

# SPATIAL ARTICULATION AND DYNAMICS OF BANGLADESHI FOLK DANCE

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### Abstract

Dance is a performing expression, intricately tied to nature and inspired by the rhythms of life. Folk dance, one of the oldest art forms, acts as a storyteller, mirroring the lives, myths, and traditions of rural communities. This study delves into Bangladeshi folk dances by looking at their performance settings and how these spaces gain significance from the natural environment. Through field surveys, video analysis, and movement analysis, we investigate the connection between dance formations and the rural contexts in which they have traditionally taken place. As urbanization grows, these traditional dance forms and their performance spaces are quickly vanishing, leading to a loss of cultural and spatial identity. This research highlights the importance of preserving these spaces in architectural design, aiming to rekindle the connection between folk dance and its spatial heritage.

**Keywords:** Folk Dance; Space-Articulation; LABAN; Traditional-Environment; Digital-Dance-Platform; Performing-Expression.

## INTRODUCTION

Dance serves as a universal form of cultural expression that has evolved alongside humanity, mirroring its social structures, religious practices, and community ties. Its roots are deeply embedded in the rhythms of nature and the rituals of ancient societies. Over the years, the settings for dance performances have changed, shaped by societal shifts, technological progress, and cultural interactions.

In prehistoric times, dance was mainly ritualistic, taking place in natural environments such as forests, caves, and open plains. These locations held sacred significance, often linked to fertility rites, celestial events, and communal storytelling.

Archaeological discoveries, like the Bhimbetka rock shelters in India and the cave paintings in Lascaux, France, illustrate scenes of group dances, indicating that early humans utilized movement to honor nature and foster social unity. (Dilip, 1999)(Clottes, 2002) As societies progressed, the context of dance became increasingly organized. In ancient Egypt, dances performed in temples played a crucial role in religious ceremonies, paying tribute to gods such as Hathor, the goddess of music and dance (Manniche, 1991).

Likewise, the civilizations of Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley utilized public squares and temple courtyards for ritual dances, highlighting the communal nature of movement within sacred spaces (Frankfort, 1948).

The classical era brought about architectural advancements, enhancing dance venues significantly. Ancient Greek theaters, like Epidaurus, were crafted to improve both the visual and acoustic experience, allowing choreographed performances to be enjoyed by large audiences.

This period also marked the incorporation of dance into public life through festivals such as the Dionysia, where theatrical dances took center stage (Kuritz, 1988). In India, temple complexes like Chidambaram and Konark served as havens for classical dances such as Bharatanatyam and Odissi, with their spatial designs symbolizing cosmic order and connecting the performer to divine energy (Vatsyayan, 1977).

During the medieval period, folk dances thrived in more natural and informal environments. In Europe, these dances took place in village squares and marketplaces during festivals, often serving as expressions of rebellion or celebrations of seasonal changes (Hobsbawm, 2012).

In South Asia, rural courtyards and open fields became the venues for Baul and Bihu dances, highlighting community involvement and storytelling (Sen, 1992). At the same time, Islamic cultures integrated dance into mystical practices, such as the Sufi whirling dervishes, performed in enclosed spaces to represent spiritual elevation (Schimmel, 1975).

The colonial era introduced significant transformations, as traditional dances were either suppressed or modified to fit new venues like colonial halls and missionary schools. In many areas, folk dances were pushed to the margins but experienced a revival as symbols of national identity during independence movements (Anderson, 1983).

In today's world, globalization and technology have greatly expanded the variety of dance spaces. Traditional forms now exist alongside modern stages, digital platforms, and hybrid performances.

While this change brings opportunities for both preservation and innovation, it also raises concerns about the potential loss of authenticity that is connected to the original spatial and cultural contexts (Mitra, 2015).

### ***Dance in Bangladesh:***

Bangladesh, located to the eastern part of Bengal, is mostly rural in settings with a remarkable urban growth from the middle of the last century. Most of the people are largely agrarian. And the agro ecology of the land has produced a fount of predominantly indigenous, embodied traditions, practiced by different local communities for over several centuries to date.

These include: (1) seasonal/agrarian ritual events (i.e., jarinach of Muharram, baha of Santhals in Spring); (2) expression of “rites of passages” (i.e., dhmail of weddings); (3) ritual expression (i.e., shaonedala to appease Manasa); (4) martial arts (i.e., lathikhela); (5) entertaining performances (i.e., jatra, nosimon); and (6) musical debates (i.e., kabigaan). It is mentionable that the expressions during performances seemed a bit different from the communities do themselves. Sadly, this “othering” has been weakening the myth-culture for over century like a part of Southasia. (Mariam, 2022).

The significant influence of spaces on dance is also evident in the history of Bangla folk dances. These folk dances originate primarily in rural Bangladesh and draw inspiration from the area's distinctively lush landscapes, rivers, forests, and even rural households. For example, Shaone Dala is part of river-centric rituals, and dhmail is performed within semi-outdoor or indoor courtyard-like spaces(Mariam, 2022).

The movements and storytelling of these dances are blended with natural settings and performed in intimate courtyards in our village households or the celebrations at village fair.(Williams, 2012)(Ray, 2014)

Folk dances in Bangladesh are of three kinds: religious, social, and cultural. Some of these folk dances originated on riverbanks, while our village households treasured others in intimate courtyards or during village fair celebrations(Ray, 2014)(Haque, 2016).

Additionally, Bangla festivals such as Nabanna, Pahela Baishakh, and Paush-Parban, among others, serve as public spaces that foster the environment for jatra palas and folk dances. (Ahmed, 2018; Manhiça, 2023)

On the other hand, big cities like Dhaka are home to cultural academies where dance is practiced. These academies held classes, workshops, training, and cultural programs. Dance classes typically take place in indoor spaces that lack the necessary environment (Mridha, 2023).

Also, the enclosed nature of the spaces isn't enough. However, as cities become more densely populated with buildings, open spaces such as playgrounds or fields become less prevalent. (Merriman, 2010). Enclosed spaces now host dances that once took place in natural settings like Bot-tola. Also, outdoor dance performances are becoming less common (Manhiça, 2023).

This paper explores the complex connection between traditional folk dances and the spaces in which they are performed, tracing the historical development of these performance areas from ancient times to today.

By looking at how these spatial environments influence the dances and vice versa, the study seeks to emphasize the lasting relationship between cultural heritage and the physical settings in which it exists.

## METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a **mixed-method approach**, integrating qualitative, quantitative, and spatial analysis methods to explore the interplay between Bangla dance forms and their performance spaces. The combination of these methods allows for a nuanced understanding of the cultural, historical, and spatial dimensions of traditional and contemporary performance environments.

The data collection process begins with historical and archival research to trace the origins and evolution of performance spaces associated with Bangla dance. Historical documents, artworks, and artifacts are studied to examine the architectural and cultural features of traditional spaces, such as temples, riverbanks, and courtyards. Additionally, the study investigates the spatial and symbolic characteristics of traditional dance forms like *Jari*, *Dhamail*, *Shawtal*, *Dhali* and *Ghetu* within their original contexts.

Fieldwork plays a crucial role in understanding the dimensions and material configurations of both traditional and modern performance spaces. Visits to rural courtyards, cultural academies, and urban stages enable the researcher studies further.

Through interviews and participatory observations of performances in various settings—temples, fairs, studios, and even virtual platforms—the research captures the dynamic interaction between performers, spaces, and audiences.

The study also examines contemporary performance spaces, including urban stages and virtual environments. By analyzing social media platforms and streaming trends, the research highlights how digital spaces are reshaping the ways in which Bangla dance is performed and experienced.

To understand the audience's perspective, surveys and interviews are conducted to explore how different performance settings affect visibility, intimacy, and emotional connection during performances. This audience-centric approach emphasizes the significance of spatial characteristics in creating meaningful and engaging dance experiences.

Movement analysis is conducted using Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), which provides insights into how spatial settings influence choreography. Additionally, motion-capture tools are used to record and analyze the flow of movements, offering a precise understanding of the relationship between dance and space.

The study employs thematic coding of interviews and ethnographic notes to identify recurring spatial themes and cultural patterns. Quantitative analysis complements this by measuring spatial dimensions such as size, scale, and acoustics to assess their impact on dance movements and audience engagement.

Together, these methods provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing the evolution of Bangla dance spaces, bridging the gap between traditional heritage and contemporary practices.

## Methodology Framework for Exploring Bangla Dance Spaces

### Table Representation

**Table 01: Framework for Methodology**

Stage	Methods	Tools	Expected Outcome
1. Research Objectives	Define the focus on cultural, historical, and spatial dimensions of Bangla dance.	Literature Review	Clear research scope and guiding questions.
2. Data Collection	<b>Historical Research:</b> Study documents, artworks, and artifacts.	Archival Materials, Visual Records	Trace the origins and evolution of dance spaces.
	<b>Fieldwork:</b> Observe and document traditional and modern spaces.	Sketches, Photographs, Interviews	Detailed spatial documentation and ethnographic insights.
	<b>Contemporary Data:</b> Explore virtual and urban spaces through social media and surveys.	Surveys, Online Platforms	Insights into the digital transformation of dance experiences.
3. Data Analysis	<b>Qualitative:</b> Thematic coding of ethnographic notes and interviews.	Thematic Analysis	Identify recurring cultural and spatial themes.
	<b>Quantitative:</b> Measure spatial features like scale, and audience capacity.	Formation Analysis	Assess impact of space on movement and engagement.
4. Interpretation	Integrate findings from all methods to compare traditional and modern dance spaces.	<b>LABAN</b> Analysis Tool	Holistic understanding of the evolution of dance spaces.
5. Outcomes	Provide design guidelines for inclusive and meaningful dance spaces.	Visualization and Reporting Software	Recommendations bridging traditional heritage and modern practices.

This structured approach ensures that the research captures the multifaceted relationship between Bangla dance forms and their evolving spatial contexts. Let me know if you'd like additional refinements.

## RESULT

Folk dance traditions often took place in sacred spaces like Muslim mazars and Hindu mandirs, as well as in open community areas under the sky, where they were accessible to everyone. These spaces fostered community participation, creating a strong bond between the performers and the audience. Temples in Bangladesh, especially during festivals and religious ceremonies, have become spaces for Kirtan performances. The spiritual ambiance of the temple contributed to the devotional nature of the kirtan dance for ages (Rahman, 2022)(Husain and Tinker, no date). Sorting the provided information into a more structured and research-friendly format can make it easier to analyze, compare, and present. Here's a step-by-step guide with suggested tables or charts for clarity:

## 1. Historical Evolution of Dance Spaces

Organize the content chronologically to trace the evolution of dance spaces over time. This can be presented as a timeline or table.

**Table 02: Evolution analysis of dance**

Period	Dance Spaces	Characteristics/Functions	References
Ancient Period	Open fields, near agricultural areas	Stress relief during farming; community bonding through rhythmic movements.	(Ahmed W. , 2021)
Village Evolution	Courtyards, playgrounds, paths, Fair	Joyful expressions during festivals like Nobanno Utsav; storytelling and celebration of rural life.	(Ahmed S. J., 2000)(Ray, 2014)
Sacred Spaces	Temples, mazars	Devotional and spiritual performances like Kirtan; community participation in religious settings.	(Ahmed N. , 2018)(Mariam, 2022)
British Colonial Era	Theaters, Jatra stages	Introduction of structured performances; interaction with larger audiences; eye-level engagement.	(Ahmed S. J., 2000)(Ray, 2014)
Urbanized Settings	Auditoriums, amphitheaters, academies	Transition to enclosed spaces; opportunities and challenges of modern spaces.	(Ahmed S. J., 2000)
Virtual Spaces	Online platforms, virtual reality environments	Broader access to global dance; concerns over commoditization of dance as 'entertainment.'	(Yáñez, 2021)

## 2. Spatial Influence on Dance

Categorize the spatial influences based on natural, built, and virtual environments. A chart could illustrate the interplay between the space and its impact on dance.

**Table 03: Spatial evolution analysis of dance**

Type of Space	Examples	Impact on Dance	References
Natural Spaces	Fields, rivers, courtyards	Foster creativity and harmony with nature; inspiration from surroundings (e.g., river flows in Jadukata).	(Mridha, 2023)
Built Traditional	Nata mandirs, mazars, akhdas	Promoted spiritual engagement and collective learning; architectural layout influenced dancer-audience interaction.	(Mitra, 2015)
Built Modern	Auditoriums, amphitheaters	Increased accessibility and professional platforms; lack of 'earthy' connection can impact emotional expression.	(Ahmed S. J., 2000) Shibli Mohammad (cited)
Virtual Spaces	Online platforms, augmented reality	Increased global reach; risk of diminishing artistic value; shifts in audience perception and experience.	(Yáñez, 2021) Sreoshi Purkayastha (cited)

Both rural and urban areas have been visited, and sketches were created in real-time, while others were drawn from reference collections and other accessible resources. The

sketches include the local temple, a village home with a courtyard, the bajra in haor, childhood memories of the village fair, the open amphitheater in Hatir Jhill, the auditorium at Shilpakala Academy [ **Figure 2**].

Folk dances are an integral part of various community spaces such as the temple, courtyard, and other communal spaces. Understanding the spatial features is important to comprehend the evolution of folk dance. Therefore, the functional spaces, spatial characteristics, and types of dances typically performed in these locations have been identified. This has resulted in an evolutionary journey.

### 3. Regional Variations in Dance Spaces

Highlight regional-specific dance practices and their corresponding spatial settings. Here's an expanded and more detailed version of the table on **Regional Variations in Dance Spaces**, encompassing additional regions, dance forms, and their unique spatial contexts.

**Table 04: Regional Variations in Dance Spaces**

Region	Dance Form	Common Spaces	Cultural Significance	References
Sylhet	Dhamail	Courtyards during weddings and festivals	Intimate, family-centered gatherings emphasizing joy, unity, and cultural preservation.	(Haque, 2016)
Kushtia and Jessore	Baul Tradition	Lalon Akhda, communal spaces	Centers of spirituality and philosophy, fostering unity and deep introspection among performers and audiences.	(Sen, 1992)
Sunamganj	Riverine Processions	Rivers, boats, and riverbanks	Combines storytelling and nature; rituals like Behula's journey depict mythological and cultural heritage.	(Mariam, 2022)
Dhaka	Classical and Modern Dance	Auditoriums (e.g., Shilpakala Academy)	Offers professional settings for classical and experimental performances; reflects urban adaptation of traditions.	(Ahmed N. , 2018)
Chattagram	Chakma Circle Dance	Village squares, community halls	Highlights indigenous Chakma culture; dances during weddings and harvest celebrations in shared community spaces.	(Mitra, 2015)
Rajshahi	Gambhira	Jatra stages, open fields, courtyards	Satirical and philosophical storytelling, often addressing social and religious issues through dance and music.	(Vatsyayan, 1977)
Khulna	Shaari and Jari	Village courtyards, shrines	Traditionally linked to spiritual and religious themes, especially in mourning rituals and festivals.	(Mariam, 2022)
Mymensingh	Maimansingh a Gitika Dances	Open fields, village fairs	Reflects rural folklore and legends; strong narrative component rooted in the region's heritage.	(Ahmed S. J., 2000)

Barisal	Bhatiali Dance	Riverbanks, boats	Represents the life of boatmen and fishermen; inspired by nature and the rhythm of rivers.	(Mridha, 2023)
Rangpur	Jari Dance	Courtyards, shrines	Used in Islamic devotional storytelling; combines dance, music, and recitation of religious epics.	(Ahmed S. J., 2000)
Manikganj	Nakshi Kantha Dance	Village fairs, open courtyards	Inspired by local craft traditions; celebrates rural artistry and collective memory.	(Mariam, 2022)
Cox's Bazar	Marma Traditional Dances	Hillside clearings, community centers	Represents Marma tribal identity and their connection to nature, spirituality, and harvest festivities.	(Minahan, 2012)
Cumilla	Manipuri Dance	Mandirs, nata mandapas	Deeply spiritual, performed during religious ceremonies and festivals; strong connection with the Vaishnavite tradition.	(Minahan, 2012)

The figure below explores the connection between Bangladeshi folk dances and their spatial needs by examining five unique dance forms: Ghetu Dance, Santal Dance, Dhali Dance (Lathi Dance), Jari Dance, and Dhamail Dance.

Each section details the type of dance, its specific movement styles, and the spatial arrangements required for performance, accompanied by diagrams that illustrate the relationship between dancer movements and audience positioning.

Ghetu Dance is usually performed on a small indoor stage. The circular setup of performers mirrors the cozy nature of the space, with a compact audience area designed to enhance the intimate bond between dancers and viewers.


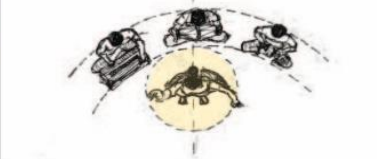
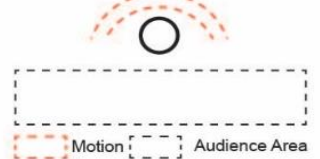

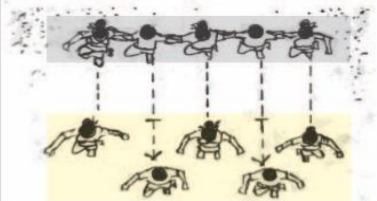
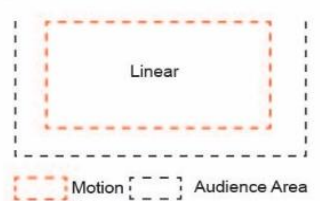


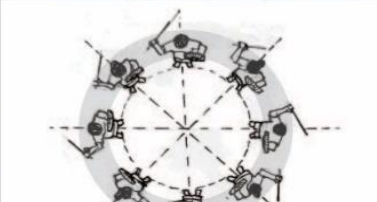

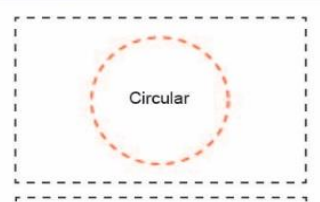
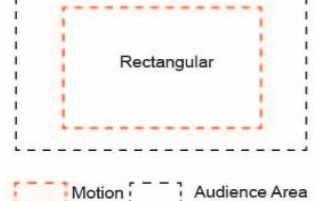


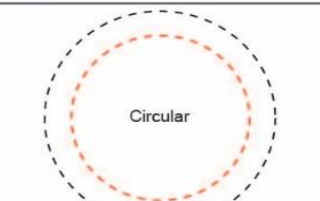

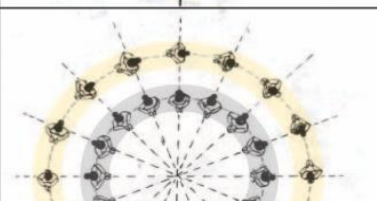
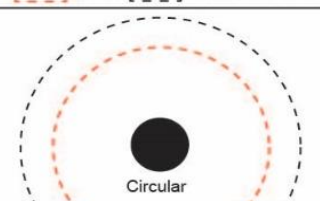
In contrast, Santal Dance flourishes in a courtyard environment, where its linear movements fit well with the rectangular layout. This setup allows for clear pathways for the dancers' rhythmic actions while providing comfortable gathering spots for the audience along the edges.

Dhali Dance showcases lively performances that shift between circular and rectangular formations, reflecting its martial arts origins. This dance needs spacious outdoor areas to support the dancers' vigorous movements while leaving room for audience engagement.

Jari Dance features a circular formation that highlights group synchronization and fluid motion. This arrangement is ideal for large open spaces, enabling both dancers and spectators to immerse themselves in the performance and fostering a sense of community.

Lastly, Dhamail Dance also uses a circular setup but on a larger scale. Its coordinated movements require plenty of space for the performers while also allowing significant room for audience involvement, showcasing the inclusive spirit of this dance style.

**Table 02: Dance formation and articulation analysis( Image source : Ghetu: (Ibrahim, 2014 ); Shantal: (Rafique, 2021); Dhali: (Uzzal); Jari: (Uzzal); Dhamail: (Society, 2018);) (Arefin, Sifat, Roy, & Haque, 2025)**

FOLK DANCE	DANCE PATTERN	SPACE ARTICULATION
<p>1. Ghetu Dance</p> 		
<p>2. Shantal Dance</p> 		
<p>3. Dhali Dance or Lathi Dance</p>  	 	 
<p>4. Jari Dance</p> 		
<p>5. Dhamail Dance</p> 		

The **Laban Movement Analysis (LMA)** provides a framework to analyze the physical movements, spatial patterns, and expressive qualities of Bangladeshi dance forms. Below is a breakdown of key Bangladeshi dance forms using Laban's four primary categories: **Body, Effort, Shape, and Space**:

**Table 06: LABAN analysis (assertive)**

Dance Form	Body	Effort	Shape	Space	Reference
Jari Dance	Minimal, deliberate gestures focusing on storytelling.	Strong and sustained, reflecting mourning and spirituality.	Linear and grounded; emphasizes hand and arm movements.	Confined or circular, with synchronized group dynamics.	(Ahmed S. J., 2000)
Dhali Dance	Full-body martial movements using shields and sticks.	Strong, sudden, and direct, mimicking battle intensity.	Angular with sharp extensions representing combat.	Dynamic and confrontational paths between dancers.	(Mohanta, 2021).
Bizhu Dance	Gentle, fluid movements emphasizing harmony.	Sustained and light, reflecting Buddhist influence.	Rounded and symmetrical, symbolizing unity.	Semi-circular or circular formations.	(Minahan, 2012)
Manipuri Dance	Intricate hand gestures and fluid motions emphasizing storytelling.	Sustained and indirect, reflecting devotional calmness.	Circular and spiraling, symbolizing transcendence.	Temple or sacred spaces, symbolizing sanctity.	(Minahan, 2012)
Dhamail Dance	Rhythmic circular group movements with synchronized clapping and swaying.	Light and repetitive, symbolizing celebration and harmony.	Circular and flowing, emphasizing unity and festivity.	Circular or semicircular, performed in social gatherings.	(Ahmed S. J., 2000)

## DISCUSSION

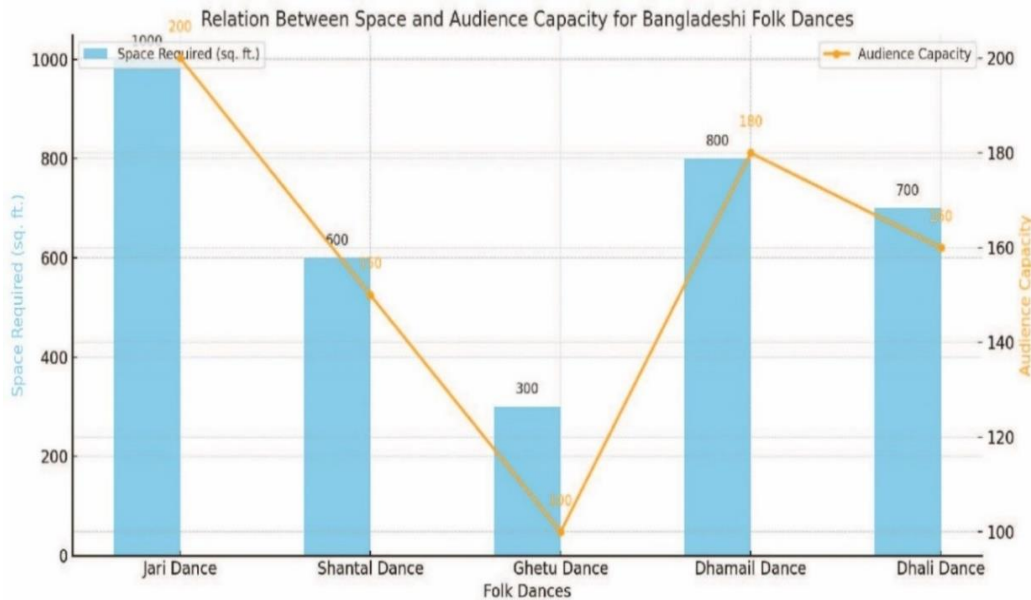
**Table 07: Area analysis for dance forms (area per person was determined through survey, expert's opinion, movement and media analysis)**

Dance Type	Area per Person (sq. ft. apx)	Performers (People min.)	Audience (People)	Total Area (sq. ft.)
Jari Dance	4.65	15	200	1000
Santal Dance	3.75	10	150	600
Ghetu Dance	2.86	5	100	300
Dhamail Dance	4.17	20	180	800
Dhali Dance	5.00	12	220	1200

### Key aspects:

- **Dhali Dance** has the highest area per person (5.00 sq. ft.), indicating a more spacious setting per individual.
- **Ghetu Dance** requires the least area per person (2.86 sq. ft.), reflecting its compact indoor stage setting.

- **Jari Dance** and **Dhamail Dance** maintain similar area-per-person values, consistent with their open courtyard or circular space preferences.



**Figure 01: Relation between space and audience capacity for Bangladeshi Folk dances**

This bar and line graph provides a quantitative representation of the spatial and audience requirements for Bangladeshi folk dances, correlating their spatial preferences with their traditional performance contexts:

The spatial settings of Bangladeshi folk dances are essential in shaping their performance characteristics, movement dynamics, and audience engagement. Each dance form is suited to specific environments, influenced by its historical, cultural, and functional contexts:

- **Jari Dance:**

Traditionally showcased in open festival environments, Jari Dance flourishes in vast outdoor areas like paddy fields. Its circular movements and communal essence necessitate a large space (1000 sq. ft.), making it perfect for festivals or gatherings where a considerable audience (200 people) can encircle the performers, fostering an immersive, collective experience.

- **Santal Dance:**

This dance is ideally suited for courtyards, where its linear movements reflect the elongated, rectangular layout of these spaces. With a moderate area requirement (600 sq. ft.) and an audience capacity of 150, Santal Dance integrates seamlessly into the

social and cultural events of indigenous communities, allowing for close interaction between performers and spectators.

- **Ghetu Dance:**

Characterized by its intimate nature and smaller spatial needs (300 sq. ft.), Ghetu Dance has shifted from outdoor venues to indoor performances. Often staged in compact settings, this form caters to a smaller audience (100 people), highlighting its more personal and focused character, typically featuring a solo dancer accompanied by a small supporting group.

- **Dhamail Dance:**

Typically performed in semi-open venues like wedding halls, large courtyards, or open areas, Dhamail Dance focuses on group participation and circular movements. It requires 800 sq. ft. of space, providing ample room for both performers and an audience of 180 people. This dance form embodies celebration, making it a highlight of social and festive occasions.

- **Dhali Dance:**

Originating from martial arts traditions, Dhali Dance features vigorous movements that necessitate more spacious environments. While it can be performed in courtyards, its dynamic rectangular and circular formations require 700 sq. ft. of space to accommodate its energetic style.

**Observations:**

- The **space requirement** corresponds to the dance's movement style and formation (linear, circular, or static).
- The **audience capacity** reflects the communal or intimate nature of the dance.
- Traditional settings such as open fields, courtyards, or stages align well with these spatial requirements.

The analysis visually establishes the relationship between dance forms and their spatial contexts, demonstrating how the architecture of performance spaces complements the choreography and audience engagement. The traditional folk dances of Bangladesh, which are deeply embedded in the cultural heritage of the country, are slowly losing their importance along with the spaces where they used to be performed. These dances, once essential to festivals and community celebrations, are diminishing as urban development disrupts the environments that supported them. With houses becoming compact and rising vertically, the open courtyards, fields, and semi-open spaces that once hosted these vibrant performances are disappearing. This loss of space directly impacts the survival of these dance forms, severing their connection to the cultural and natural landscapes they reflect. To protect this intangible heritage, it's vital to revitalize not just the dances but also the spaces they occupy. By incorporating these performance areas into architectural design, we can help ensure their ongoing existence and relevance in a

modernized world. Rethinking courtyards, public squares, and community centers can create spaces for these art forms to flourish. This strategy not only preserves cultural identity but also strengthens community ties. Bringing back these spaces and traditions can act as a link between the past and the present, ensuring their legacy remains for future generations. (Islam, August 2014)

## CONCLUSION

This study confirms that Bangladeshi folk dances are inherently influenced by their spatial environments, where movement formations, performer density, and audience relationships are directly affected by architectural context. The quantitative area analysis and Laban Movement Analysis show measurable links between dance styles and spatial needs. Circular and communal forms require large participatory spaces, while martial and intimate forms respond to different spatial limitations. The shift from open rural areas to enclosed urban and virtual spaces reflects a spatial change rather than a loss of culture. However, this transition modifies embodied interaction and collective participation. Therefore, future architectural designs should recognize dance as a spatial practice and create adaptable environments that preserve its cultural and performative essence.

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