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MAKING THE MOVES

Sarina Jain has a fan in Deepak Chopra

Sarina Jain
THE TRAINER WITH A TWIST

Her dance workout, Masala Bhangra, has earned both celebrity fans and violent threats. On a muggy summer night at Manhattan's prestigious Alvin Ailey dance centre, in the mirrored wall of a large, bright studio, a woman watches herself dance. Her svelte shoulders bounce up and down. Her head, crowned by shampoo-commercial-worthy jet-black hair, moves from side to side. Her taut calves, outlined under Patiala pants, contract as they jump forward. Her toned arms stretch up in the air, hands rotating in half-circles. "It's like you're screwing in a light bulb, guys!" she shouts, moving in an agile, quick succession of steps. Then, for emphasis, she yells, "O balle balle!"

"Balle balle!" comes an out-of-breath chorus from dozens of perspiring men and women as they stumble to follow. The woman, Sarina Jain, a certified fitness instructor, runs through their midst, smilingly shouting encouragements as she pushes them harder still. She jumps atop a chair and surveys her students. Jain is the creator of Masala Bhangra, a dance workout that boasts thousands of followers and over 300 instructors in eight countries and 15 American states. She has been featured on American TV's *The Dr. Oz Show*, and

Deepak Chopra is a fan. This summer, New York's Mayor Bloomberg even presented her with a proclamation declaring May 7 as Masala Bhangra Day. "Sometimes I just stop and think, 'Holy moly, did I really do this?'" says Jain. "I made it happen because I believed in it."

That belief began in grief. Jain's father died of a heart attack when she was 19. He was 47. "My father was my life, my best friend," says Jain, now in her mid-30s. "Your mom helps you be a woman, but so does your dad. I lost a guiding figure at such a young age." Jain turned her sorrow into substance. Raised in a close-knit Indian community in California's Orange County, she helped organise desi dance shows. Her father's death made her question the unhealthy lifestyle of many in her community. "I asked aunties and uncles why they weren't working out. I wondered what I could do to get them moving."

Her answer was dance—specifically, Bollywood and bhangra. Jain took to her garage to devise a way of combining the two forms into a classic 32-step aerobics beat. Over a year of experimentation, she fashioned Masala Bhangra. "No one believed in me. Except my mom and my sister and maybe five friends."

Her determination was rewarded. She started teaching classes at local uni-

versities and word got around. She released her first Masala Bhangra instructional workout video in January 2000 and soon after, the behemoth New York Sports Club asked her to teach a week of classes in the Big Apple. In December 2000, she went to New York on a trial move, and she never left.

Since then, Jain has produced eight videos, hosted *V-Desi* (a music variety TV show), and been part of *Workout in the Park*. She's introduced Masala Bhangra to the UK and her latest project is *Bar Bhangra*, which pairs dumb-bells with Masala Bhangra routines.

Dancing her way to success hasn't come without some backlash. In 2009, Jain was on *The Today Show*, during which one of the hosts, Kathie Lee Gifford, imitated the routine in jest. Many bhangra purists took offence, misunderstanding Gifford's antics to be the gist of what Jain taught. She received angry letters, some threatening her with physical violence. The messages were serious enough for the FBI to get involved.

Jain is unfazed. "I've made it easy for the average person to get Bollywood and bhangra on a simplistic level," she explains. "I say to these kids, 'You try getting 5,000 people to say 'balle balle' for 20 minutes without making a fool of yourself.'" —Sahar Khan ■