

37TH ANNUAL INDIA FESTIVAL

TAMPA BAY · 2026

“Unity with Devotion”

Event Date: October 31, 2026

DANCE COMPETITION

Rules & Process Guide

www.indiafesttampa.com

cultural@indiafesttampa.com

Welcome to India Festival 2026

Namaste, and welcome to the 37th Annual India Festival Tampa Bay. In the spirit of this year's theme, "Unity with Devotion," our dance competition celebrates the richness of India's classical and folk traditions on one shared stage. This guide explains the complete set of rules and the new online process for the 2026 season. Please read it carefully and share it with every performer, parent, and choreographer on your team.

All entries for 2026 are managed online through the **Choreographer Dashboard** at www.indiafesttampa.com. All questions and communications regarding the competition should be directed to cultural@indiafesttampa.com.

Common Rules

The following rules apply to all divisions and dance types. Dance-specific rules are explained later in this document, and where they differ, the dance-specific rules override these common rules. The India Festival Cultural Committee may grant a waiver to these rules under certain acceptable circumstances, entirely at the committee's discretion. Such waivers are exceptions and are not a general rule.

Choreography, performance themes, props, and costumes must be socially appropriate and in good taste at all times.

◆ Eligibility

- Participants must be residents of the USA. Visitors to the USA are not permitted to participate.
- Participants may perform in a **maximum of two dances from two different divisions** (for example, Minor Garba and Junior Raas).
- The competition is open to amateurs only. Professional teams are not permitted to participate. A professional who directs or choreographs for a fee may not perform in his or her own team.
 - This restriction does not apply to the College and Adult divisions.
- **Each choreographer or director may bring a maximum of two groups per age category** (Minor, Junior, High School, College, Adult).
- **Each choreographer or director may not bring two groups in the same category** (for example, two groups in Junior Classical).

◆ Team Requirements

- Only Indian Classical and Indian Folk dances performed in a team format are allowed.
- Maximum participants per team are limited to 20 members for all divisions.
- A Bhangra team may have 20 participants plus 1 Dholi and 1 Kirtal player.
- A minimum of 8 participants is required in a team.
- Solo performances are not allowed. One dancer may not dominate the performance while others dance in the background.

◆ Dance Types

India Festival 2026 features the following dance types: Raas, Garba, Classical, Folk, and Bhangra. Please see the Appendix for a definition of each of these dances.

◆ Divisions

Division	Description & Age Limits
Minors	Ages 5 to 10 on the day of India Festival. Up to 25% of the team may be out of age.
Juniors	Ages 10 to 14 on the day of India Festival. Up to 25% of the team may be out of age.
High School	Ages 14 to 18 on the day of India Festival. Up to 25% of the team may be out of age.
College	Ages 18 to 25 on the day of India Festival. Up to 25% of the team may be out of age.
Adults	Ages 25 and older on the day of India Festival. Up to 25% of the team may be out of age.

The out-of-age allowance is +/- 2 years from the specified age limits for the division. Proof of age is required for all participants.

◆ Trophies & Awards

- Trophies will be awarded for Best Costume, Best Choreographer, and 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place teams in every division and category.
- A certificate of participation or a trophy will be given to all participants.

Choreographer Dashboard & Online Process

New for 2026: every step of the competition entry is now completed online through the **Choreographer Dashboard**. After submitting an application, each choreographer receives access to a personal dashboard and completes the following steps, in order, on or before the posted deadlines.

1. **Select your competition division.** Log in to the Choreographer Dashboard and choose the competition division for each of your entries.
2. **Upload your group logo / branding.** Upload your team's logo or branding artwork by the published deadline.
3. **Upload your dance picture.** Add a group dance photograph for the entry.
4. **Enter performer details.** Provide the complete list of performers along with their required details.
5. **Add parent / guardian emails.** For each minor performer, enter the email address of the parent or legal guardian.
6. **Send the waiver emails.** Press the "Send Waiver" button to email the Waiver of Liability to every parent or guardian on file.
7. **Parent signs and verifies.** Once a parent signs the waiver electronically, they enter their initials to confirm the performer's date of birth — completing the age verification and safety confirmation for that participant.
8. **Upload or update the performance song.** Upload the final performance song (MP3 format), and update it if needed, before the song deadline.

All of the steps above must be completed on or before the deadlines posted at www.indiafesttampa.com. Entries that remain incomplete after a deadline may not be accepted, and waivers must be signed by every required parent/guardian and adult participant before the participant registration due date.

Team Registration

- India Festival Tampa accepts dance competition entries only through the official website, www.indiafesttampa.com. Complete the online team registration form before the deadlines posted on the website.
- **Late entries will not be accepted — no exceptions.**
- All communication regarding the dance competition will be handled through cultural@indiafesttampa.com.
- **Complete all participant information in the Choreographer Dashboard before the date specified on the website.**
- **Upload the song (MP3 format) and group photo through the dashboard before the date specified on the website.**
- **Late team registrations and participant registrations will not be accepted — no exceptions.**
- You may withdraw your team entry before the last date specified on the website.
- **Proof of age is required** for all participants, except in the Adult division.
 - A copy of a birth certificate, passport, government-issued ID, or driver's license is acceptable as proof of age and must be submitted through the online registration process.
- **The Waiver of Liability must be signed by all adult participants and by the parent or legal guardian of every minor participant. In 2026 this is completed electronically through the Choreographer Dashboard, on or before the participant registration due date.**

The India Festival Cultural Committee's decision is final in the case of any dispute, complaint, or controversy arising from the India Festival event.

Song Selection

- Lyrics must be in a language from the same region as the dance they represent.
- Garba and Raas songs must be in Gujarati.
- Lyrics and music from a Hindi film (or a film in any other language) are **not allowed** in any section of the competition.
- The song must be uploaded to the Choreographer Dashboard in MP3 format before the posted deadline.
- A CD is no longer required to be mailed.
- A USB drive must, however, be brought and kept with you on the day of the competition, in case the MP3 does not work.
- Traditional instruments appropriate for the song and dance form are encouraged.
- Music with or without words will be accepted, provided it reflects a particular dance category or a traditional instrument.
- The song must be a minimum of 4 minutes and a maximum of 6 minutes in all categories.
- Songs must meet appropriate quality standards and will be reviewed by the Cultural Committee.
- Mixed songs are allowed, with no limit on the number of songs mixed. All mixed songs must belong to the same style, be in the same language, and come from the same region of India. For example, a Gujarati Folk dance song may only be mixed with another Gujarati Folk dance song.
- All music must be on one continuous track. Any breaks or pauses must be pre-recorded into the track.
- If a song does not pass quality standards, you will be notified in advance.
- You will be contacted to confirm your participation and whether a preview performance is required, depending on the number of interested parties in a category. India Festival reserves the right to pre-screen performances and to assign performance time slots at its sole discretion. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Props

- There is no limitation on the number of props used during a dance performance.
- Teams should use props appropriate to the requirements of the song and dance.
- **Safety Code:** No glass bangles, colors, confetti, grains, smoke, or flammable items such as diyas or lights, and no other small or breakable objects, are allowed on stage, backstage, or in the dressing rooms. This safety code is strictly enforced.
- Props that require electricity are **not allowed**.
- Backdrops, scenery, and large or awkward props are not allowed.
- Items may not be thrown, hung, shot, or launched off the stage.
- **Cones are not counted as props and are not allowed in any dance category or division.**

Costume

- Appropriate costumes must be worn for the dance performance and should reflect the dance category and/or regional culture.
- Changes of costume on or off stage during a performance are **not allowed**.
- Blouses must have sleeves. Strapless or spaghetti straps are not allowed.
- Ghaghara and chaniya lengths should be worn six inches below the knee as the norm (applicable to all divisions and dance types).
- Costumes must use traditional colors, textiles, and embroidery.
- Costume selection is one of the scoring points, so it should promote regional ethnicity and culture.
- Costumes should resemble the actual costume worn in the geographic region where the dance originated — for example, a Bhil or Adivasi dance should depict the rural Gujarat area and not Andhra.
- **Safety Code:** No glass bangles, colors, confetti, grains, smoke, or flammable items such as diyas or lights, and no other small or breakable objects, are allowed on stage, backstage, or in the dressing rooms. This safety code is strictly enforced.

Timings

- The duration of the dance performance must be a minimum of 4 minutes and a maximum of 6 minutes for all divisions.
- Only 2 minutes are allowed for stage preparation (including general introductions) before the performance, and only 1 minute is allowed after the performance to clear the stage.
- Timing is one of the scoring points. 10 points will be deducted from the final score for each minute that exceeds the time limits.

Stage & Environment Preparation

- No special effects such as steam, disco balls, or smoke are allowed.
- Props hanging from the ceiling are not allowed.
- At no time will the hall or stage lights be shut off or dimmed.
- Stage dimensions will be posted on the India Festival Tampa website.
- **No parents, choreographers, managers, or directors are allowed on stage during a performance.**
- **Teams may not bring banners with the team name on stage during a performance.**

Backstage Rules

- Teams must be present backstage at least **45 minutes** prior to their assigned time, regardless of whether the schedule is running on time.
- **We will not come to the dressing rooms to look for you. “No-shows” will forfeit their chance to perform.**
- Teams should report backstage as advised by the committee.
- **Safety Code:** No glass bangles, colors, confetti, grains, smoke, or flammable items such as diyas or lights, and no other small or breakable objects, are allowed on stage, backstage, or in the dressing rooms. This safety code is strictly enforced.

Dressing Room Usage

- A schedule will be posted at the entrance of each dressing room. Each team will have approximately 2 hours to get ready. Please respect the schedule so that every team has a chance to prepare before their performance.
- Teams should stay in their assigned dressing room only.
- **India Festival is not responsible for lost or stolen items. Please make arrangements to secure your belongings.**
- **Safety Code:** No glass bangles, smoke, colors, confetti, grains, or flammable items such as diyas or lights, and no other small or breakable objects, are allowed on stage, backstage, or in the dressing rooms. This safety code is strictly enforced.

Evaluation & Scoring

- A panel of professional judges from outside of Florida will evaluate all entries.
- The point distribution for the 2026 season is shown below.

India Festival Scoring Rubric	Points
Entry	25 points
Exit / Conclusion	25 points
Originality / Innovation	50 points
Action (facial expression)	50 points
Coordination & Synchronization	50 points
Costume / Jewelry	50 points
Song Selection	50 points
Steps, Choreography, Rhythm	100 points
Overall Impression	100 points
TOTAL	500 points

♦ Judging Aspects

Judges will consider the following aspects when evaluating each performance:

- Enthusiasm
- Authenticity — use of props and presentation
- Creativity
- Style and formation — use of stage
- Start and closing
- Song selection
- Overall choreography

Performance Integrity & Authenticity

Faithfulness to the Declared Dance Style

Every performance must stay true to its declared dance style. Whether a team competes in Classical, Garba, Raas, Folk, or Bhangra, its music, choreography, and costumes must clearly reflect the authentic elements associated with that specific style. This standard applies to every entry, including any category with only one competing group. Performances that do not meet these criteria may be disqualified or declared ineligible for placement and awards.

Registered & Age-Verified Performers Only

Every performer on stage must be officially registered for that entry and within the approved age limits. If, during a performance at India Festival, a team is found to have substituted a registered dancer with an unregistered or out-of-age performer who is not officially part of the dance, the entire entry will be removed from consideration for placement in the competition.

Grievance

- No dance choreographer, director, participant, or parent may communicate directly with the judges.
- **Grievances must be filed on the India Festival website with proper documentation and proof before the end of the India Festival day.**
- The Grievance Committee will settle all disputes within one week.
- The India Festival Cultural Committee's decision is final in the case of any dispute, complaint, or controversy arising from the India Festival event.

Interruption of Performance

- If a team's presentation is interrupted because of a failure of the equipment, facilities, or similar, the affected team will be allowed to present its entire routine again at a time determined by the judging panel.
- If a team's presentation is interrupted because of a failure of the team's own equipment or supplies, the team must either continue the presentation or withdraw from the competition.
- If an injury interrupts a team's presentation, the team must either continue or withdraw from the competition. India Festival staff reserve the right to stop a presentation if it is deemed necessary due to injury.

Dance-Specific Rules

The following rules are specific to each dance category and, where applicable, override the common rules above.

◆ Raas

Dance Performance

- Lines and a variety of formations and patterns are allowed in Raas using small sticks.
- The use of Dong-Lila of Rajasthan (long sticks) is not acceptable.
- All dandias must be held in the hands without the aid of attached hoops, strings, or similar.
- The use of a dholi is allowed for entry only.
- After the entry and during the exit, no instrument-carrying performer is acceptable.
- **Cones are not counted as props and are not allowed in any dance category or division.**

Song Selection

- In the Raas category, mixed songs are allowed. A mixed song must be from the same category — for example, a Raas song mixed with another Raas song.
- Songs must be in Gujarati.
- Music should not be re-dubbed with a super-imposed dandiya beat. Disco dandiya, enhanced remixes, and other fusion music are not acceptable.
- Please follow all general song selection rules.

Costume

- Please follow all general costume rules.

◆ Garba

Dance Performance

- Only girls may participate in Garba.
- All formations must end in a circle.

Props

- No props are allowed in Garba.
- **Cones are not counted as props and are not allowed in any dance category or division.**

Song Selection

- In the Garba category, mixing of Garba songs is allowed. A mixed song must be from the same category — for example, a Garba song mixed with another Garba song.
- Music should not be re-dubbed with a super-imposed dandiya beat. Disco dandiya, enhanced remixes, and other fusion music are not acceptable.
- Songs must be in Gujarati.

Costume

- Please follow all general costume rules.

◆ Garbi (Garba Category)

Dance Performance

- In Garbi dance, up to 25% of the girls may participate on the condition that they dress as boys.

Props

- **No props are allowed in Garba.**
- **Cones are not counted as props and are not allowed in any dance category or division.**

Song Selection

- Mixing of Garba songs is allowed. A mixed song must be from the same category — for example, a Garba song mixed with another Garba song.
- Music should not be re-dubbed with a super-imposed dandiya beat. Disco dandiya, enhanced remixes, and other fusion music are not acceptable.
- Songs must be in Gujarati.

Costume

- Please follow all general costume rules.

◆ Folk Dances

Follow all general rules.

◆ Classical Dances

Follow all general rules.

◆ Bhangra

Team

- A minimum of 8 participants and a maximum of 20 participants, plus one Dholi and one Kirtal.

Props

- The use of a dhol is allowed.
- Any number of props is allowed. Please provide a list of props.
- **Cones are not counted as props and are not allowed in any dance category or division.**
- Not allowed: gatka, kirpans, daggers, confetti, fire, or glitter; pounding objects on the stage; and disrespect toward or throwing of turbans or flags.

Song Selection

- Up to 5% of the music may be non-Bhangra. Film music is not allowed.
- All music must be on one continuous track. Any breaks, pauses, or blank time must be pre-recorded into the track.
- Mixing of songs must be from the same category.

Costume (suggestions only)

- Men: chaadra or lungi, kurta, pag, turla, jugi (waist decoration), and rumal.
- Women: salwaar, kameez, ghagra, and rumal.
- Please follow all general costume rules.

Appendix: Dance Definitions

◆ Raas

Raas, or Dandiya Raas, is the traditional folk-dance form of Vrindavan, India, where it is performed depicting scenes of Holi and the lila of Krishna and Radha. Along with Garba, it is a featured dance of the Navratri evenings in Western India. The word “Raas” comes from the Sanskrit word “Ras.” Its origins can be traced to ancient times, when Lord Krishna performed the Rasa lila.

There are several forms of Raas, but Dandiya Raas, performed during Navaratri in Gujarat, is the most popular. Other forms include Dang Lila from Rajasthan, where only one large stick is used, and Rasa lila from North India. Some even consider Garba a form of Raas, namely Raas Garba.

In Dandiya Raas, men and women dance in two circles with sticks in their hands. In earlier times Raas did not involve much singing — the beat of the dhol was enough. Dandiya, or sticks, are about 18 inches long. Each dancer holds two, though when short on dandiya they may use just one in the right hand. In a four-beat rhythm, opposite sides hit the sticks at the same time, creating a pleasing sound. One circle moves clockwise and another counter-clockwise. In the West, people often form rows rather than full circles.

Raas is performed with dandias (small sticks) held in the participants’ hands at all times. Many varieties exist, some full of masculine vigor, whirling speed, and hops and jumps specific in style. Although innovative steps and moves are welcome, choreography should stay rooted in its Gujarati cultural flavor. Bhangra steps, gymnastics, acrobatics, and cheerleading moves will not be accepted by India Festival, as they take away from the essence of authenticity. Choreography that includes lines and a variety of formations and patterns is acceptable. Typically, most Raas should feature partnership choreography where dandias are struck against a partner’s in tune with the rhythm of the music. Raas may be performed by all boys, all girls, or boy/girl partners.

◆ Garba

Garba is an Indian form of dance that originated in the Gujarat region. It is more similar to Western folk dance than to the presentational style of Indian classical dances such as Bharatanatyam and Odissi. The name comes from the Sanskrit terms Garba (“womb”) and Deep (“a small earthenware lamp”). Many traditional garbas are performed around a central lit lamp. The circular and spiral figures of Garba have similarities to other spiritual dances. Traditionally it is performed during the nine-day Hindu festival Navaratri, with either the lamp (the Garba Deep) or an image of the Goddess Amba placed at the center of concentric rings as an object of veneration.

People dance around the center, bending sideways at every step, their arms making sweeping gestures, each movement ending in a clap. Modern Garba is also heavily influenced by Raas, a dance traditionally performed by men. The merger of these two dances has formed the high-energy dance seen today.

Both men and women usually wear colorful costumes while performing Garba and Dandiya. Girls and women wear the ghaghra choli — a three-piece dress with a choli on top and a ghaghra as the bottom, made of cotton with beads, shells, mirrors, and embroidery, accompanied by jhumkas, necklaces, bindi, bajubandh, chudas, kangans, kamarbandh, payal, mojiris, and a dupatta tucked in the Gujarati manner. Boys and men wear kafni pyjamas with a kediyu — a short round kurta above the knees — and a pagadi on the head, with bandhini dupatta, kada, and mojiris.

Garba has two forms: Ancient (Prachin) and Modern (Arvachin). Both are performed in a circle.

Prachin Garba

Prachin Garba is traditional and is presented collectively by moving in a circle around a lit earthen pitcher. The pitcher, called “Garbha,” is a symbol of Mataji and her divine powers. Prachin Garba songs are more devotional and refer to family members and folk settings of the villages. Claps and snaps with hops and vigorous steps are part of the Prachin Garba style. Cotton, embroidered, or mirrored chaniyas are appropriate for this style.

Arvachin Garba

Arvachin Garba is presented as a piece of art requiring special training, displaying artistry, a variety of subjects, and new experiments. Garba retains its originality in this style as well and is rendered in a circle, but with a more stylish aura or imagination. Songs may cover a variety of subjects. This type of Garba can incorporate new experiments in body and hand-gesture choreography, together with the claps, clicks, and circular formations.

Traditional Garbas

Traditional Garbas can incorporate new experiments, as with Arvachin Garbas, but are performed to a song with a classical musical base, with body and hand gestures that are classical in form, and should still maintain a circular formation with hand claps and clicks. They are executed slowly and in a graceful manner.

India Festival invites and allows a combination of Prachin and Arvachin styles of Garba and encourages creativity from choreographers, while applying some basic understanding and knowledge of Garba. All types of Garba must include hand claps and clicks, choreography, and are performed in a circle. To encourage creativity, India Festival allows breaking of the circle and proceeding from one circle to multiple circles and vice versa. However, units of dance in straight lines and pattern formations that do not immediately resolve into a circular motif will be subject to penalty points by the judges. For the logistics of competition evaluation, India Festival categorizes all prop use (including mandh and diwa) as belonging to the folk category. Only girls may participate in Garba.

Garbi

Garbi is a form of Garba dance performed by the men folk of Gujarat. The dance is noted for its circular movements with actions of speed and grace. Dandiya, Dhol, Nargha, and Manjira are the main musical instruments used in Garbi. Garbi is mainly held at religious festivals such as Janmashtami. Nowadays women also participate in Garbi.

◆ Folk Dances

India is a land of diverse cultures and traditions. Each region has a unique culture that is prominently visible in its art forms. Almost every region has its own folk music and dance, which express the community and its traditions. Though folk dances are not as complex as the classical forms, they are very beautiful because of their essence of rawness. From the Bihu of Assam and Dolcholom of Manipur to the Hikal of Himachal Pradesh and Chhau of Bihar, each Indian folk dance reflects the deep-seated beliefs and traditions of a particular culture.

Folk dances are performed on almost every special occasion and festival, to express elation and joy, and are considered auspicious by many tribal communities. Many are dedicated to the presiding deity of a specific community. The most interesting part of a folk dance is the attire: every folk dance has its own specific costume and jewelry, generally very bright and colorful, giving a folk touch to the performance. These dances are an asset of India’s cultural heritage. The following is a short and incomplete list of folk and tribal dances.

Dance Name	Description
Bathakamma	A folk dance of Andhra Pradesh.
Bihu	A folk dance from Assam — a very brisk and lively dance performed by both boys and girls.
Bagurumba	A folk dance from Assam, performed by the Bodos and known for its colorful attire.

Dance Name	Description
Bhangra	A folk dance from the northwest Indian state of Punjab — a lively, powerful dance.
Chah Baganar Jumur Nach	A dance from Assam — a dance of the tea gardens.
Changu	A folk dance found in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, named after the changu, a simple tambourine (daf) used to accompany it.
Daankara	A stick dance from Punjab, similar in some ways to the Dandiya Raas of Gujarat.
Dandaria	A folk dance of Andhra Pradesh.
Dasakathia	A folk theatre of Odisha, performed by a pair of performers who entertain the audience with dance, songs, and stories.
Dhamal	A folk dance of Punjab; also a folk dance of Andhra Pradesh.
Gair	A dance of Rajasthan, performed by groups of dancers moving in and out with almost military precision.
Garba	A folk dance from Gujarat, traditionally danced at marriages and during Navaratri.
Gatka	A folk dance utilizing swords, daggers, or sticks, performed in Punjab.
Geendad	A folk dance of Rajasthan, very similar to the Gair.
Ghoomar	A folk dance of Rajasthan, named for its characteristic pirouettes.
Ghanta Patua	A folk dance of Odisha, named after the large brass gongs (ghanta); performed in the Hindu month of Chaitra and notable for being performed on stilts.
Giddha	A folk dance of Punjab, generally performed by women.
Gobbi	A folk dance of Andhra Pradesh.
Jhoomar	A dance of the Mundas and Mahantas of Odisha.
Jhumar	A slow version of Bhangra performed at weddings and other festive events.
Julli	A folk dance performed in Punjab, done sitting down.
Kacchhi Ghodhi	A folk dance of Rajasthan performed with a dummy horse.
Kavadi	A folk dance of Tamil Nadu, played with wooden poles to which two pots are tied and balanced on the shoulder.
Karagam	A folk dance of Tamil Nadu, played with a pot balanced on the head.
Kela Keluni	A dance performed by the Kelas of Odisha.
Kikli	A women's folk dance of Punjab.
Kushan	A folk theatre of Bangladesh and West Bengal.
Laathi Nauch	A folk dance of NE India and Bangladesh, originally based on a martial art using large sticks (laathi).
Luddi	A very characteristic form of Bhangra.
Mathuri	A folk dance of Andhra Pradesh.
Raas	A folk dance from Gujarat, traditionally danced at marriages and during Navaratri.
Saami	A women's folk dance of Punjab.
Sakhi Nata	The puppet dance of Odisha.

Dance Name	Description
Terahtali	A folk dance of Rajasthan, performed by women while seated.
Therukoothu	A folk theatre from the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu.
Yaksha Gana	A folk theatre from the south Indian state of Karnataka.

◆ Classical Dances

There are many types of dance in India, from those that are deeply religious in content to those danced on more festive, happy occasions. The classical dances of India are almost always spiritual in content, although this is often true of folk dances as well.

Kathakali and Mohini Attam — Kerala

Kathakali literally means “story-play” and is an elaborate dance depicting the victory of truth over falsehood. A striking feature of Kathakali is the use of elaborate make-up and colorful costumes, emphasizing that the characters are superbeings from another world. Their make-up is easily recognizable to the trained eye as satvik (godlike), rajasik (heroic), or tamasik (demonic).

The theme of Mohini Attam is love and devotion to God, with Vishnu or Krishna most often the hero. Through slow and medium tempos, the dancer finds space for improvisation and suggestive bhavas (emotions). The basic dance steps are the Adavus, of four kinds: Taganam, Jaganam, Dhaganam, and Sammisram. The Mohini Attam dancer maintains realistic make-up and a simple costume, attired in a beautiful white saree with a gold border (the Kasavu saree of Kerala), with white jasmine flowers around a bun at the side of the head.

Bharata Natyam — Tamil Nadu

Bharata Natyam has been handed down through the centuries by dance teachers (gurus) called nattuwanars and by temple dancers called devadasis. In the sacred environment of the temple, these families developed and propagated their heritage. Training traditionally took around seven years under the direction of the nattuwanar. The four great nattuwanars of Tanjore were known as the Tanjore Quartet — brothers named Chinnaiah, Ponnaiah, Vadivelu, and Shivanandam — and the Bharata Natyam repertoire as we know it today was constructed by this talented quartet.

Kuchipudi — Andhra Pradesh

The dance-drama that still exists today and can most closely be associated with the Sanskrit theatrical tradition is Kuchipudi, also known as Bhagavata Mela Natakam. The actors sing and dance, and the style is a blend of folk and classical — which is why this technique has greater freedom and fluidity than other dance styles. Bhagavata Mela Natakam was always performed as an offering to the temples of Merratur, Soolamangalam, Oothkadu, Nallur, or Theperumanallur.

Odissi — Odisha

Odissi is based on the popular devotion to Lord Krishna, and the verses of the Sanskrit play Geet Govinda are used to depict love and devotion to God. Odissi dancers use their head, bust, and torso in soft, flowing movements to express specific moods and emotions. The form is curvaceous, concentrating on the tribhang — the division of the body into three parts: head, bust, and torso. The mudras and expressions are similar to those of Bharatanatyam. Odissi performances are replete with the lore of Lord Krishna and depict the philosophy of Odisha’s most popular deity, Lord Jagannath, whose temple is in Puri.

Kathak — Uttar Pradesh

This North Indian dance form is inextricably bound with classical Hindustani music, and the rhythmic nimbleness of the feet is accompanied by the table or pakhawaj. Traditionally the stories were of Radha and Krishna, in the Natwari style (as it was then called), but the Mughal invasion of North India had a serious impact on the dance. It was taken to Muslim courts and thus became more entertaining and less religious in content, with more emphasis on nritya (pure dance) and less on abhinaya (expression and emotion).

Manipuri — Manipur

This dance style was originally called jogai, meaning circular movement. In ancient texts it has been compared to the movement of the planets around the sun. It is said that when Krishna, Radha, and the gopis danced the Ras Leela, Shiva made sure no one disturbed its beauty. Parvati also wished to see this dance, so Shiva chose the beautiful area of Manipur and re-enacted the Ras Leela. Centuries later, in the 11th century, during the reign of Raja Loyamba, Prince Khamba of the Khomal dynasty and Princess Thoibi of the Mairang dynasty re-enacted the dance, and it became known as Lai-Haraoba, the most ancient dance of Manipur.

Bhangra — Punjab

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’s folk heritage. It is a graceful dance based on a specific Jhumar rhythm, in which dancers circle around a drum player while singing a soft chorus.