



INTACH

UDAY SHANKAR



**Uday Shankar: Father of Modern Indian Dance, who never learnt how to dance.**

### Background and Early Life

Born as Uday Shankar Chowdhury into a Bengali family which was not associated with performing arts in any which way, in the year 1900, Rajasthan, Uday Shankar went on to become a major dancer and choreographer of India whose adaptation of Western theatrical techniques to traditional Hindu dance popularized the ancient art form in India, Europe, and the United States.

During his school years he was not introduced to dance but photography and music by his art teacher. And he went on to pursue Fine Arts from J.J. School of Art and further from Royal College of Arts, London under the tutelage of William Rothenstein. He was sent to British Museum to study the reproductions of paintings from caves of Ajanta and Ellora.

## TRYST WITH DANCE AND GLITTERING CAREER

While in London in 1923, Uday Shankar was discovered by the famous Russian Ballerina Anna Pavlova, who was trying to experiment with classical Indian themes for a dance production. Pavlova convinced Shankar to turn to dance and this was the time when the seeds of Shankar's dancing career was sown. He and Pavalova worked in line of fusing western dance form of Ballet with Indian dance forms. The collaboration of Uday and Anna led to many fabulous ballets based on Hindu themes.

Uday's performances with Pavalova, in 'Radha Krishna' ballet and the 'Hindu Wedding' in a program called 'Oriental Impressions', caused sensation and this unique fusion grabbed the attention of audience in London and United States. Later on he toured the world and delivered many breathtaking performances.



Shankar returned to India in the year 1929 and created his own dance company. His Indian Troupe toured between 1930 and 1960 into the western world and added on to new theatrical techniques. The knitting of two different techniques of Indo- Western World became hugely popular worldwide.

### **The New Setup**

In 1938, Uday opened a dance school at Almora, Uttar Pradesh. Many leading exponents of different dance forms were invited to teach in the school. Among the experts, were Kandappa Pillai for Bharatanatyam, Shankaran Namboodiri for Kathakali, Amobi Singh for Manipuri and Ustad Allauddin Khan, who took care of the music. Later, the school came to be known as Uday Shankar Indian Culture Center.

During the World War-II, the Uday Shankar Indian Culture Center was shut and was reopened after twenty years in Calcutta.

### Did You Know?

It is said that the legendary poet Rabindranath Tagore himself welcomed Uday Shankar when he returned to his motherland. After giving him a warm welcome, the Bengali poet insisted Uday to open a dance school, saying that it would benefit thousands of aspiring dancers. It was because of his encouragement and wise words that Uday went on to establish the dance school at Almora.



### The First Indian Dance Company in Europe

Shankar established first Indian Dance Company with Alice Boner. He further went on to devise new range of music, which could help his new dance form with the help of maestros- Vishnu Dass, Shirali and Timir Baran. Later with his brother, Sitarist Ravi Shankar, he explored the realm of classical and folk dance and created dance dramas which had elements of society.





### ACTIVITY TO DO....

1. Can you name few performances of Uday Shankar performed in the Western World.

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2. Find out why Uday Shankar has been regarded as the father of modern Indian dance.

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3. Name the western artists who were associated with Shankar in the journey of fusion of Indo-Western Theatrical techniques.

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### REFERENCES

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