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Silicon Valley gets fit with Bollywood

Neelam Raaj, TNN 3 September 2009, 03:27am IST

Call it the Jai Ho effect! Bollywood's famous jhatkas and thumkas are now the next big fitness trend in the US. These workouts are a lot more sweat and a lot less glamorous than our filmi numbers but an increasing number of dance studios and gyms are getting into the groove, Bollywood-ishtyle.

And it's not just the desis who're hooked to the bosom-heaving and hip-shaking moves. Dance instructor Anna Botelho's Bollywood dance classes at the Google and Oracle fitness centers in San Francisco draw many who are not of Indian descent.

Like Merry Yen, a Googler who loves to do a 'Desi Girl'. "While it takes a lot of energy to get through a 7-minute Bollywood choreography, it's challenging yet exhilarating," says Yen, who works in Google's HR department as an administrative assistant. To keep the routines fresh and exciting, Botelho says she watches all the latest films. "I loved the moves in Love Aaj Kal's 'Twist' number. It's one of my favourites."

While Botelho's gone beyond Jai Ho, most Americans want to shake it Slumdog-style. At an Atlanta dance studio last month, Jai Ho's choreographer Longinus Fernandes recreated the final sequence of the Oscar-winning film with 83 students. "The class was packed and there were people waiting outside. I was surprised to see so many non-Indians," says the Mumbai-based Fernandes, who has also choreographed comedian Chris Kattan in the US mini-series 'Bollywood Hero'.

Bollywood dance has also taken centrestage on American television. Isharra, a team of dancers from UC Berkeley, recently drew a standing ovation on the show 'America's Got Talent' with their interpretation of Jai Ho. Just this week, five teams on the show, America's Best Dance Crew, performed Bollywood routines. New York-based Sarina Jain, whose Masala Bhangra workouts that combine Bollywood and bhangra are all the rage, says her class has doubled after Slumdog. "India is so big that people want to learn more about our culture," says Jain, who takes 18 classes a week.

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