

KATHAK DANCE



ORIGIN

Kathak is one of the main genres of ancient Indian classical dance and is traditionally regarded to have *originated from the travelling bards of North India referred as Kathakars or storytellers*. These Kathakars wandered around and communicated legendary stories via music, dance and songs quite like the early Greek theatre. *The genre developed during the Bhakti movement, the trend of theistic devotion which evolved in medieval Hinduism.*

The Kathakars communicate stories through rhythmic foot movements, hand

gestures, facial expressions and eye work. This performing art that incorporates legends from ancient mythology and great Indian epics, especially from the life of Lord Krishna became quite popular in the courts of North Indian kingdoms.

HISTORY AND EVOLUTION

The roots of this dance form trace back to Sanskrit Hindu text on performing arts called 'Natya Shastra' written by ancient Indian theatrologist and musicologist Bharata Muni. It is presumed that the first complete version of the text was completed between 200 BCE to 200 CE, but some sources mention the timeframe to be around 500 BCE and 500 CE.

REPERTOIRE

The three main sections of a Kathak dance are invocation and '*Nritta*' and '*Nritya*' mentioned in '*Natya Shastra*' and followed by all major Indian classical dance forms.

'Nritta' represents pure dance where the dancer initially performs a *thath* sequence exhibiting elegant and slow movements of eyebrows, neck and wrists following which she slowly ups her speed and energy in multiples as she completes a sequence of *bol*. Each *bol* comprising of short sections includes spectacular footwork, turns and gestures encompassing *tora*, *tukra*, *parhant* and *paran* among others.

In 'Nritya' the dancer communicates a story, spiritual themes, message or feelings through expressive gestures and slower body movements harmonised with musical notes and vocals.

CHARACTERISTICS

Kathak is characterized by intricate footwork and precise rhythmic patterns that the dancer articulates by controlling about 100 ankle bells. It takes its movements from life, stylizes them, and adds the complex rhythmic patterns. Kathak is danced by both males and females; many of the dances convey moods of love.

- ❖ **Namaskār:** is done before starting and at the end of a dance practice and presentation showing respect to God, Guru, Musicians, Stage, and the Audience. This is a symbolic way of seeking their blessings and permission.
- ❖ **Ghungru:** Metal bells tied on a cotton cord, worn around the ankles by the dancer. These are the primary instrument of a Kathak dancer and should be respected and taken care of by the dancer.
- ❖ **Warm-Up:** Before starting a dance practice and presentation a dancer must warm-up. Warm-up may comprise of simple exercises that get the body and mind ready for movement. The main purpose of warm-up is to increase the heart-rate and get the blood flowing.
- ❖ **Cool-Down:** At the end of a dance practice and presentation the dancer must cool down. Cool-down may comprise of simple stretching exercises that gets the body and mind to slow down. The main purpose is to gradually slow down and get the heart-rate and breathing back to normal.

EMINENT KATHAK DANCERS

- ❖ Shambhu Maharaj 1955
- ❖ Birju Maharaj 1964
- ❖ Sitara Devi 1969
- ❖ Saswati Sen 2004



THE ART OF STORYTELLING

Kathak is one of the eight forms of classical Indian dance, hailing from northern India. This dance originally focused on religious themes before it was adapted for the Mughal courts during the 16th century. Performed by courtesans, these themes were replaced with popular and secular folk stories to entertain the aristocracy.

EXPRESSIVE EYES

Facial movements were a key part of the kathak dance and prominent makeup was worn by the dancers to highlight their expressions as they enacted their stories. For example, they wore black kajal around their eyes as many of the facial movements focused on the eyes and eyebrows.

PERSIAN INFLUENCE

Kathak became heavily influenced by Persian dance and music during the Mughal Empire and this included the costumes that were worn. For example, dancers traditionally wore a transparent headscarf or veil, known as an odhani or orhni, which was typically worn by Persian women.

ORNATE JEWELLERY

The Mughal Empire was known for its stunning jewellery, so it's no surprise that kathak dancers were adorned with it, especially as jewellery helped to emphasise their movements. They typically wore pieces such as earrings, bracelets, armlets, necklaces and so on, which were made from gold or occasionally silver.

FLOWING DRESS

During the Mughal era dancers wore an angrakha dress, which left the midriff visible and had a sheer skirt, allowing audiences to see their legs underneath. The skirt, influenced by the costumes of Sufi dancers, would flare out during the dance but was short enough that it would not get entangled in their feet.

EYE-CATCHING COSTUME

Dancers wore trousers under their sheer skirts - known as churidar pajamas - in bright colours such as orange and red, which made them more noticeable. Not only did this hold the audience's attention, but it enabled them to see the deliberate and skilled movements of the kathak dancers.

PERCUSSIVE FOOTWORK

Ghungroos, anklets of small metallic bells strung together, were worn by dancers to highlight their intricate and rapid footwork to the music. They also complemented the complex and rhythmic step sequences, known as tatkaras, and the sound of the bells engaged the senses of the audience.

Teentāl: is a 16 **Mātrā** (beat) timecycle divided into 4 **Vibhāgs** (divisions/ sections) of 4 beats each, 4 + 4 + 4 + 4. It has 3 **Tālis**, at beats numbered 1, 5 and 13. It has 1 **Khāli**, at beat number 9. **Thekā** or the tablā bol for teentāl is ***dhā dhin dhin dhā dhā dhin dhin dhā dhā tin tin tā tā dhin dhin dhā***

MUDRAS USED

- ❖ **PATAKA:** All fingers should be straight and together, and bend the thumb in such a way that it reaches the end of the index finger.
- ❖ **TRIPATAKA:** Starting with pataka, bend the ring finger. The rest of your fingers should be firm and upright as well.
- ❖ **ARDHPATAKA:** After performing the Tripataaka, bend the little finger.
- ❖ **KARTARIMUKHA:** Bend the little and ring fingers and press them against the thumb while stretching the index and middle fingers to resemble a scissor.
- ❖ **ARDHACHANDRA:** Hold the thumb finger apart and all of the other fingers are straight and together.
- ❖ **MUSHTI:** First of all, clench the fingers and then wrap the thumb around them to form a fist.
- ❖ **SHIKHARA:** Firstly, bend all the fingers except the thumb and press it against the palm. Then raise the thumb and hold it erect.
- ❖ **KAPITTHA:** While performing Shikhara, bend your pointer finger and place it over your thumb.
- ❖ **KATAKAMUKHA:** Firstly, bring the index, middle, and thumb together and then elevate the ring finger and little finger at a particular angle.
- ❖ **SUCHIMUKHA:** While pressing the middle finger, ring finger and little finger against the thumb, keep the forefinger straight.
- ❖ **PADMAKOSHA:** Stretch all the fingers and slightly bring them closer to each other as if you're holding a cup or a glass.

❖ **SARPASHIRAH:** Raise your hand, intertwine your fingers with palm facing the front. Slightly bend your fingers rounding them in similar to the head of a snake.

❖ **MRIGASHEERSHA:** Stretch the little finger and thumb upwards while bending all three fingers in the middle halfway towards the palm. Keep these three fingers firm and uptight.

NRITTA DHYANA

The school for Indian Classical Dance



PATAKA



TRIPATAKA



ARDHA-PATAKA



KARTHARIMUKHA



MAYURAM



ARDHACHANDRAN



ARALAM



SHUKATHUNDAM



MUSHTI



SHIKARAM



KAPITHAM



KATAKAMUKHAM



SUCHI



CHANDRAKALA



PADMAKOSAM



SARPASIRSHAM



MRIGASIRSHAM



SIMHAMUKHAM



KANGULAM



ALAPADMAM



CHATURAM



BRAMHARAM



HAMSASYAM



HAMSAPAKSHAKAM



SANDAMSHAM



MUKULAM



TAMARACHUDA



TRISOOLAM

Dance Steps in Kathak:

The word Kathak has been derived from the word Katha which means a story. **Kathakars** or story-tellers, are people who narrate stories largely based on episodes from the epics, myths and legends. It probably started as an oral tradition. Mime and gestures were perhaps added later on to make the recitation more effective. Thus evolved a simple form of expressional dance, providing the origins of what later developed into Kathak as we see it today.

The Vaishnavite cult which swept North India in the 15th century, and the resultant bhakti movement contributed to a whole new range of lyrics and musical forms. The Radha-Krishna theme proved immensely popular alongwith the works of Mirabai, Surdas, Nandadas and Krishnadas.



Thate ,basic position

2.Rasleela in Uttar Pradesh

The emergence of **Raslila** , mainly in the Braj region (Mathura in Western U.P.) was an important development. It combined in itself music, dance and the narrative. Dance in Raslila, however, was mainly an extension of the basic mime and gestures of the **Kathakars** or story-tellers which blended easily with the existing traditional dance.

With the coming of the Mughals, this dance form received a new impetus. A transition from the temple courtyard to the palace **darbar** took place which necessitated changes in presentation. In both Hindu and Muslim courts, Kathak became highly stylised and came to be regarded as a sophisticated form of entertainment. Under the Muslims there was a greater stress on **nritya** and **bhava** giving the dance graceful, expressive and sensuous dimensions.



Rasleela in Uttar pradesh



Taking Pirouettes

The nineteenth century saw the golden age of Kathak under the patronage of Wajid Ali Shah, the last Nawab of Oudh. He established the Lucknow **gharana** with its strong accent on **bhava**, the expression of moods and emotions. The Jaipur **gharana** known for its *layakari* or rhythmic virtuosity and the Benaras **gharana** are other prominent schools of Kathak dance. The technique of

movement in Kathak is unique to it.

The weight of the body is equally distributed along the horizontal and vertical axis. The full foot contact is of prime importance where only the toe or the ball of the foot are used, their function is limited. There are no deflections and no use of sharp bends or curves of the upper or lower part of the body. Torso movements emerge from the change of the shoulder line rather than through the manipulations of the backbone or upper chest and lower waist muscles. In the basic stance, the dancer stands straight, holds one hand at a level higher than the head and the other is extended



Salami

The technique is built by the use of an intricate system of foot-work. Pure dance (*nritta*) is all important where complex rhythmic patterns are created through the use of the flat feet and the control of sound of the ankle bells worn by the dancer. As in Bharatnatyam, Odissi and Manipuri, Kathak also builds its pure dance sequences by combining units of movement. The cadences are called differently by the names **tukra**, **tora**, and **parana**, all indicative of the nature of rhythmic patterns used and the percussion instrument accompanying the dance. The dancer commences with a sequence called *That* where soft gliding movements of the neck, eyebrows and the wrists, are introduced. This is followed by a conventional formal entry known as the **Amad** (entry) and the **Salami** (salutation).

Then follow the various combinations of rhythmic passages all punctuated with and culminating in a number of pirouettes. The pirouettes are the most characteristic feature of the dance style in *nritta* portions. Recitation of the rhythmic syllables is common; the dancer often pauses to recite these to a specified metrical cycle followed by execution through movement.

The *nritta* portion of Kathak is performed to the **nagma**. Both the drummer (here the drum is either a pakhawaj, a type of mridangam, or a pair of tabla) and the dancer weave endless combinations on a repetitive melodic line. The metrical cycle (*tala*) of 16, 10, 14 beats provides the foundation on which the whole edifice of dance is built.out on the level of the shoulder.



Performance of Tatkari

In the mime portions (*nritya* or *abhinaya*), words are not used in simple numbers called the **gata**, which is performed in a lyrical manner to gentle rhythm. These are short narrative pieces which portray a brief episode from Krishna's life. A poetic line set to music is interpreted

with gestures in other numbers, such as the **tumri, bhajan, dadra** - all lyrical musical compositions

In these sections, there is a word to word or line to line synchronisation in the same fashion as in Bharatnatyam or Odissi. Both in **nritta** (pure dance) and the **abhinaya** (mime) there is immense scope for improvisation of presenting variations on a theme. The interpretative and the abstract dance techniques are interwoven into each other, and the dancer's greatness lies in his capacity for improvisation on the melodic and metric line on the one hand and the poetic line on the other.



Performance of kathak with tabla 's rhythm.



Abhinaya with music

BENEFITS

1. **KATHAK MAKES YOU PHYSICALLY STRONG:** Kathak helps to make the body of the individuals strong. It also helps in making the muscles stronger by learning the dance. The dance involves a lot of footwork, eye expressions and hand gestures. This makes the lower portion of the body strong; hand muscles also get their proper exercise.
2. **KATHAK HELPS IN OVERCOMING THE STAGE FEAR:** One of the major benefits of learning Kathak is that it gives you the opportunity to perform on a stage. By performing it in front of a large audience alleviates your stage fear. It makes you confident and gives you conviction about your own abilities.
3. **Kathak increases your ability to focus:** Learning of this dance form helps to increase focus and concentration. This dance is full of nuanced movements of foot, eyes, hands and face.
4. **Kathak makes you a good team worker:** Kathak helps you become a good team worker. While performing this dance, you will have to co-ordinate with your musicians and other co-performers. This helps in your ability to become a good team player.

5. **Kathak makes your brain sharp:** This dance form gives good exercise to the brain even as the dancer needs to memorise various steps and hand gestures. Also learning various Taals are also an important part of learning Kathak dance.
6. **Learning Kathak helps improve your expressions:** Expressions make the dance look more vibrant and graceful. The communication of each and every move in kathak is made more meaningful by giving proper expressions of happiness, sadness and so on.
7. **Kathak helps you learn Indian Culture and Heritage:** This dance form helps to represent the art and culture of India and help it in carrying forward. Kathak dance form which started to spread as a dance of storytelling of mythological anecdotes helps us to represent the rich culture and heritage of India. This dance form represents the stories of Mahabharata and the Ramayana. These were particularly spread by the bards or the storytellers who were termed as Kathakars.
8. **Kathak makes you a better storyteller:** This dance conveys various mythological stories through their dances, foot works and hand gestures.
9. **Kathak helps you in better body balance through learning footwork:** Learning of classical dances like Kathak helps in doing foot-works which are mostly done in various rhythms and laya. This dance form has various laya in which the footwork is done by the dancers. Learning of these foot-works makes the dance look more graceful and neat.
10. **Learning Kathak Mudras improves your hand movements:** Learning of Mudras in Kathak is also one benefit to the dancer. This dance includes the learning of both Samyukta hastas or mudras and also the Asamyukta hastas or mudras. Various mudras represent various objects. Mudras in Kathak also help to convey various feelings to the audiences.

 **PARTICIPANTS**

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