



## Strictly Come Dancing ... India-Style

**It was a baffling experience. Why would men – and men only - sit drinking beer, or whatever, whilst watching a fashion show, which consisted of young ladies walking around and around in circles, fully decked out in colourful Indian apparel? They were all dressed exquisitely. Could that be the clue?**

Frank, and I wanted to get off the hot Mumbai street, into somewhere with cool air and a cold drink. Unknowingly we found ourselves ushered into this dimly lit cavern, past a succession of warm handshakes, as if we were VIP guests.

*“When in Rome, just go with the flow,”* I thought to myself.



In contrast to the heat and traffic we left in our wake, a wonderfully cool blast of Arctic air and deafening music greeted us as we were guided by the Maitre-D to one of several remaining ring-side tables. Then discretion got the better, as spotted a table in a darker corner, well back from the strobe-lit centre-circle. From this more secluded space, we surveyed the scene, throwing questioning glances at each other as we settled in.

After I got used to the dim light, I could see the central area was surrounded by tables, half of them occupied by Indian men, mostly in western clothes and seated in pairs, with a couple of larger groups and a few in solitary confinement. Discussions appeared

animated, though because of the blaring Bollywood music, these seemingly vigorous conversations were assumed, rather than heard.

A dozen or so beautiful young women dressed in bright and arresting colours paraded around the circle, moving with a flowing rhythm and swaying in time to the pulsating music. The men watching appeared to focus intently on certain ladies in the parade. Occasionally a dancer would disappear through a door, to be replaced by a substitute.

We ordered a second drink, which came with a tasteful array of spicy snacks.

*“It must be your turn to pay the bill, Frank.” I joked, assuming it would not be cheap.*

*“No, no... I paid yesterday! ...near where we saw the mongoose and the snake. You remember?”* I remembered of course.

*“What I can’t understand Frank,”* I shouted, *“Is what all these men are doing.”*

Just then – as if in response to some undisclosed signal – one man began throwing rupee notes at the circular parade. Another man leaned forward to push notes into a purple sash tied loosely around one woman’s waist. Given this lead, like the shot from a starting gun, other men began to follow suit, throwing money with gay abandon and stuffing it into the nearest lady’s waistband. Soon the floor was awash with notes and the women covered in the stuff. Some males were standing and applauding.



We both stared at the spectacle, then turned to face each-other.

*“Ah.”* said Frank. *“I get the picture. Perhaps we’ll leave after this one.”*

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The next day, with an Indian colleague, a long-time female friend of mine, we attempted to explain where we had been and what we had seen.

She stared at us at first in disbelief, then made a dismissive gesture, saying simply: *“Oh, that place. Not such a good place for you to be, really.”*

We quickly moved on to another topic.

*Duncan Gregory*

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