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“Kathak Dance”

Kathak is one of the main genres of ancient Indian classical dance. It 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.

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 epics, especially from the life of Lord Krishna became quite popular in North Indian kingdoms. Three specific forms of this genre that is three gharanas (schools), which mostly differ in emphasis given to footwork versus acting, are more famous namely, the Jaipur gharana, the Benaras gharana and the Lucknow gharana.

During the medieval period, Kathak became an established part of court culture, performing under the special patronage of India's Persian kings and Muslim moghuls. This sealed Kathak's transition from colloquial entertainment to classical art form. Kathak developed into a strong dance tradition with elements of both Hindu and Muslim culture present.

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Kathak as a performance art survived and thrived as an oral tradition, learnt and innovated from one generation to another verbally and through practice. It transitioned, adapted and integrated the tastes of the Mughal courts in the 16th and 17th century, was declined in the colonial British era, then was reborn as India gained independence and sought to rediscover its ancient roots and a sense of national identity through the arts.

As Kathak is popular both in Hindu and Muslim communities the costumes of this dance form are made in line with traditions of the respective communities. There are two types of costumes for female dancers. While the first one includes a sari worn in a unique fashion complimented with a blouse that covers the upper body and a scarf worn in some places, the other costume includes a long embroidered skirt with a contrasting blouse and a transparent scarf. Costume is well complimented with traditional jewellery that includes the ones adorning her hair, nose, ear, neck and hand.

Musical anklets called ghunghru are of higher importance. These are made of leather straps with small metallic bells attached to it. They are wrapped at the dancer's ankles that produce rhythmic sound during the performance. Male Kathak dancers usually wear a silk dhoti with a silk scarf tied on the upper part of the body. Jewellery of male dancers is quite simple and are usually made of stone.

A Kathak performance may include a dozen classical instruments depending more on the effect and depth required for a particular performance. However some instruments are typically used in a Kathak performance like the tabla that harmonise well with the rhythmic foot movements of the dancer and often imitates sound of such footwork movements or vice-versa to create a brilliant jugalbandi.

The most eminent Kathak dancer of recent times is Pandit Birju Maharaj. He is the only son and disciple of Shri Achyan Maharaj and is a competent inheritor of the Lucknow Gharana. Not only on India, he is familiarly known abroad, nearly all over the world. Sitara Devi, Shovana Narayan, Malabika Mitra etc...are some of the other famous kathak dancers.

"Creativity is the greatest rebellion in existence"

- OSHO (11 December 1931 –
19 January 1990)

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