



Kathak

Why in News

Recently, the famous **Kathak** dancer **Pandit Munna Shukla** died.

- His most noted works include the dance-drama Shan-e-Mughal, Inder Sabha, Ameer Khusro, Anga Mukti, Anvesha, Bahar, Tratak, Kraunch Badh, Dhuni, among others.
- His contribution to the world of dance was awarded the [Sangeet Natak Akademi Award](#) (2006), [Sahitya Kala Parishad Award](#) (2003) and the [Saraswathi Samman](#) (2011).

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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 tatkars, and the sound of the bells engaged the senses of the audience.

Key Points

▪ About:

- The word Kathak has been derived from the **word Katha which means a story**. It is primarily performed in Northern India.
- It was primarily a temple or **village performance** wherein the **dancers narrated stories from ancient scriptures**. It is one of the [classical dances of India](#).

▪ Evolution:

- Kathak began evolving into a distinct mode of dance in the **fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with the spread of the [Bhakti movement](#)**.
- The legends of Radha-Krishna were enacted in folk plays called **rasa lila**, which combined folk dance with the basic gestures of the kathak **story-tellers**.
- Under the **Mughal emperors and their nobles**, Kathak was performed in the court, where it acquired its present features and developed into a form of dance with a distinctive style.
- Under the patronage of **Wajid Ali Shah, the last Nawab of Awadh**, it grew into a major art form.

▪ Dance Style:

- Usually a solo performance, the dancer often pauses to recite verses followed by their **execution through movement**.
- The focus is more on footwork; the movements are skillfully controlled and performed **straight-legged** by dancers **wearing ankle-bells**.
- The **tatkaar** is the fundamental footwork in kathak.
- Kathak is the only form of classical dance wedded to Hindustani or North Indian music.
- Some prominent dancers include **Birju Maharaj, Sitara Devi**.

▪ Other Classical Dances in India

- **Bharatanatyam** from Tamil Nadu
- **Kathakali**, from Kerala.
- **Kuchipudi**, from Andhra Pradesh.
- **Odissi**, from Odisha.
- **Sattriya**, from Assam.
- **Manipuri**, from Manipur.
- **Mohiniyattam**, from Kerala.

Bhakti Movement

- The development of the **Bhakti movement** took place in **Tamil Nadu between the seventh and ninth centuries**.
- It was reflected in the **emotional poems of the Nayanars** (devotees of Shiva) and **Alvars** (devotees of Vishnu).
 - These saints looked upon religion not as a cold formal worship but as a loving bond based upon love between the worshipped and worshipper.
- They wrote in local languages, **Tamil and Telugu** and were therefore able to reach out to many people.
- In course of time, the **ideas of the South moved up to the North** but it was a very slow process.
- A more effective method for spreading the Bhakti ideology was the use of local **languages**. The Bhakti saints composed their verses in local languages.
- They also translated Sanskrit works to make them understandable to a wider audience. Examples include **Jnanadeva writing in Marathi, Kabir, Surdas and Tulsidas in Hindi, Shankaradeva popularising Assamese, Chaitanya and Chandidas spreading their message in Bengali, Mirabai in Hindi and Rajasthani**.

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