

## Trends and transitions in Kathak since 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards



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### Abstract

*Kathak has traversed through a long span of changing times and situations. With a brief account of its history, this research paper will focus on tracing the trends and transitions that have occurred in Kathak since 19<sup>th</sup> Century. This research aims to, Study and analyse the innovations and experiments in Kathak presentations since modern era till today, explore the changing modes in the pedagogy of Kathak, explore the journey of Kathak tradition as a performing art. It is expected to know (i) the flexibility and strength inherent in the form. (ii) the contributions of the Kathak exponents. (iii) the shift from spiritual to secular art form. This research will be pursued on the bases of scholarly writings, internet material, watching performances, speaking to artistes in Kathak field. It is seen that the art form Kathak has been highly adaptable to the changing times, patrons, audience, space and technology. In contrast to the earlier times the field is dominated by female Kathak dancers. The emerging trends with few exceptions have contributed in extending the traditional boundary of Kathak thus, enriching the form. For writing this paper I have collected secondary source of material.*

**Key Words :** Trends, innovations, experiments, tradition, transgression, extension.

### Research Paper

#### A Brief account of the origin and development of Kathak

Kathak the classical dance of North India has its origins in the ancient *kathakar* tradition. The origin and development of Kathak can be broadly divided into three phases. The first phase from ancient to medieval era, the second from medieval to modern period and the third the post-independent times.

In the first phase the *kathakar* tradition was associated with spiritual and religious purpose. The various storytelling groups presented their art in temples as well as during sacrificial rituals. The core aspect of these presentations was *katha-kathan* or storytelling, which was aided with dance gestures and abhinaya. With the passage of time the various dancing and storytelling communities intermingled with each other and had artistic exchange. Thus, the communities of *kathak-s*, *kuuilava-s*, *caran-s*, *rasadhari-s*, *kirtaniya-s*, *dhanha-s* etc. came under the

umbrella of storytellers, dancers and musicians. Some of these also presented their art in the royal courts of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and provinces in the North. In the later medieval period, from 16<sup>th</sup> century dance became the popular entertainment at Moghul court. At this juncture, Kathak was developed under the influence of Persian dance technique. The core content of Kathak shifted from religious to secular and ornamental.

The second phase witnessed the emergence of courtesan tradition by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Lucknow, the newly established cultural center attracted artistes from all parts of India in the hope to seek royal patronage. During this period, artistes explored and developed new concepts, which brought significant changes in music and musical instruments. Urdu gained the status as court language, and also the medium of artistic expression. *Thumri* became the popular genre of music in court. The female dancers belonging to professional dancing communities were well

accomplished in all the fine arts and earned the status of 'courtesan' popularly known as '*tawaif*', in the royal court of Lucknow. The courtesans sang and expressed the amorous themes of *Thumri* by interpreting in *abhinaya* and dance. They were trained in Kathak by the male Kathak dancers. *Thumri* and Kathak thus became associated with the courtesan tradition which continued to flourish till the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The anti-naught movement launched under the British rule around 1892-1893 brought Kathak on yet another threshold of time.

The renaissance (1927) brought about by the reformists revived the Indian classical dances, and Kathak gradually began to regain its lost identity.

In the third phase—the post-independent era, Kathak was redefined, reconstructed and presented on the proscenium stage. Major changes took place in the training and presentation of Kathak. Under the agenda of national identity, Kathak was recognized as one of the major classical dances of India. The history of Kathak is evident of the fact that there are many transitions in the journey of Kathak since its early stages. This paper will focus upon the changes in the presentation and pedagogy from 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

### **Kathak Under Royal Patronage**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century Kathak was practiced in the royal courts of both Hindu and Muslim rulers. The courts of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Lucknow and Punjab (to name the few), offered patronage to Kathak. The taste of patrons influenced the style and content of Kathak in these regions. Among the various provinces, Jaipur and Lucknow were the prominent centers of Kathak during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The city of Jaipur was established by Maharaja Jaisingh who reigned from 1699 C.E. to 1743 C.E. The patrons of Jaipur were Rajput warriors. There were both vaishnavite and shaivite kings who preferred the themes centering around their respective deity. Thus, the *vaicnava* themes centering around *Krsna* and *saiva* themes centering around *Siva* were explored in the court of Jaipur. The *nrtta* comprised of *lamchhad paran-s*, which exuded the *tandava* aspect of dance. The themes in *nrtya* were more of devotional fervor and thus *bhajan-s* were preferred to *thumri*. The *gat-bhav-s* were based on mythological themes more than secular ones. The patrons were adept in

music and also undertook training from veteran musicians. They were well versed in literature and composed numerous devotional compositions. As mentioned by Pandit Teerathram Azad, "Savai Maharaja Pratap Singh (reign 1778-1803) had composed several bhajans in praise of lord *Krsna*. The *kathak-s* under his patronage interpreted his compositions in *abhinaya*." [1] A temple of *Krsna* was built by Maharaja Savai Jaisingh in the city of Jaipur. The *kathak-s* and the female dancers used to perform in this temple as well as in the royal court. The male Kathak dancers were also appointed as teachers to train new disciples.

The presentations were underlined with religious sentiment and virtuosity of dancers. There was a trend of dancing on '*gula*' (a red powder used in rituals) and creating various images. Pandit Teerathram Azad further revealed, "It is said that Hanuman Prasad ji who was a court dancer in Jaipur, used to create the image of an elephant in *gula* while dancing a *Ganesparan*." [2] There were some presentations which included dancing on swords and dancing while balancing pots on head. The virile attitude also reflected in *nrtta*, which comprised of intricate footwork and compositions in difficult *tala-s*. Performing multiple *cakkar-s* in fast tempo was a part of their scintillating presentation.

The province of Lucknow was established by Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula in the year 1775. The *nawab* continued to follow the great Moghuls in their artistic inclinations and grandeur. Under his patronage Lucknow became the cultural hub, and home for many artistes. The tradition of *tawaif* or courtesan began to flourish in this era and continued till early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These women were well educated in various arts like poetry, literature, singing and dancing. Pandit Teerathram explain, "They were trained in courtly manners and etiquettes and enjoyed a high status among the court artistes. There is a mention of a courtesan named Deedar Baksh who was in the court of Savai Maharaja Pratap Singh. She was known for her soulful depiction on the devotional compositions composed by the Maharaja." [3]

Since the *tawaif-s* belonged to traditional dancing communities, it can be assumed that they must be adept in some form of dance which could be the traditional dance of their community. However, these courtesans were trained in Kathak by the male Kathak dancers in order to

present their art in the royal court. Secondly, they were also trained in singing *thumri* which was the popular genre of music as court entertainment. Vikram Sampat in his book said, “The famous courtesan Gauhar Jaan from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was trained in Kathak and *thumri* from the legendary *guru-s*, Shri Bindadin Maharaj and Pandit Bhaiya Ganpatrao respectively.”[4]

The style of presenting *thumri* included singing as well as interpreting the *bhav* through facial expressions and hand gestures. Most of the interpretation was done in sitting position with some interludes of dancing in fast tempo. Along with *thumri*, the genre of ‘*gazal*’ was also a part of the courtesan repertoire. *Gat-nikas* the beautiful and delicate aspect of Kathak had become popular in the royal courts. During the reign of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah (1847–1856), there were numerous *gat-s* explored by the *nawab* which are illustrated in his book ‘*Bani*’. In this text, he has described the various *gat-sin* detail. For example, the *naaz gat* is described as, “the middle finger of the right palm is placed on the chin while the left hand is folded near the waist in front. While moving backwards in dance, the right side of the dancer should face the audience.”[5]

There is a possibility that the *desi* trends which are mentioned in the earlier Sanskrit texts from 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards, were also a part of technique in these presentations. As opined by dancer-scholar Mandakranta Bose and Dr. Ranjana Shrivastava, the Persian dance piece *jakkadi* has close semblance with the ‘*ghunghatki gat*’, and the six types of *gharghara-s* are compared to the different type of footwork used in Kathak today. Among the various *cari-s* the description of *nupuraviddhacari* shows close semblance with the Kathak technique used in *gat-nikas*. All these *desi* trends are mentioned in *Manasollasa* (12<sup>th</sup> century) and also seen in the later texts like, *Sangitaratnakara* (13<sup>th</sup> century) and *Nartananirnaya* (16<sup>th</sup> century).

#### *Nupuraviddha Cari*

“...svastikasthau yada padau parsniprapadarecitrau ||  
tada nupuraviddheticariyam samudarita |”[6]

“To stand with the feet crossed (*svastika*) and to move (*recita*) the heel and the forepart of the feet.”[7]

The technique of moving in crossed feet while striking the sole and forefeet is common in *gat-nikas* and is known as ‘*na dhin dhin na ki tatkar*’ in colloquial language.[8]

These and many such trends which are still seen in Kathak today, might have been the part of Kathak technique and presentation during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Based on the writings of scholar-writer Margaret Walker, it is observed that different repertoire was danced by men and women dancers. The Persian texts, *Sarmaya-i-Ishrat* (1884) and *Madun-ul-Mausiki* (1869) describe the dance pieces which are danced by men and women respectively. Among the various *gat-s* mentioned in these texts, there are three *gat-s* which were performed by male dancers—the *mardani gat*, the plate *gat* and the plate and bowl *gat*. The *mardani gat* is described of having footwork with folded hands.[9] Margaret Walker describes that the female dancer (the courtesan) danced while playing with her veil or skirt, walking in gliding movements using various glances. This shows that, the *ghunghat* was shown by the actual use of veil and not by mime using gestures. The male dancers used to dance *parmelu-s* in the pure dance repertoire.[10] From these descriptions one can infer that the male dancers exhibited virtuosity with more of *tandav* aspect, whereas female dancers danced the delicate and feminine dance pieces exhibiting the *lasya* aspect of dance. This description also sheds light on the fact that Kathak was not agender then, as it is today.

Along with the traditional repertoire, Kathak was also a part of the famous dance dramasthe ‘*Inder Sabha*’ and ‘*Kissa Radha aur Kanhaiya ka*’, which were choreographed by Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. The *nawab* had appointed numerous female dancers in the *Pari Khana*, who had participated in these dance dramas. Both folk and classical forms were blended in these dramas[11] The musical compositions belonged to Persian and Hindustani traditions like, *thumri*, *holi*, *gazal*, *kalam* etc.

During the year 1856, the British deposed the *nawab* from his throne, and the splendor of Lucknow came to an end. Some of the *kathak-s* migrated with the *nawab* to Calcutta, and others scattered in the search of new patrons. The courtesans continued to perform in other existing provinces, and also in their private quarters. The *nawab* continued his passion for music and dance and invited many artistes at Matiya Burj in Calcutta.

Gradually due to the changing policies of the British government the royal patrons were replaced by wealthy landlords and the newly evolved class of bureaucrats in British administration. The courtesans performed in the

private concerts at their palatial mansions and on formal occasions. By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century around 1893 the anti-nautch movement was launched by the British under the policy of moral purity. The dance of courtesans and *devadasi-s* was considered vulgar and was banned. This act led the *tawaif-s* in a state of turmoil. They suffered from defamation and faced a setback in their profession. In spite of the difficult situations, the *tawaif-s* managed to perform in private soirees and on wedding functions.

One such performance is described by the renowned vocalist Smt. Sheila Dhar in her book, 'Rag'N Josh'. She had watched this performance on a wedding function around 1935, and remembers that the dancer sang and interpreted a *thumri* based on *Krsna*. She describes her dance as, "...mime, hand gestures, and body movements painted the picture for me very clearly... I was electrified by the sequence of brilliant footwork and explosions of sound from the *tabla* which peppered the musical storytelling." [12]

The anti-nautch movement was launched in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and concluded in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The tradition of *devadasi-s* and courtesans came to an end by the year 1947. The 20<sup>th</sup> century renaissance brought Kathak on the proscenium stage.

## Kathak in Modern Era (20<sup>th</sup> century)

### The Pre-Independent Period

The early 20<sup>th</sup> Century witnessed the renaissance, the agenda of nationalism, revival of Kathak and its recognition as a classical art of India. During this period the legendary dancers Uday Shankar and Ram Gopal showcased Indian dance in Western countries. These endeavors laid a great impetus on the reformist movement. The revival of Kathak took place on many grounds primarily dissociating it from the courtesan tradition. In this process Kathak underwent many changes pertaining to the content and technique of presentation. Some significant changes that took place in Kathak were as follows.

- (A) The sitting position for *abhinaya* was given up by the dancers, instead they interpreted while dancing.
- (B) The dancer no more sang the composition while dancing, but was accompanied by a vocalist.
- (C) The sensuous *thumri* was replaced by *bhajan-s* and other devotional compositions.

- (D) *Sarangi* was not used as a musical accompaniment to Kathak.

Madame Menaka, who came from a non-professional background was one of the pioneer female dancers who is credited to have brought the above changes. She was the first to introduce saree as the formal costume for Kathak. Her disciple the legendary artiste Smt. Damayanti Joshi, followed her *guru*, and continued to perform in saree.

In later years female dancers like Sitara Devi and Roshan Kumari (who belonged to professional musician family) came into the field of Kathak crossing the social boundaries. They popularized Kathak among the masses with their own unique style.

With the change in space Kathak was redesigned to be performed on the proscenium stage. The *abhinaya* which was rich in subtle movements and facial expressions was not visible in an auditorium. Thus, the interpretation was enhanced with body movements—*angikabhinaya*, in order to reach the audience. The concept of *thath bandhna* was inherent with small delicate movements of *anga pratyanga* and *upanga*. It began with the focusing of eyes— '*nazar bandhna*' and gradually progressed by displaying delicate movements of major and minor limbs. This controlled execution of *thath* would portray a 'still visual' in the large space of auditorium. To overcome this, *thath* was composed with rhythmic phrases, and more open stances.

Another measure against the stigma on solo female performance was introduced by Madame Menaka in the form of group presentations. The themes of these choreographies were mainly mythological, drawn from ancient *purana-s*. For example, 'Krishna Leela' was the first production of Madame Menaka in the year 1934. In the year 1936, Madame Menaka along with her troupe presented the ballet 'Deva Vijaya Nritya' in the International Dance Olympiad held in Berlin.

On the grounds of national identity, Kathak was reconnected with its ancient shastric origins. All inclusive, the '*margi*' tradition of ancient times was translated as 'classical' in the modern age. [13]

At this juncture it is important to mention about the innovative measure taken by Raja Chakradhar Singh of Raigarh (1924-1947). The Raja was a connoisseur of art and was upset about the phase of Kathak under British

rule. He invited renowned Kathak *acarya-s* belonging to different *gharana-s* to train young boys who were good at dance. Among them were Pandit Acchan Maharaj, Pandit Lacchhu Maharaj (Lucknow *gharana*), Pandit Jai Lal, Pandit Sunder Prasad (Jaipur *gharana*), to name the few. The dancers who were trained under them earned fame in various music and dance conferences. Pandit Kartik Ram and Mahant Kalyandas are among the prominent dancers of Raigarh *gharana*. Long before the intermingling of *gharana-s* that took place in later period, Raja Chakradhar Singh had set the trend of learning from different *gharana-s* under one roof. The *raja* died in the year 1947, a few months after the independence.

### The Post-Independent Era

The post-independent era brought Kathak under academic training. The foundation of institutional training in Kathak was already laid in 1939 by the Marris College of Lucknow and then in 1941 by 'Nriyalaya' founded by Madame Menaka. However, more institutes were established and various scholarships were introduced for Kathak in the later period. The Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra, Delhi, was inaugurated in 1952 by Shri Charat Ram and Smt. Sumitra Charat Ram. This was the earliest institutes imparting training in music dance and theatre. Later in 1955, Kathak Kendra was established as the Kathak wing of the former institute. There after there arose many institutes and universities in other parts of India which offer various courses in Kathak.

This initiative encouraged female aspiring students from non-professional families to learn Kathak and pursue this art as a vocation. The students in modern era had taken formal education in academic discipline and were exposed to the modern culture. First among the female students of Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra were legendary artistes and *guru* late Smt. Maya Rao and Smt. Kumudini Lakhia. They learned under the able guidance of the giants in Kathak – Pandit Shambhu Maharaj (Lucknow *gharana*) and Pandit Sunder Prasad (Jaipur *gharana*).

The institutional training brought about many changes in the pedagogy of Kathak owing to the limited teaching hours and exam patterns. Following the exam pattern a syllabus was introduced in the institutes thus binding the teaching program to it. In a way it organized the training process but, in a way, it limited the freedom of teaching in

one's own way. A formal syllabus for graded exams in Kathak was first created by Pandit Mohanrao Kallianpurkar which later became the model for many institutes and universities. [14]

Gradually with the association of traditional *guru-s* and modern students Kathak continued to flourish in the modern times. Having learnt from different *gharana-s*, the dancers incorporated the nuances of both *gharana-s* and with their own expression created their unique style. For example, Guru Rohini Bhate, Guru Rani Karna, Guru Uma Sharma, Guru Shovana Narayan and many more. The dancers belonging to different *gharana-s* like Pandit Gopi Krishna, Pandit Birju Maharaj, Pandit Durgalal, Pandit Rajendra Gangani, enhanced their family style with their aesthetic sense creating a hallmark in their presentations.

### Redefining and Reconstructing Kathak

The transition of Kathak from ancient to medieval era had diverse influences on its technique and content. The content was moreover influenced by the patrons and audience of diverse cultures. The technique that evolved was the amalgamation of ancient shastric tradition known as '*marga*' and the later *desi* trends including the Persian dance technique. The content also changed from religious to secular as the temple art of Kathak stepped in the Moghul courts. The two parallel streams – '*mandir*' and '*darbar*', got integrated in the modern era. The form that shaped in the later years was the result of refinement of technique and presentation in the hands of stalwarts.

The fluid movements, beautiful stances and intricate footwork are the hallmark of Kathak. The infinite vocabulary of movements and stances which exist in Kathak today are the result of endless efforts and vision of Pandit Birju Maharaj – the doyenne of Kathak. With his aesthetic sense and creative genius Maharajji brought remarkable change in the stylization of the movements making them manifold. As described by scholar-writer Sunil Kothari, "His own intuitive sense of aesthetics and an awareness of how a body would create pleasant images while executing movements, left an indelible impact..."

Among his numerous contributions, his innovative concept of *ginti-s* has become a part of tradition today.

The redesigning and redefining process gave way to new styles of presentations in solo and group performances.

Dancer choreographers Maya Rao, Kumudini Lakhia, explored new themes and innovations in group choreographies. Guru Maya Rao was the first Kathak dancer who had done a formal course in choreography in Russia. She choreographed many ballets which collaborated different dance styles with Kathak. Well known mythological themes were presented by Pandit Birju Maharaj in his ballets which succeeded in connecting Kathak with the masses.

Guru Kumudini Lakhia worked upon secular contemporary themes like, 'Duvidha' (presenting the dilemma of a house wife), 'Atah Kim' (introspection of an artiste), 'Setu', (an unusual love-story of contemporary times), to name the few. Her experience with legendary Ram Gopal and exposure to the western world inspired her to create her works which are the milestones in Kathak. Guru Kumudini Lakhia set the trend of choreography in its true sense, in Kathak. She also introduced the minimalist approach in costume and jewelry.

Guru Rohini Bhate explored ancient *sastra-s* and Sanskrit literature and reestablished the shastric tradition in Kathak. 'Ushasukta' is one of her choreographies based on the *rca-s* of *Rgveda*. She is also credited to have created new *tala-s* like, *citrarupak tala* with  $10^{1/2}$  *matra-s*, *niltaal* with  $7^{1/2}$  *matra-s*, to name the few.

The solo presentation was restructured in an organized pattern. This included a systematic progression of *nrtta* and *nrtya* compositions ascending from *vilambit* to *madhya*, and concluding in *drt lay*. New *tala-s* were created and danced, adding to the corpus of *nrtta* compositions. Varied choice of themes was interpreted in *nrtya* which were drawn from mythological and secular literature. Modern poetries of contemporary poets were also interpreted in Kathak. Innovative techniques were developed by dancers in order to use the stage creatively. Pandit Gopi Krishna who had travelled extensively for his stage performances had developed a unique style of covering the stage. Pandit Birju Maharaj thoughtfully worked upon this concept and derived many techniques in footwork and *cakkar-s* in order to use the space while executing the *bol-s*.

The form that was defamed at the advent of modern era, regained its dignity in the free spirit of the post-independent times. The new generation of dancers imparted their knowledge to their disciples and the 'guru-

*sisyaparampara'* which was prevalent in the traditional Kathak families, also continued to flourish in the hands of dancers who were outside the *gharana-s*. Gradually the number of aspiring students went on increasing. Soon Kathak got decentralized to various regions of India, acquiring regional flavors. It can be said that 'Kathak' which was a *desi* variety of the ancient *margi* tradition, gave rise to more *desi* trends in modern era.

### Exploring New Avenues in Kathak

The latter half of 20<sup>th</sup> century welcomed more female dancers. Kathak by then was recognized as one of the major classical dance forms of India. Both solo and group performances were practiced in Kathak. The knowledge imparted by the *guru-s* and their works inspired the dancers of next generation to tap more possibilities inherent in Kathak. Kathak was no more perceived as mere entertainment but was a medium of self-expression. The urge of self-expression expanded the scope of presentations in Kathak.

The solo format was explored and innovated by many dancers who have set new trends through their innovative skills. These trends are numerous pertaining to the individual expression and are hence beyond the limit of this research paper.

The stream of group choreographies was explored to a great extent by the dancer-choreographers. With every new choreography Kathak offered new possibilities encouraging and inspiring the dancers who developed many themes-traditional and modern.

The social issues like women empowerment, environmental conditions, political plot etc. were effectively portrayed in Kathak. For example, the ballets 'Mamta' and, 'Dishantar' choreographed by dancer-choreographer Shovana Narayan Traxi speak about the traumas of women and environmental issues respectively. The political plot of 'Sattakal' by Guru Maulik Shah and Guru Ishira Parikh commented upon the game of power with three male characters from Mahabharat.

On the inter-cultural plane, many artistes came up with collaborative performances with other dance styles like Flamenco, tap dance and the classical ballet. These performances displayed the similarities as well as differences in both the forms, revealing the beauty and strength of individual forms. Such collaborations also

underlined the adaptable nature of Kathak which blend well with the dance forms of diverse cultures. Pandit Chitresh Das who resided in America, had presented many duets with the renowned tap dancer Jason Samuel Smith. He has also developed an innovative practice which includes *tatkar*, while playing harmonium or *tabla* and reciting the melody simultaneously. He has named this innovation as 'Kathak Yoga', which involves a fine coordination of the dancer with dance, music and recitation.

A significant example of inter cultural theme portrayed in choreography is the ballet 'Romeo-Juliet' by dancer-choreographer Shasvati Sen. The well-known saga by Shakespeare was expressed in Kathak. The music was a fine blend of Indian *raga*-based music and western jazz. There were no lyrics or narration used in the presentation.

Stage space was also considered as a theme by dancer-choreographer Shama Bhate. Among her many choreographic works, 'Chaturang ki Chaupal' is a recent one. For this presentation the space of '*caupal*' – the board of dice was fixed by her, and the dance and music were then designed for this space. The dancers presented four *chaturang-s* in four different *raga-s* on the space of *caupal*. As explained by Guru Shama Bhate, "This choreography is a play with the ragas... Here the four mighty ragas are using the dancers like their dice." [15]

While tapping the roots of Kathak, Guru Rajashree Shirke did a research on the *kathavacak* tradition still practiced in northern parts of India. Her research inspired her to develop a style which she named as 'Ranga-Nritya'. This form includes dance, drama and spoken dialogues. Her productions like 'Kanhopatra', 'Ravan Mandodari Samvad' and many more, are traditional yet innovative.

With the changing times, and changing cultural milieu, Kathak presentations have thoughtfully been designed to meet the taste of multicultural audience. Besides, the exposure to various art forms and advanced technology inspires the artistes to create and express themselves anew keeping the tradition intact. The choreographic presentations of dancer-choreographer Aditi Mangaldas have set a new trend in this direction. With her innovations in choreographies, she has also thoughtfully shaped the Kathak movements making them contemporaneous. As said by Aditi Mangaldas the process is like, "...taking a seed of Kathak and sowing it with contemporary

sensibilities so...the plant that grows out of it, has the roots of Kathak but may not have all its characteristics" [16] Her productions like 'Footprints on Water', 'Uncharted Seas' 'Immersed', and many more have been designed with the same contemporary and modern perspective.

The above-mentioned spectrum of themes and concepts in Kathak presentations are evident of the impact of changing times and cultures on the society which in turn reflects in the performing arts.

### **Kathak in Contemporary Times**

The society in contemporary times is influenced by the electronic media, the people are exposed to various cultures, and the pace of life is ever increasing. The reality shows on various channels present Kathak choreographies which are beautiful and attractive but they lose the core of classicism. With the influence of western culture, the dancers today experiment with the technique of Kathak by fusing it with other styles like jazz, western ballet, and contemporary western dance. There are collaborative experiments where Kathak is danced with western dance styles as well as with the other Indian classical dance forms.

Experiments are also done in traditional repertoire where the *nrtta* and *nrtya* pieces comprising *tode-tukde*, *gat-nikas* etc. are beautifully arranged in a music track creating an array of compositions. Many classic concepts like *nava rasa*, *asta nayika*, *nayak bheda* etc. are portrayed in contemporary contexts. The performance is enhanced with techniques like beautiful synchronization, costumes, light design etc. creating a spectacle. In this set up though the physical beauty of the form is revealed, it lacks the extempore character which is at the core of Kathak tradition. However, these presentations successfully connect with the common audience who is uninitiated in classical genre.

These and many more experiments are being done in Kathak presentations. The process is unending and will give rise to new trends in future. There are many more dancers who have contributed to the field of Kathak whose names and works are not mentioned in this paper due to the limitation of space and time. Kathak tradition will always be indebted for their immense contribution.

As a performing art Kathak has to flow with changing times. The trends and experiments described above are functional in transforming Kathakin order to withstand

the test of times. The trends that strengthen the form will get assimilated in the tradition, while the rest will remain on the periphery.

### Conclusion

- The journey of Kathak has undergone major shifts since historical stage, related to space, culture, music, patrons and audience. In every transitory stage Kathak has continued to flourish by assimilating many new concepts and discarding some. This reflects on the highly adaptable nature of Kathak tradition, which offers more possibilities in order to rejuvenate at every time juncture. This makes the tradition old and new at the same time.
- The form Kathak which is seen today is no more practiced as an offering or service to God, but as a highly refined classical entertainment. On the other hand, it is a medium of self-expression for an artiste.
- The pedagogy of Kathak has shifted from one to one training to classroom teaching and workshops. In recent years Kathak lessons are also given through internet and television channels.
- Today the field is dominated by female Kathak dancers from outside the Kathak *gharana-s*. The performances are more inclined towards group presentations than solo due to various reasons. Over the period the extempore character of Kathak is slowly diminishing.
- One can see that Kathak extended its boundaries assimilating Persian culture in the Moghul courts, and the process continues today while assimilating the western culture on global level. There is a fine line between extension and transgression of boundaries which decides whether the trend will become a part of the tradition or will remain as an individual fancy.

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