

AN INTRODUCTION TO KATHAK AND ITS GHARANAS

Dr Ayushi Dixit

Assistant Professor
Department of Dance
Vally College Jodhpur

Abstract: Indian culture is known for its rich culture and heritage. We have evolved in different era's and over the period we have transformed, upgraded our culture. Our culture shows reminiscent of Mughal, Persian, Afghani, British making it more rich and extensive. In this paper Kathak evolution as different styles and forms and gharanas were studied and it was quite evident that each Gharana has a different story and form. From the literature it was concluded that there were three famous gharanas of kathak as Jaipur, Banaras, Lucknow. Jaipur Gharana focused on the intricacy of the technical aspects of the dance, Banaras emphasizing the gestures and Lucknow for expression and footwork. The present-day kathak we see have mostly the grouping of two or more Gharana or dance forms. Over the period the kathak has matured in the way of delivery and many cultures reminiscent can be seen in this dance form. The kathak is now not only limited to our country but the artist has workshops and performances all around the globe and people are getting training across the globe.

Keywords: Kathak, Gharana of Kathak, kathak in modern times, kathak evolution.

Introduction

Kathak having roots in northern India, originated from Katha which means story. Kathakars the kathak artist used to perform on the stories related to god and mythology Mahabharata, Ramayana. It holds a very stronghold in the Indian culture. It has evolved in different forms and styles over the eras. Initially started with the bhakti movement and performed in the temples and telling the stories with the Mughals empire in India it has moved to the courts, where their artist also had given their element in the dance and then with the coming of British it was degraded and lost its hold in our culture but after independence Government had again worked to uplift its position. Now, kathak had developed a lot and even part of the drama, play, theatre and cinema. This dance form is also not specified to a particular gender.

Kathak involve:

- Nritta ~ the pure dance
- Natya ~ authentic drama
- Nritya ~ use of vivid facial expressions

It's a dance form that has a slow as well as fast pace. (Hawa, 2017). Every Dance form is inspired by the culture of the region from where it is originated. The artist of the dance form was futuristic perception and the tode, tukde composed at that time also have relevance and popular till date. In this era also it can keep its presence. The kathak is preached from guru to shishya and the styles become the symbol of belonging to a particular Gharana, teacher giving the dance a new shape and form. Classical dances and music are always from gharanas. Kathak has major three gharanas, Banaras, Jaipur and Lucknow. The teaching is passed from one generation to other in typical guru shishya parampara. The three main compulsory elements of dance are nritya, nritta and bhaav, all gharanas have expertise in one or more of these

Banaras Kathak Gharana is one of the spiritual and purest forms as considered by artists, as it was performed mostly in temples. Banaras Kathak Gharana founded by Janakiprasad. This style is known for its natwari or dance bold. It includes more floor work. Prominent dancers of Gharana are Dulha Ram and Ganeshilal, Chunnilal, Biharilal, Hiralal Hanuman Prasad, Shivalal Nawal Kishore.

- Sitara Devi is known Kathak dancer both in India and abroad. She is proficient in creating a fusion of Banaras and Lucknow Gharana. She was titled as 'Nritya Samragini' by Rabindranath Tagore. She had performed at various prominent venues like Carnegie Hall, New York and Royal Albert Hall, London over her six decade long career. She was honoured by Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, Padma Shri, Kalidas Samman and Nritya Nipuna. (FP, 2017)

Lucknow Kathak Gharana originated from courts of Muslim nawabs this gharana focuses mainly on the abhinaya, expressions, acting, grace with the movements. It is known for presenting bhaav in a better way. Prominent artists of this gharana are Birju Maharaj, Shambhu Maharaj and Lachhu Maharaj.

- Dr Maya Rao has created her place as choreographer of kathak all over the world. She had also one who have passed this beautiful north Indian dance in South India and started a dance school their back in 1987. (Express News Service, 2021)
- Pt. Birju Maharaj- add glory to the Lucknow Gharana, he is known for his exceptional, inspirational and illustrious dance form. He was trained under his father and uncle the guru of this gharana Achhan Maharaj, Shambhu Maharaj and Lachhu Maharaj. He had many awards like Sangeet Natak Academy Award, Padma Vibhushan, also awarded honorary doctoral degrees by Banaras Hindu University and Khairagarh University. (Verma, 2021)

Jaipur Kathak Gharana originated at the time of Kachchwaha reign. This Gharana focus mainly on the technicality of the dance, simple to complex footwork, spins and talas are known as abhinaypakhawaj, such as paranas are also developed in this. Jaipuris a

city with rich culture and heritage even kathak has its roots. 'Katha kahe so kathak kahave' – which means Kathak is the dance of storytellers. The story is narrated through the body. Face, hands, feet on the beats of table and lehra. Ganganis are known as the leading exponents and their 3 generations are continuously performing this all over the country and world. Earlier the dance was restricted to be performed by the male members, but with the changing time, even the female are given chance to showcase their talent. (Vashisht, 2019). Famous artist of this Gharana are Chunnilal Prasad, Kundan Lal Gangani, Sunder Prasad, Mangala Bhatt, Puru Dadheech, Pt. Sundar Lal Gangani, Pt. Devi Lal,

- Pandit Durgalal is one of the best gurus and also has received awards at Rajasthan Sangeet Natak Academy, Rashtriya Sangeet Natak, Padmashri.
- Pandit Rajendra Kumar Gangani is known for his innovation in the dance form, and was honoured with many awards as Sangeet Raj and Shastriya Natya Shiromani Award, Sangeet Natya Academy Award

One more Gharana which come into existence was **Raigarh Kathak Gharana** it was developed in early twentieth century in Chhattisgarh during the reign of Maharaja Chakradhar Singh.

Kathak is gaining a lot of importance and the government also try to promote both the art and the artist. Now the artist tries to re-create and innovate it with many different styles and elements. this is not restricted to our country it is being preached worldwide and even the interested students learn it through the online medium, not restraining it to a particular mass or place.

Research methodology

The paper aims to study the evolution of different gharanas of Kathak and the difference in the dance style of these gharanas and how they have travelled over the period were studied. To conduct this study, secondary data was considered for the collection of data. We have taken the literature published on various journals, websites, newspapers, blogs and reports.

Related literature

The author has studied the various Gharana of kathak. House of kathak is known as Gharana. The position got deteriorated with the coming of British raj but few families retained their tradition and the art form. Three forms were developed as Lucknow, Banaras, and Jaipur Kathak Gharana.

Lucknow Gharana- Sri Ishwar prasad acclaimed to revive the art of kathak. It gain its importance when it was performed in the nawab courts of Oudh, Lucknow. This Gharana focuses mainly on the grace and elegance of the artist. It was following lasha style, abhinaya, bhavas, thumri of this Gharana became popular. Birju Maharaj, Shambhu Maharaj, and Lachhu Maharaj are the most famous artist.

Jaipur Gharana- this dance form originated during the reign of Kachchwaha kings. Shri Bhanuji is known to be its founder who had expertise in Tandava. The artist of this Gharana perform mainly in courts of Hindu kings, consecutively preserving the traditional form of the dance. In this dance form technicality of dance are given more importance.

Banaras Gharana- Janakiprasad is known as the one who developed this gharana. This gharana focus more on the bol or natwari and footwork. Lasya and tanadava also have its features. (Bhatt)

The performers of Uttar Pradesh known as Kathavacs, their form of kathak is narrating a story called Kathavac with gestures, rhythms, songs. This is known to be the ancient and spiritual form of dance. The author got insights into the origin of the dance. The clan belonging to this form are doing a continuous effort to propagate the identity associated with documentation. (Walker, M. 2006)

Kathak known for its footwork, storytelling techniques were transferred from guru to teacher in the typical Indian guru shishya parampara. The author tried to study the change in the dance technique Over generations in all gharanas. The change in the periods and rulers have developed kathak styles. The basics of styles have also seen the change and the flexibility and adaptability in the dance form define the important aspects of teaching. The change in the socio-cultural, demographics also play role in developing and changing the dance style and teaching pedagogy as it is not limited to our country only. (Morelli, S. 2010).

In this article the author focused on the four gharanas the following are the view about the gharanas:

- **Lucknow Gharana-** it started at the reign of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah the ruler of Awadh in the early 19th century. It is said that in this Gharana the dance gains its complexity and grace. This Gharana is known for the grace, expressions and gestures
- **Jaipur Gharana** developed in the courts of the Kachchwaha kings. This Gharana focuses on the technicality as complex and powerful footwork, multiple spins, and complicated compositions in different talas.
- **Benaras Gharana** founded by Janakiprasad. It is known for use of floor and the natwari.
- **Raigarh Gharana** developed in the early twentieth century by Maharaja Chakradhar Singh of Chhatisgarh. The king called the experts of kathaks at his court and all the artist together developed a new form with different rhythms beats footwork. (Singh, 2015)

Over the period the rich and graceful dance form of India has also seen the changes.. till sixteenth-century Ram Lila, Krishna Lila and portraying the stories of god were part of the dance. In the 17 and 18th century the dance had major changes as it was experimented by many people of different communities. By the 19th century, the known styles of kathak evolved as Jaipur Gharana, Lucknow Gharana and Banaras Gharana. (Grover, B. (2015).

Kathak originated in the northern region of India and belonged to the brahman men and was also called brahman kathak. It has its root in Hindu mythology and is considered to be very spiritual. The philosophy it follows is of the Advaita meaning whole, which means the male artist perform both parts of male and female. In this paper, the author tries to study the unknown facts and basics of dance. (Gupta, 2015)

The author studied the kathak recent history with the regional viewpoint. Lucknow Gharana was confined to courts and salons of colonial rulers. How the changes happen in the dance form with the transition from the traditional form of transmission to the institutes. The new form included modernisation and globalisation. The traditional form is preserved but the new culture and generation of the cosmopolitan world are reshaping the dance form, now the disciples experiment and innovate with the traditional form. (Skiba, K. 2016).

Kathak has transformed with time, earlier if artists performed abroad it always crossed the time allotted and the audience was there to enjoy till the end but now the audience to have the time restriction and they are not able to spend so long hours restricting their performance to the time allotted. (Sahasrabudhe, 2019).

Conclusion

Kathak reflects our ancient culture and is known for its styles, abhinaya, Mandra. The rhythm, sound of ghunghroos and the expressions of the artist keep the audience engaged and mesmerized. The literature depicts the specialisation of different gharanas and how the cosmo and global world have merged not only the different gharanas but also with the international and other national dance forms. The audience has a lot of expectations from the artist and is no more enlightened just to see the abhinaya. It's the need of the hour for an artist to create a dance piece that binds the present-day audience. Artists also try to protect and save the original form of kathak. The government also encourages and endorses the events and the artist as this dance has passed through various centuries and was merged with the styles of different reigns and rulers. Kathak is not a gender specified dance form, it does start with the performance of male members who used to play the part of both male and female in the performance but over the period the female also got the equal position and are known for their exemplary performances.

This dance form also traces familiarity with the south Indian Dance form Bharatnatyam, one considered to have introvert expression style and later as extrovert expression style. Kathakali and kathak are different having common things as both portray stories, involve extensive footwork, gestures; kathakali has recently emerged and later known to be more ancient. Even certain author believes that kathak and Flamenco have similarity as both involve extensive footwork and gestures, kathak is done barefoot while other wearing boots. Though kathak has developed and belonged to our country, still the artist witness more audiences when they perform abroad, this was the view of many kathak artists. They believe that the foreign artist usually merges two or three dance form and enrich it but the Indian artist stick to the traditional form and that may be one of the reasons we are not able to attract the youth and more audience in the cultural fest and foreign fest witness more audience. (Khajuraho, 2017). Our institutes and academy must enrich and allow the artist to experiment and develop new forms.

References

1. Bhatt, E. Gharanas of Kathak – Kathak World. Retrieved 18 September 2021, from <https://www.kathakworld.com/gharanas-of-kathak/>
2. Express News Service. (2021). RIP Dr Maya Rao: Remembering a legendary Kathak dancer. Retrieved 19 September 2021, from <https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/bengaluru/2021/sep/06/rip-dr-maya-rao-remembering-a-legendary-kathak-dancer-2354730.html>
3. FP. (2017). Sitara Devi: The 'Nritya Samragini' who was one of Kathak's most eminent exponents-Entertainment News , Firstpost. Retrieved 19 September 2021, from <https://www.firstpost.com/entertainment/sitara-devi-the-nritya-samragini-who-was-one-of-kathaks-most-eminant-exponents-4199245.html>
4. Grover, B. (2015). NEW EXPERIMENT IN KATHAK DANCE: ANALYTICAL STUDY: कथकनृत्यमेंनवीनप्रयोग:विश्लेषणात्मकअध्ययन. *International Journal of Research-GRANTHAALAYAH*, 3(1SE), 1-3.
5. Gupta, S. (2015). Performance and Subversion in Kathak. *Sub Versions*, 3(1), 118-153. Retrieved from <http://subversions.tiss.edu/>
6. HAWA, N. (2017). The History and Origins of Kathak Dance. Retrieved 16 September 2021, from <https://www.desiblitiz.com/content/history-origins-kathak-dance>
7. Jog, G. (2014). Comparison of Kathak Gharanas in Kathak Dance by Gauri Jog. Retrieved 16 September 2021, from <https://www.gaurijog.com/comparison-of-kathak-gharanas/>
8. Kathak - Wikipedia. (2021). Retrieved 19 September 2021, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kathak>
9. Khajuraho. (2017). More audience for Indian classical dance on foreign shores: Kathak dancer Anuj Mishra. Retrieved 19 September 2021, from https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/more-audience-for-indian-classical-dance-on-foreign-shores-kathak-dancer-anuj-mishra-117022300052_1.html
10. Khurana, S. (2018). Dance cannot be conservative: Uma Dogra. Retrieved 16 September 2021, from <https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/art-and-culture/dance-cannot-be-conservative-uma-dogra-5299752/>
11. List of Kathak exponents - Wikipedia. (2021). Retrieved 19 September 2021, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Kathak_exponents#:~:text=Benaras%20gharana-,The%20following%20is%20a%20list%20of%20the%20gurus%20of%20the,Puranlal%2C%20sons%20of%20Dulha%20Ram
12. Morelli, S. (2010). Intergenerational adaptation in north indian kathak dance. *Anthropological notebooks*, 16(3), 77-91.
13. Sahasrabudhe, A. (2019). Renowned Kathak artiste Nalini Asthana on Benaras gharana's aesthetic, why the classical form has endured-Living News , Firstpost. Retrieved 16 September 2021, from <https://www.firstpost.com/living/renowned-kathak-artiste-nalini-asthana-on-benaras-gharanas-aesthetic-why-the-classical-form-has-endured-7481661.html>
14. Skiba, K. (2016). Cultural geography of Kathak dance: streams of tradition and global flows. *Cracow Indological Studies*, (18), 55-89.

15. Singh, S. (2015). KATHAK: UNDERSTANDING THE GHARANAS OF KATHAK. Retrieved 18 September 2021, from <https://nateshwar.wordpress.com/2015/02/18/kathak-understanding-the-gharanas-of-kathak/>
16. Vashisht, R. (2019). Tales from Jaipur. Retrieved 16 September 2021, from <https://www.asianage.com/life/more-features/110219/tales-from-jaipur.html>
17. Verma, A. (2021). A flagbearer of Lucknow's culture, Pt. Birju Maharaj's life is a love-laden treatise on Kathak!. Retrieved 19 September 2021, from <https://www.knocksense.com/lucknow/a-gem-of-lucknow-pandit-birju-maharajs-life-is-an-epic-poem-of-love-for-kathak>
18. Walker, M. (2006). Ancient Tradition as Ongoing Creation: The Kathavacaks of Uttar Pradesh. *MUSICultures*.

