



Innovation In Kathak Dance: Review After Independence Period To Present Time

Nimisha Shastri

(Corresponding Author)

Department of Performing Arts/Faculty of Fine Arts
Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut, India

Dr. Bhawna Grover

(Supervisor)

Professor, Department of Performing Arts/Faculty of Fine Arts
Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut, India

Abstract

"Kathak, the dance of storytellers, is poetry in motion". This review traces Kathak's evolution from a temple devotion to a global art form. Since the 18th Century, Mughal influence reshaped it, while 19th - 20th century waves added European and contemporary techniques, new rhythmic patterns and artistic innovations. Bollywood and digital media later expanded its reach, transforming presentations, costumes and compositions. Based on literature from Scopus, Shodhganga and texts like Kathak Gyaneshwari, Kathak Nritya Shiksha, the study finds Kathak maintains continuity yet faces preservation challenges. Fast digital learning by new generations risks diluting its classical foundation, raising concerns for tradition amid modernization.

Keywords

Kathak Dance, Contemporary and European techniques, Lyrical and rhythmic patterns, Artistic Innovation, Bollywood and digital media.

Introduction

The classical dance form of North India, Kathak is deeply rooted with its traditional practice of story telling by story tellers, also known as. Kathakaars, in the temples or streets in the form of Ramayana, Mahabharata and Krishna Leela (Harmalkar, et al, 2026; Kumar, 2025). Being rooted with devotion and spirituality, this dance form came across many era's, moved from temples to courtyards to royal courts to auditoriums and now to social media like Facebook, Youtube, Instagram platforms, (Gupta 2025), with this, contemporary and modern technical aspects of Kathak dance's creativity level came a long way.

Historical development of Kathak Dance and its culture in India.

Early beginning period of Kathak Dance : The dance form from Northern India derived from the word "Katha" which means a story that was performed by the Kathakaars street to street. It was the devotional practice done by them during that era. As the Bhakti Movement existed, from the 8th to the 17th Century, the transformation began, as the compositions of poets like Meerabai, Surdas, Tulsidas etc. became the part of the repertoire, (Kumar, 2025). The story of epics told by the story tellers with just gestures and expressions, the art form accompanied by devotional songs (Bhajan's) and hymns. The costumes were also simple, modest and suitable for devotional settings.

According to Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, there was no significant evidence about the dance during the 16th to 18th century, the miniature paintings revealed the development of a dance form which ultimately developed as Kathak style. This was the time when Persian and Central Asia artists were brought up. This movement became the centre of acculturation for Hindu and Persian cultures in the Court of Akbar, which has also assimilated in other techniques. (Rana, 2023).

Impact of Mughal's and Britisher's arrival on Kathak Dance: With the time being, during the 18th Century, the temple dance moved to the Mughal Courts, changing its devotional worship to court entertainment and sensual pleasure (Walker, 2010 and 2024). During their ruling period, many changes took place in terms of dance, music, costumes, stages, techniques, compositions etc. They changed the aesthetics of Kathak dance. But, with the arrival of Britishers, the dance form faced more challenges as they banned traditional dance practices (Shovana Narayan).

Establishment of Institutions: The major developments occurred with the establishment of institutions for the preservation of art forms. With Independent India, private and national institutions came into existence. The table given below shows the institution's name and year of establishment.

(i)	1953	Sangeet Natak Akademi	for performing arts
(ii)	1954	Sahitya Akademi	for literature
(iii)	1954	Lalit Kala Akademi	For Visual Arts

Source: The data of the table collected from Academic. edu., *Evolution of Indian classical dance since Independence* by Shovana Narayan.

For the promotion of Dance and Drama, two-dance-teaching institutions namely Kathak kendra (Delhi) and Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy (JNMDA) at Imphal were set up. Moreover, for all major 4 dance forms like- Bhaknatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Manipuri, few institutions were set up under the prevalence of Senior Artists.

Similarly, in the context of Dance, many changes occurred in terms of:

1. **Costume Of Kathak Dance:** During 18th Century, the period of Mughal's, the costume of Kathak was a way different as we see in 21st Century. At that time, men and women wear tight fitting-trousers, ankle-bells and full gathered or pleated- ghaghra skirts with choli for women and a long-sleeved jacket and, often, traditional (topi) hat for men (Dharna, 2021; Chameera, 2025), whereas, in modern times, it is evolved with churidar salwar, Angrakha, lehenga-choli, dupatta. The costume has moved from heavy traditional garments to light and comfortable outfits, which provide more freedom to the dancer's techniques.



Fig-1 A group of 3 dancers costumes at the time of Mughal Period

(Source: Google Chrome)



Fig-2 An artists wearing modern Kathak Costumes

2. **Evolution Of Stages Or Centres:** The stages in the dance form plays a vital role for every performer, dancer or artists to showcase their performance, in front of the audience. In the ancient period, the temples and open air-amphitheatres were seemed as stages. Later, during the Mughal period, the stages converted to proscenium arch, a hallmark of renaissance theatre design emerged and in the 19th Century, the rise of opera houses and concert halls took place for large scale productions. In the 20th Century, multipurpose centers became the more captivating stages, and now in, 21st Century, with the digital era, the stages are no longer concerned with the physical boundaries or presence as the virtual platforms have taken place with more technology driven spaces (Gupta, V.et al. 2024).



A figure shows the presentational stage at the time of mughal period.

(Via : Google Chrome)



A fig. shows the Auditorium and stage of modern times.

(Via : Google Chrome)

3. **Innovation In Compositions:** With the establishment of Kathak Gharanas, like Lucknow, Jaipur, Banaras and Raigarh, each carries its unique style of compositions from the beginning. But, the legendary artist of Kathak Dance, Pandit Birju Maharaj ji's creative thinking added the simplest way of learning the complex compositions, due to which many changes also occurred. In the choreography, Sade (Half) and Savai (One and a quarter), matra (beats) being used in Taal (rhythmic cycle). Pt. Birju Maharaj Ji presented "Ginti Ki Tihaiyan, telephone ki tihayi,

hockey khelne ki tihayi etc. (Dr. Grover, 2015) along with Abhinaya (expression) which has created the most spark in Kathak Dance. Whereas, on the other hand, social issues, environment issues and dance dramas were added to showcase the reflection of society (Dr. Mandlik, 2026).

4. **Gender and Caste Barrier:** The dance form which was majorly performed by men is no longer limited to the same gender. In the 19th to 20th century, educated elite women or the under-educated got the equal opportunity to teach, learn and perform the dance forms, nationally and globally.
5. **Cross-Culture and Globalisation:** Being the temple dance and then the dance of courts, this form spread world wide in the 21st Century. Due to the diversity this dance form attracted the people of other countries where Performing Arts pedagogy plays a major role on individual learning (Shinde, et al 2026; Sharma et.al, 2024).
6. **Role of Digital Media:** The relationship between artists and the audience or learners across countries becoming strong, but also a task to find the right and passionate audience or learners to who can really focus on the traditional form of this dance, rather, just learning for the sake of social media reels or videos. With the shift from solo dance presentations to group theme based performances, from simple costumes to elaborate costumes of Kathak dance, from small stages to large /big auditoriums, from temple dance to a globally known Kathak dance, this journey came a long way. And here, the question arises, about the authenticity and purity of Kathak Dance. Where the impact of social media practices like popularity and followers of the people become the concern of fast learning approach. Despite the rise in every aspect of Kathak dance, (Dr. Gupta 2025) this form reflects the continuity but also raises the concern of preservation in present as well as for future. The practices or connections our legendary have nationally and globally is the true and tremendous efforts made by them for the new directions in Indian dances (Lopez Y Royo (2004); Bhattacharj ya, 2011).

Scope and Objectives

This review paper examines the evolution of Kathak Dance from the temple art to the streets or place to place presentation to Mughal Courts to stages and now to social media. The power and impact this dance form holds since beginning has become more captivating with its powerful storytelling, intricate footwork and expressive gestures. In today's time, this traditional dance form has become a more dynamic and versatile expression of Indian culture with modern influences. But the question still arises with the mixing of modern elements like jazz, contemporary, flamenco, etc. Is the traditional or classical element still alive in this dance form? The objective is to know whether this Indian classical dance form "Kathak" still holds the rules and essence within it or it is just fused with modern elements like we see on social media. Except for a few artists, the younger generation may have accepted this dance form as a fusion dance form. It has become easily accessible but at what cost! The beauty of Kathak dance lies in its classical form not in fusion with Bollywood songs. How much this social media trend has taken the Kathak realm in other ways as well! The focus and main objective of this review paper was to know about Kathak dance evolution till now.

Methodology

This review paper followed a systematic search strategy, covering books of various authors in descriptive and analytical ways, whereas, a comprehensive literature search was conducted via Google scholar, Scopus, International Journal of Research (IJR) Granthaalayah, Academia.edu, Research Gate, Shodhkosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts, etc.

Data Collection

All the data related to the topic was collected from various sources, majorly, Indexed Journals, libraries, books, and data available on the website mentioned above.

Classification of Data and Thematic organization

The data collected related to the subject was classified under various thematic categories to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of Kathak Dance. The first category includes history and textual sources, which discuss the origin and evolution of Kathak from ancient story telling traditions to its development in Mughal Courts and its transformation in the modern period. The second category includes the comprehensive comparison of Kathak dance elements from past to present times. This enabled a structured synthesis of diverse sources and high-lighted both the traditional and evolving elements of the Kathak Dance.

Findings from Literature

The review of scholarly literature, performance analysis and historical sources reveals several recurring themes in the study of Kathak Dance.. The finding ensures that the traditional aspects shift towards contemporary interpretations of Kathak, including cross-cultural collaborations and thematic innovations. However, the concern was raised regarding the preservation of traditional pedagogy amidst increasing fusion practices. Overall, the literature reflects both continuity and transformation within the Kathak traditions.

The changes in Kathak Dance with time being considered a huge transformation. Post independence Kathak innovated by moving from Solo-Bhakti to group-contemporary from temple to big theatres and auditoriums, from low lighting to heavy and colourful lighting impacts (kapuduwa, 2025). When there were no schools or institutions, in today's time, Kathak dance is being taught in the government and private institutions, universities build up to teach this dance form in online as well as offline modes. The shift from mythological tales to non-mythological, thematic expression of dance form changed and also accepted by the artists with more creations in the field of Kathak Dance.

Bibliography / References

1. Anand M., (2013), Kathak Ka Lucknow Gharana Aur Pandit Birju Maharaj. (The Lucknow Gharana of Kathak and Pt. Birju Maharaj). Kanishka Publishers, Distributors.
2. Azad, P.T., (2020), Teerathram, Kathak Gyaneshwari,(3rd Edn), Nateshwar kala mandir, 28, Bharati Artist Colony, Vikas Marg, Delhi-1100902.
3. Bhaduri, A., (2016). The Dancer, Her Dance and the temple within Exploring the sacred links of Indian Dance with the Hindu Temple. Academia.edu. 101143027.
4. Bhagchandani, S., (2018), Institution of Change: Kathak Dance from Courts to classrooms, Chitrolekha Journal on Art and Design, [Academic.edu.115512316](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v3/i2.2022.180).
5. Burla., V.N., & Yadav, S., (2022), Revaluation of traditional performing Arts in the Post-Independent Indian Theatre Shodhkosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts. 3(20, 411-422. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v3/i2.2022.180>.
6. Chadha, P., (2017), Indian Classical Dances: Techniques and means of expression. 1. Academia-edu.72542326.
7. Dadheech. Dr. P., (2004), Kathak Nritya Shiksha (Second part), (3rd ed.), Bindu Publications, G-7, Ayodhya Apartment, 9-A, Manormagunj, Indore-452001 (M.P)
8. Daun, S., & Bhattacharya, M., (2025), Dancing into the digital age: Preserving Indian Classical Dance Narratives through virtual avatars. Shodkosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts, 6(2), 157-169. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v6.i2.2025.6273>

9. Dharan, N., (2021), Kathak: The art of storytelling through dance, 1013140/RG.2.2.11301.22240.
10. Grover Dr. B., (2015), Kathak Nritya Mein Naveen Proyog Vishleshnatamak Adhayan, International Journal of Research –Granthaalayah. <https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v3.i1SE.2015.3446>.
11. Grover, Dr. B.,(2021), Sangeet Avam Nrityakalayekal, Aaj Aur kal (Music and Dance Arts (Tomorrow, Today & Tomorrow).
12. Gupta, V., Rampal, T., & Naaz, S., (2024), Evolution of performing Arts Centers: A Historical and Contemporary Analysis, Shodhkosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts, 5(10), 62-75. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.V6.i2.2025.6273>.
13. Gupta, T., (2025), The impact of social media on the practice, perception and popularity of Kathak Dance. International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, 7.10.36948/ijfmr.2025, Vo7i04.50190.
14. Goyal, E., Likhith SR, Kolcle, G., Sharma, D., Behera, S.K., & Dingankar, S., (2025), Intelligent performance Evaluation in Dance Training, Shodhkosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts, 6(25), 501-510.
15. Harmalkar, Dr. S., & Sharma, A., (2026), Evolution of Kathak Dance as a temple tradition of India. International Journal of Research-Granthaalayah, 14(2), 69-73.
16. Jaiswal, V., & Upadhyay, R., (2023). The Banaras Gharana of Kathak Dance: A study from past to present, Shodhkosh: Journal of visual and performing Arts, 4(2), 149-160. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.V4.i2.2023.584>.
17. Kapuduwa, I., (2025), Exploring New Lighting approaches and their impact on contemporary Kathak performance. International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research. 7.10.36948/ijtmr.20-26. Vo7i06-65373.
18. Kumar, S. Kathak's Journey: Evolution Through Devotion, Dynasty and Modernity., (2025) International Journal of Environment Sciences, 11(3S), 956-964.
19. Lakshan, C., (2025), Evolution of Kathak Dance Costume; From Ancient Temple Tradition to Modern Global Adaptations. Swar Sindhu. 13(01) 53-65. ([Researchgate.net/publication/399366859](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/399366859)).
20. Lakshan. C., (2025). A Study of the influence of the Mughal Era on the Costumes of the Kathak Dance Tradition. ([Researchgate.net/publication/39966889](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/39966889)).
21. Mandlik, Dr. Y., (2026). An Analytical Study of the Dance Compositions of Kathak Guru Dr. Suchitra Harmalkar in the Context of Tradition and Social Awareness, International Journal of Research-Granthaalayah, 14(2SCE), 1-3.
22. Nillanjan, Bhattacharya, (2011): A Productive distance from the nation: Uday Shankar and the defining of Indian Modern Dance, South Asian History and Culture, 2:4, 482-501.
23. Narayan, S., Evolution of Indian Classical Dance since Independence by Shovana Narayan, [Academia.edu](https://www.academia.edu/87923658).87923658.
24. Raghuvir, G., (2000), Kathak Ke Pracheen Nrityang, (1st ed.), Publication Scheme.
25. Royo. Y Lopez, Alessandra B. (2004). New Directions in Indian Dance, Dance Research Journal. [Academia.edu](https://www.academia.edu/115512316).115512316.
26. Ramya, R., (2019), Kathak: The Dance of Story- Tellers (P. Adelman, Ed.). Niyogi Books.
27. Rana, P., (2023). Transition in Kathak Dance during the Mughal Period. Shodhganga: a Reservoir of Indian Thesis@ Infliibnet. <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/576786>.
28. Sircar, J., (2020). How Modern India Reinvented Classical Dance, NCPA, [Academia.edu](https://www.academia.edu/49041084).49041084.
29. Shobha, Sharma, & Dr. Amandeep Singh Makkar., (2024). Evolution Presentation of Indian Classical Dance Kathak, Educational Administration: Theory and practice, 30(50), 4834-4844.
30. Shinde, J.M.: & Chaudhary, S., & Bhilare, A., & Jaraad, R.s., Aniktha K., & Satav, S.s., (2026), Adaptive Learning Platforms for performing arts., Shodhkosh: Journal of visual and Performing Arts, 7, 264-274. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v7.i1s.2026.7081>.

31. Poudwal,J., Madan, P., Sargam, S., Kamble, T., Faiz, A., & Thatoi, D.N. ,(2025). Emotion-Aware Tutoring Systems for performing arts. Shodhkosh-Journal of visual and performing arts, 6(2s), 281-291. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.V6.i2S.2025.6746>.
32. Walker, E. Margaret., (2024). India's Kathak Dance in Historical Perspective. [Academia.edu](https://Academia.edu/13282434).13282434.
33. Walker, E. Margaret., (2010), Revival and Reinvention in India's Kathak Dance, Music cultures, 37, 1711-184.

