

# Trends & Transition of Indian Dance (Kathak)

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## Abstract

Being a model of cultural pluralism and diversity, India has become a land of diversified art forms of which Dance is one. There are eight forms of dances to be counted as classical of which Kathak is a major one, which saw the amalgamation of both Hindu and Muslim culture.

Upto 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century this dance form was associated with the Bhakti movement swept over with Vaishnavism, but as soon as the foreign invasion starts, the evolution in style and presentation changes even in dress design were sharply noticed.

The taste of viewers also changed. Modern technological improvement also affected both teachers and learners. Some compromises with the purity of the style were made and put in serious question.

**Keywords:** Hallisak, Raas, Natvari, Bhakti, Angarakha, Kathaka Devdasi, Parampara, Durbar, Mehfil, Amad, Salami, Baijis, Tawaifs, Nautchgirls.

## Introduction

What is dance? Dance is set to proper disciplinary movements and steps that match the speed and rhythm of music. Dance requires through preparation of mind and body which again controlled and combined by spirit. Dance is the most intangible and important form or constituent elements of fine arts. For someone dance is a worship or puja, for someone it is a medium – a bridge between the human being with the divine. It is very much difficult to access about when dance exactly became the integral part of human culture, as India is a land of many racial, ethnic and religious groups, it has become a model of cultural pluralism and diversity.

## Kathak – Classical Dance Form

The criteria for a dance form to be counted as classical, is the adherence to the guidelines with regard to style as laid down in the ancient text of "Natyashashtra". Kathak is one of the major classical dance form of Northern & Western India basically from Lucknow, Jaipur, Varanasi & Raigarh.

## Culture & Tradition

Amongst all other classical forms, in Kathak style, we can notice the amalgamation of both Hindu and Muslim culture. Before getting classicalized it had a history of decadence from the ancient tradition of Kathakas, the professional story teller.

Hallisak or Raas dance which also described the stories of Krishna, Gopis, became a part of folk culture in the Braj regime. It is obvious that Kathak became rich by taking some elements from the Raas tradition prevalent in Braj. Kathak is called as "Natvari" to the famous "Raas Dance". Perhaps both grew roughly in the same geographical area. They share much Vaishnavite poem which incorporates dance bolts to be expressed through singing as well as dancing.

## Historical Changes

Upto 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century this dance form was associated with the Bhakti movement swept over with Vaishnavism. When Kathak dance was confined as a form of worship in the temple, eminent Kathakas of the Kathak community used to sing, dance and acts throwing a verse or episode taken from mythology, Purana or from epic.

As soon as the foreign invasion started conquering our country, the evolution got started, the spiritual concept, the "Bhakti" worship were



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shifted by the erotic sentiment. The dancers improvised dances predominantly to entertain the Muslim audience and Nawabs. In costume also was replaced by "Angarakha", hat and transparent veil.

#### **Temporary Degeneration**

Kathak already framed as a court entertainment, from 19<sup>th</sup> century onward to the British period, the female dancers were termed as "Nautch girls". Gradually the British officials, Christian Missionaries started to disregard them. Socially the "Nautch girls" were considered as the female of low station of society, and they were forced to stay in their own boundaries. The Christian missionaries forced "anti-dance" movement in 1982 to stop such practice of dance for the "Nautch girls" in North and Devdsasi system of the South. The Madras presidency under British colonial rule banned the custom of dancing in Hindu temples in 1910.

#### **Regeneration or Revival**

But the progress of the Indian freedom movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the effort of some familiarities of musicians and dancers gave effort to make the dance alive from dying.

The revival movement of Kathak developed both in the Hindu and Muslim simultaneously, legendary name like Ishwari Prasadji, from whom generation after generation are considered as the revolutionist.

#### **The New Forms of Details**

In the history of kathak, we can easily notice, that both the Muslim Ustads and Hindu Gurus and dance girls, all of them were patronized by the Nawabs, Zamindars or landlords.

1. At that period Kathak had its chronological order in the technical part of presentation.

For example :

1. Amad (To take entry);
2. Salami/Anjali (To greet audience, patron, God, in Muslim & Hindu culture respectively);
3. That (The stylized way or standing or sitting stance with very low pace).

Then gradually Tukras, Tora, Paran, Chakkardar Tora, Chakkardar Paran, Kavitt (poem), palta & Gat Nikas and at the end Tatkar (Footworks).

But today the changes in presenting the technical aspect are noteworthy.

Today's Kathak artiste starts performance with the entry music, simply with UPAJ on the stage instead of doing a "Amad". Not only that, in every Nritya part (pure dance) the dancers used to presents everything like Tukras, Tora, Paran, Kavitt, Gat Nikas, Gat Bhav and Tatkar in one go.

In the twentieth century, even before that Kathak was confined in the "Durbars" of the Nawabs where there were no time limit for the performers, so many musicians, vocalists and other accompanists were kept prestigiously, for the performers. Each and every time the performance was live in the "Mahefil" (The venue of the performance) accompanied by the live musicians took the important role, but with the passage of time scenario changed. Very few festivals or programme these days we watch with live musicians.

The recognition of the dancers who were once considered as the "Nautch Girls", "Baiji", "Tawaifs" are considered as the prestigious kalakar. From durbar, Kotha, it has come to the stage.

"Thumri", the most important aspect of Kathak, which was improvised at the time of the Great & last Nawab of Audh Wazid Ali Shah – when Thumri was presented specially with sitting position but these days Thumri is being presented through both sitting and standing position by the dancers.

#### **Old & New Parampara: Contribution of Technology**

Our tradition was being oral from Guru to Shishya – the Shishya (disciple) used to stay at Guru's house and learn both academic side and cultural side. But now in today's life, no student have time to pursue lessons by staying at Guru's house day after day, so these days the workshop systems of learning come into the scene. Most of the dancers, musicians are interested to learn through workshops to save time. So in 21<sup>st</sup> century very few disciples are seen to be learning decades with one single Guru.

High technical improvement in this era, you tube, etc Influenced the learners greatly, by imitating and initiating from you tube students are trying to learn, so the Quality of the art form is suffering even spoiling the form in some cases. Students are losing interest to go to Guru's house even, instead, they are getting the items readymade, easily, which is time saving, but may compromise with basic quality.

The length of the programme becoming shorter day by day, than the previous days, because in some classical conferences night long programmes used to occur with live musicians. So there were no time-bar for the dancers and musicians at one hand ; on the other hand the spectators or Rasikas also were of different nature, characters who really loved to take the essence of dance and music in true sense, appreciate the artistes where as today the time stipulation given by the organizers to the kalakar hardly for 15 to 20 minutes maximum 45 minutes which lead to make the repertorie shorter, cannot cover means of classical dance or simply cannot cover all aspects like (Nritya, Natya) in one go at one concert.

#### **Role of Audience**

The motivation, taste and nature of the viewers also lead artistes to take different items to entertain people and public. As a result these days reality shows have opened their wings everywhere.

Key words – "Nritya, Natya"

#### **Patronage, Socpe & Developments**

Innovation, improvisation with different items, different topics, have started, to increase people's interest in the music and dance and other fine arts. Government is taking initiative to establish the schools, colleges, universities to give the diplomas and degrees, so that the students get opportunities to get the job after completing their theoretical and practical studies. Before twentieth century these type of colleges, universities were not found.

In the nineteenth century even and in the early twentieth century we got many Gurus, but at the time of practical learning, movements name (hand

movement, pada bhangima) foot position were not named by any Gurus, but in 21<sup>st</sup> century we get the name of hand movements, name of foot positions, to easily communicate with distant students.

This contributive work done by living legend Pdt. Birju Maharaj.

Different dance festivals like, Puri Beach festival, Konark festival, Khajuraho dance festival, Chidambaram dance festival and many others are being held to enhance the interest of normal public. Except a few these type of festivals did not occurred in previous days.

But the question is how far the Kalakars are getting the patronizations from Government or non-Government organization?

Of course Government is giving some financial support for the organizations are engaging in propagating the art and culture. But in comparison to demand, this supports are insufficient. No such help can be received for individual artists. The organizations also do not offer honorarium as per the demand and / or the credentials of an artiste lead to perform only with the music track. So searching for a caliber of an artiste or to make aware about our tradition towards society is none of their concern. Moto of the organizations are changing day after day, getting business minded instead of propagating for the traditional heritage.

Because of this technical improvement artistes are being benefitted at one side but on the other, the "parampara" to perform with live musicians disappearing day by day.

#### **Objective of the Study**

The aim and object of this article is not only to make the readers and scholars aware of the trends of this particular dance form in terms not only of styles and presentation, but also to make them aware the kind of transitions with the reasons behind.

The article will trace the history as also the present scenario of this dance form. To maintain a

balance between the two is very much important to improvise and according to situation innovate.

#### **Hypothesis**

Amongst all other fine arts one of the major art forms is dance, which is a mobile art, where transition is quite reasonable and sometimes very consistence also for keeping pace with changing law of nature.

#### **Suggestion**

To promote and propagate the Indian tradition balance between the viewers tastes and values for tradition, should be maintained simultaneously which is very much essential in this changing scenario. For this purpose Guru and Shishya should be a little flexible to accept the transition in case of performance repertoire.

#### **Conclusion**

As change is in the law of Nature and mobility is the essence of the Universe, no art form can be static, it should be dynamic and improvisations not only can keep a dance form alive dance but also all types of fine arts alive. I think fine arts are interdependent. In a word there is a large number of possibilities keeping pace with changing motilities where one can go beyond the limits of classical dance yet be faithful to the tradition

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