

1870

In Hindu mythology, dance is believed to have been conceived by Brahma. Brahma inspired the sage Bharata Muni to write the Natya Shastra, a treatise on performing arts, from which a codified practice of dance and drama emerged. He used pathya (words) from the Rigveda, abhinaya (gestures) from the Yajurveda, geet (music) from the Samaveda and rasa (emotions) from the Atharvaveda to form the Natyaveda (body of knowledge about dance). The best-known of Hindu deities-Shiva, Kali and Krishna-are typically represented dancing. Shiva's cosmic dance, tandava, Kali's dance of creation and destruction and Krishna's dance with the gopikas (cow-herd girls)-Rasa Lila-are popular motifs in Hindu mythology.



In ancient India, there were no dedicated auditorium halls or theaters, and dance was usually a functional activity dedicated to worship, entertainment or leisure. Dancers usually performed in temples, on festive occasions and seasonal harvests. Dance was performed on a regular basis before deities as a form of worship. Even in modern India, deities are invoked through religious folk dance forms from ancient times. Classical dance forms such as Bharata Natyam use mudras or hand gestures also to retell episodes of mythological tales such as the slaying of Kaliya by Krishna.

Gradually dancers, particularly from South India, moved from temples to houses of royal families where they performed exclusively for royalty.

India offers a number of classical Indian dance forms, each of which can be traced to different parts of the country. Classical and folk dance forms also emerged from Indian traditions, epics and mythology. There are many Indian folk dances such as Bhangra, Bihu, Ghumura Dance, Sambalpuri, Chhau and Garba and special dances observed in regional festivals such as Lohri and Navratri.