form of classical Indian dancing. Dance has today become a kind of visual poetry, constantly evolving and being taken to unimaginable heights. The dance space in India is in a unique position to delve into its traditional forms, while constantly learning from its global counterparts. And we can only wait and watch what wonders this creates.

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Since India's independence from colonial rule, numerous schools have opened to further education, training and socialization through dance classes, or simply a means to exercise and fitness.

Major cities in India now have numerous schools that offer lessons in dances such as Kathak, Bharatnatyam, and these cities host hundreds of shows every year. Dances which were exclusive to one gender, now have participation by both males and females. We can see many innovation and developments in modern practice of Indian classical dances.

The 21st century is the current century of the Anno Domini era or Common Era, in accordance with the Gregorian calendar and it began on January 1, 2001.

Indian classical dance, or ShastiyaNriya, is an umbrella term for various performing arts rooted in religious Hindu musical theatre styles, whose theory and practice can be traced to the NatyaShastra. The number of recognized classical dances range from eight to more, depending on the source and scholar. The SangeetNatak Academy recognizes eight Classical dances i.e.

- (i) Bharatnatyam (Tamil nadu)
- (ii) Kathakali (Kerala)
- (iii) Kathak (Uttar-Pradesh)
- (iv) Kuchipudi (Andhra Pradesh)
- (v) Odissi (Odisha)
- (vi) Sattriya (Assam)
- (vii) Manipuri (Manipur)
- (viii) Mohiniattam (Kerala)

Scholars such as Drid Williams add Chhau, Yakshagana and BhagavataMela to the list. The culture ministry of

government of india includes Chhau in its classical list. These dances are traditionally regional, all of them include music and recitation in local language or Sanskrit, and they represent a unity of core ideas in a diversity of styles, costumes and expressions. Indian classical dance is made from India and classical dance is played by various actors.

Cinema has made the greatest impact in the lives of people globally. It takes you to a different dimension and puts your imagination to test. The great Indian cinema industry has been incorporating song and dance sequences around the story line to attract and entertain audience. There are unique story lines and noble characters, which stand for a cause and struggle through their entire lives to find happiness. These character can include activists, poets, writers, singer, dancers, artists and many more types of individuals. We watch this cinema again and again.

Every Indian film should showcase classical dance. There are some popular songs of Indian cinema in which we can see Indian classical dances as described following:

(1) Kahe ched ched mohe - Devdas (2002) :

This song, like most renditions of Kathak is based on the tales of "Lord Krishna" - one of the most loved and revered gods of Hindu Pantheon. It is a chapter taken from the life of Krishna when he was growing up and in his adolescent age. Krishna loved to go to the river bank where other women would come and do their daily jobs, he was the loved one among them all. They used to dance and enjoy while Krishna would do mischief. These women were referred to as 'Gopis'. There was one Gopi whose name was 'Radha' who used to love Krishna. One day Krishna caught her and kissed her on her face. And so in this song Radha is complaining about

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Krishna's mischief to his mother- Yashoda. Madhuri Dixit has used her strong facial expressions to deliver the blushing and embarrassment of Radha in the most attractive and mesmerizing way. A trained dancer in this art form of Kathak, the legendary dance guru Pt. Birju Maharaj choreographed this song.

(2) Mere dholna sun Bhoobhulaiyaa (2007) :

Vidya Balan took everyone surprise with her splendid rendition of an Oddissi dance, mixed with a few Bharatnatyam steps. Her co-dancer- Vineet from Kerala, is an actor and expert Bharatnatyama dancer, and Vidya Balan had trained hard to come close to his level. The various “Bhangas” or stances which involve foot stamping and striking poses have been beautifully performed by the duo. In this song Vidya Balan is expressing her love for her beloved - “listen my lover, to my beats of love, my love is you, it will stay in the moist wind, and it will survive the live eternally it will stay till end.”

(3) Mai Radhaterimera Shyamtu - Vishwaroopam (2013) :

Kamal Haasan performed so well for Vishwaroopam. He trained hard. The song “Mai Radhateri” in this film where he dances, by God's grace, was loved by everyone, and got National Award for it. Pt. Birju Maharaj choreographed this song. In Vishwaroopam, Vishwa is a Kathak teacher and he teaches thumari to his students based on lord Krishna and Radha the heart of Radha is restless, Mohan (Krishna) is there in Radha's heart, The Mohan who's body is dark complexioned, and whose eyes are both like seas of liqueur, The holder of rock, becoming the excursioner of forests, he's the flautist of gokul, on whose rhythm radha dances. I am your Radha, and you are my shyam, but don't hold my wrist like this.

(4) Tum Tak - Raanjhanaa (2013) :

Kathak by Sonam Kapoor who has trained in the dance form for years under Uma Dogra. In a portion of the song “Tum Tak” that required Sonam to perform Kathak, she gave her inputs, which choreographer duo Bosco-Ceaser welcomed. Krishanji, grandson of Kathak legend Sitara Devi, was also present to lend his expert advice. Anand Rai, the film's director, says, “a choreographer can give you the beat and show you the movements, but it's up to the actor to bring grace and make slight changes to the steps. When a trained dancer is given steps, it's natural for them to add their inputs. Sonam was glad that she got to do Kathak steps in the film.

(5) Ban ke Titli - Chennai Express (2013) :

The song is truly a beautiful composition by Vishal and Shekhar. Deepika performed Classical dance Bharatnatyam at the end of the song “Ban ketitli” for around 30 seconds. Deepika and background dancers are looking very graceful and flexible. She looks gorgeous in south Indian sari as usual. Her expressions, dance and looks everything is so impressive in this song.

(6) Mohe rang do laal - Bajirao Mastani (2015) :

This is a beautiful song sung by Shreya Ghoshal, along

with Birju Maharaj giving his voice for the tukra sung here, the lyrics have a couple of 'alankaras', i.e. figures of speech, where words are used for two completely unrelated meanings, such as 'laal' for the color red and for son, and Hari for the color green, as well as lord Krishna again. Deepika Padukone took Kathak dance lesson from Pt. Birju Maharaj, who also choreographed this song. Deepika performed on Thumri to express her love for Bajirao. In an interview Birju Maharaj said I am very happy with the way Thumri shaped up. Had it been a fast footwork and movement piece then there would have been a problem. But Deepika still managed to bring out a small fast piece brilliantly. She was extremely hard working too, but her background in Bharatnatyam was a tad difficult to undo. Deepika Padukone's solo dance number “Mohe rang do laal” in 'Bajirao Mastani' may have been a hit but Pt. Birju Maharaj says the actress was initially worried about the song.

(7) Jo meri manzilon ko jati hai - Dhadak (2018) :

Jhanavi Kapoor learned Kathak for her debut movie Dhadak. In an interview she said I had a lot of fun I love Kathak as dance form. It wasn't tough as it was a crash course and the segment where I am dancing in the movie is very brief.

Conclusion :

Even though making cinemas which feature classical dancing is considered a major risk to take, there have been many examples where these cinemas became blockbusters. The directors and actors of these cinemas continue to enjoy the fame for life. These great cinemas and dance sequences in them are here for us to cherish for many decades to come. Applause to all those dancers who made history and to those who are yet to make history by bringing millions of people close to the great art form of classical Indian dancing. Dance has today become a kind of visual poetry, constantly evolving and being taken to unimaginable heights. The dance space in India is in a unique position to delve into its traditional forms, while constantly learning from its global counterparts. And we can only wait and watch what wonders this creates.

