



*Learning the intricate hand movements of Indian dance are pupils of Haugh Shaw Primary School in Halifax.*

Ten different cultures are represented at Haugh Shaw School of which four are involved in the dance class yet it would not be true to say that those from an Asian background show greater aptitude.

Indeed, it is often the case that children with an Asian background have never experienced their own traditional dancing in this country.

According to Indra, however, dance does play an important part in cultural life back in her homeland.

"Even if you do not learn classical dance everyone does folk dancing which is very much centred on the community. Each region has its own special dance for festivals."

She reckons that it takes between four and six years to train as a classical dancer and she maintains that it does not have to be taken up at an early age.

"You can start at any age so long as your limbs are quite flexible."

"In European dancing they tend to finish at a younger age — in Indian dance there are a lot of dancers over the age of 30."

"It is because Indian dance is so expressive — you have to be able to express love and rejection, for example."

"You cannot expect an 16-year-old girl to portray such emotions. Emotions are complex and they only come with age and experience."

"That is why the last ten years of an Indian dancer's career tend to be the highlight."

"Indian classical dance was

created as a form of story telling," she explains.

"It involves a lot of mime and hand gestures — there are actually only a few steps involved."

"Basically the steps keep the rhythm while the hands and face tell the story."

She also explains that the type of dance she is doing with the pupils — which also contains an element of creative dance — is not a set routine followed by all dancers carbon-copy style.

"It is not like ballet. Each dancer choreographs their own piece."

The age of the pupils with whom she works is apparently unimportant.

"It really depends on the school and the children."

"This age group is okay although because it is a new dance

structure for them, what I can do with them may be limited."

"If I went to a secondary school they may pick it up much more quickly. It depends how interested they are — working with GCSE Dance students is nice."

"Also the teachers here are very keen and join in. I have been to schools where the teachers just sit at the sides and do not take part."

Indra admits she is always surprised at the interest shown by boys who seem to enjoy themselves immensely but she feels that a possible explanation is that it is more of a dance-drama rather than just pure dance.

Certainly the boys at Haugh Shaw dancing the parts of demons throw themselves enthusiastically and imaginatively into conveying the aggressive and menacing characteristics required.