Chapter V.

THE KATHAK SCHOOL

The Kathak school of dance developed and flourished in North India. Like any other classical school of dancing, the Kathak was evolved out of the Bharata Natya Sāstra, the parent text of all classical dances in India. There can be no denying the fact that in ancient times dance was in natural conformity with the feeling of devotion and worship. According to the Indian tradition the revelation of the rhythm of dance was given to sage Bharata by lord Śiva himself, the symbol of procreation. The masculine aspect of the dance (tāndava) was symbolised in the dance of Śiva himself and the feminine aspect (lasya) was symbolised in Pārvati's dance. In early days the stories from the great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, were adopted as the subject matter of dancing by all the classical schools including the Kathak.

The word 'Katha' means a story, a 'short event' or an 'anecdote' depicting a certain sequence of the life, particularly of some deity. The 'Kathak' obviously stands

1. Supra, Preface, Page iv.
Also see: Shanti Swarup, The Arts and Crafts of India and Pakistan, 1957, Page 6.
for the person performing the story. D.G. Vyas has traced the word 'Kathak' in the Mahabharata and other early works. "In the dictionary of the Pali language, 'Kathiko' is used in the sense of preacher. It is given as 'Kathaka' in the Nepali dictionary and is interpreted as a narrator and reciter". In the famous Jain text 'Abhidhana Rajendra' the word 'Kathya' has been used. The word Kathaka finds its mention as 'Kathika' in the 'Siddhanta Kaumudi', a work on grammar.

This school of dance started as portraying stories of the great epics and was full of spirit of devotion and worship. The dancer, while depicting the story, absorbed and identified himself with the character he portrayed. Obviously the abhinaya or the nātya element became prominent. Similar to other ancient classical schools of dancing, the Kathak was accompanied with music. The music and literary compositions used in this dance have their regional characteristics. Such is the case with Bharata Nātyam, Kathākali and Manipuri also.

With the popularisation of Vaiṣṇavism in the central and northern India, the Kathak school gained

prominence with the Rāsa Līlas of Rādhā and Krishna as its central theme. Today the Kathak dance, in its expressive or abhinaya aspect depicts the famous Līlas of Krishna and Rādhā.

The word 'Kathak gradually came to be used for a particular class of persons who devoted themselves to this stype of dancing. Since the stories were drawn from the Līlas of Śiva, Pārvati, Krishna and Rādhā, the dance was performed by both males and females. It is difficult to imagine that this dance was performed in the past only by the males or by the females. The word 'Patra' is used in Sanskrit texts to denote the dancer. Some writers think that the Kathak dance was in the beginning practised by the females only. They interpret the word 'Patra' as equivalent to a female dancer and try to co-relate the devadāsis with the 'Patras'. While it can not be disputed that the Bharata Nātyam School was started by the female dancers called devadāsis, such is not the case with Kathak. In the Bharata Nātyam the main theme is the dance of Parvati to please her lord Śiva. The central theme of the Bharata Nātyam even today consists of this idea. The devadāsi


2. M.S. Kallianpurkar thinks that the word 'Paturia' is used by the village folk in U.P. to denote a female dancer and this has been derived from the word 'Patra'. See 'Kathak - An Analytical study', Dance Seminar 1958, Sangeet Natak Akadami, page 3.
performs this dance before the deity in the spirit of devotion and worship. In the Kathak School there is the same spirit of devotion and worship but it was never performed exclusively by the female dancers. Both males and females participated in it, although this dance could be performed either by a male or a female dancer. The number of experienced male and female dancers in this school is quite large. On the other hand, if one looks through the list of famous dancers of the Bharata Nātyam School, one is struck by the fact that while there are plenty of male Gurus, teaching the Bharata Nātyam, it is mainly performed by the females.

Because of the prominence of the expressive element or the abhinaya aspect of dance and because of the predominance of the līlās of Rādhā and Krishna, the Kathak school is also called the 'Natwari Nritya'. Sri Shambhu Maharaja, the greatest living exponent of Kathak in this country subscribes to this view. The word 'Natavara' alludes to the great quality of Krishna as a dancer 'par excellence'. It can not be denied that in the Kathak dance the part played by abhinaya is considerable.

which is of great significance. However, if the word Kathak is understood in its correct context, it only means that this dance form depicts some story from the religious texts. The Kathak school has adopted the Lilas of Radha and Krishna as its main subject matter. Obviously the 'Natwari Nritya' correctly symbolises this element. It can, therefore, be said that this school is called Kathak due to the long usage; it can also be designated as 'Natwari Nritya'. This Kathak Natwari School is popular in northern and central India.

The Kathak dance incorporates the three main aspects of classical dancing and it has all the three elements, viz., 'Nritya', 'Nritya' and 'Nātya'. These three elements will be noted in the study of the Kathak dance sequence. Before this study is taken up, it is apt to point out that the Kathak School of dancing was also influenced by the Muslim rulers in India. Since the seat of the Muslim rulers was Delhi in the north, the whole of the northern India came to have the impact of Muslim culture in the various facts of social life of the people.
The main Kathak dance-sequence consists of the following items:

I. GANESAVANDANA.

II. AMAD.

III. THAT.

IV. NATWARI.

V. PARMELU.

VI. PARAN.

VII. TORA AND TUKRA.

VIII. SANGEET.

IX. KRAMALAYA.

X. KAVITA.

XI. GAT BHAVA OR NRITYA.

I. GANESAVANDANA:

The 'Abhinaya Darpana' advises the commencement of a dance with salutation to god Ganesa. The Kathak dance begins with this tradition. The 'Sangeet Sara', a work composed in Jaipur also describes this as the first item. In the ancient times every Kathak dance performance

1. However, Pandit Ram Gopal, the noted dancer is of the view that Kathak dance is divided into two main parts: (1) Toraths consisting of footsteps and (2) Gaths or gestures; see 'Indian Dancing', Pandit Ram Gopal & Serozh Dadachanji, page 74, 1951.
Also see, Faubion Bowers, The Dance in India, 1953, page 99-100, wherein he has divided the Kathak dance into three main items: (1) 'Amad', i.e. the appearance of the dancer on the stage; (2) 'Paran', i.e. feet work and (3) 'Gaths'.

foot
commenced with this item. But with the advent of the Muslim influence this item was omitted and the Kathak dance started with Amad. However, this tradition has now again been revived and today every Kathak performance starts with the salutation to lord Ganpati or Ganesa:


II. AMAD:

This item consists of the introduction of the dancer on the stage who offers a salutation to the audience. Several writers on Kathak consider it to be the first item. Paubion Bowers has said that the Kathak dance performance starts with 'Amad'. Amad is a Persian word meaning 'the coming'. Some people are of opinion that amad is a piece played as a rhythmic prologue on the table or the Pakhawaj just before the commencement of the dance. The very word

1. It is interesting to note that in Jaipur Gharana, Muslim influence was not felt and the Kathak item always commenced with Ganesavandana, but in Lucknow Gharana Ganesavandana was omitted for some time and it started with 'Amad' and 'Jalami' due to Muslim influence.


Amad, which is derived from Persian language subjects
the Muslim influence in this dance and it is "based on
the Muslim greeting of raising the hand to the face".

III. THAT:

This item consists of various postures or attires
of a very graceful order. The dancer in this item places
his hands in front of his chest and then moves the face
and eyes in a graceful and rhythmic manner. This item
is for the purpose of creating the necessary mood for
the dancer as well as for the spectators. In this item
the music is accompanied on the Sarangi in a set rhythmic
pattern to the accompaniment of rhythms on tabla or
pakhawaj. The musical note of Sarangi consists of a set
pattern of a particular Rāga and is played in a set
rhythm throughout the dance, but the tabla accompanies
the dance and each and every Bola or Tukra or Paran is
played on it. The main theme of this item is to expose
every part of the body before the spectator in a graceful
manner. It begins with the movement of eyes, eye-brows,
face, neck, chest and arm turn by turn. The whole That is

1. Faubion Bowers, The Dance in India, 1958, page 100.
2. This accompaniment of Sarangi is popularly known as
' Lahara'.
performed in a slow rhythm in order to add beauty to the grace.

IV. NATWART:

Up till now in the Kathak dance-performance there is no intricate foot work involved. Upto this stage, the dancer has come to the dias (stage), offered salutation to lord Ganesa, made his appearance on the stage before the spectator and exposed himself through various graceful postures. Now the dancer starts with the famous rhythm consisting of:

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Ta
Aa
thei
thei
tat
tat
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This pattern, it is believed, was for the first time danced by lord Krishna himself on the hood of 'Kaliya Naga' after over-powering it. This symbolises the beginning of actual dance. In this item after this initial rhythmic foot work, many intricate patterns of foot work are danced. This part in the performance of Kathak is mainly Nritta, i.e. pure dance. With this item the Nritta aspect in the Kathak dance takes prominence and it continues right upto the item of Gat Bhāva. The accompaniment of Sarangi is as usual on the set rhythmic pattern and each Bola of the pattern is played on the Tabla as it is danced.
V. **PARMELU**:

In this item the main effort of the dancer is to dance out the various complex rhythmic patterns played on the Tabla or the Pakhawaj. In Parmelu the bolas of tabla, pakhawaj and other percussion instruments are mixed into one particular pattern and is performed by the food work in a graceful manner. The word Parmelu also means in this context union of different notes or Bolas. "The Parmelu pieces are composed by cleverly blending the sound syllables of various percussion instruments with Natwarl bolas"; and is danced accordingly producing the same pattern of sound and rhythm through the foot work.

VI. **PARAN**:

Paran is a complex rhythmic pattern played exclusively on the Pakhawaj. Parans are intricate and forceful compositions of the Tala. The main characteristic of a Paran is that it is a complex pattern and it is of a long duration comprising many rhythms and thus if danced correctly it presents a very graceful item. Parans are danced with vigorous movements. These complicated rhythmic unit on Parans are somewhat similar to Jatis of Bharata

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Nātyam. An ordinary Kathak dancer is supposed to know at least one hundred parans. The main effort of the dancer is to reproduce the sound of each Bola in foot work. Usually the Paran is first played on Tabla and then the dancer dances it out and Tabla accompanies it again. "Parans are the most important part of the Kathak dance art." The syllable sued in a Paran presents a great refinement of rhythmic sounds as compared to those rhythmic sounds produced in Jatis in the Bharata Nātyam.

**TORA AND TUKRA:**

The dancer while performing Paran bursts out a chain of matrical units amidst a Paran. This bursting out a quick chain of foot work which consists of difficult passages of rhythmic units is known as Tora or Tukra. These Toras or Tukras are performed on a very fast rhythm and require a great practice and skill so that the bells of the foot clearly bring out those very sound patterns clearly. The main purpose of bending Toras or Tukras amidst Parans is to give more prominence to the Nritta and this adds to the beauty of Kathak.

**VIII. SANGEET:**

When dance bolas are recited in a particular rāga, whether while performing Natwari or Parmelu or Parana, such

1. Faubion Bowers, The Dance in India, 1953, page 100.
recitation is known as Sangeet. This recitation is accompanied with dance. This recitation rhythmic pattern in particular Raga adds more beauty to the dance. There is a great tendency among the dancers of Vrindavan to recite the rhythmic pattern in Natwari or Paran etc. in classical ragas and this item is most popular among those artists. This item is simply a recitation of Natwari, Paran, Tora and Tukra etc. Apart from the fact that the recitation is in raga there is no other difference. "Thus Sangeet is not a variety of bola but the mode of musical recitation of any bola".

IX. KRAMĀLAYA :

In this item the dancer simply stands erect and uses his feet to dance the various rhythmic composition and this is popularly known as Tatkar or Laya Jatis. In the beginning the dancer starts in a slow tempo and brings out the basic or the fundamental rhythm and then introduces in it many combinations and permutation and ends in a fast tempo. This item is merely a show of fast and efficient work. In a sense this is nothing but a sort of Natwari, but because of its special character it is classified separately.


2. Ibid.
X. KAVITA:

In this item a piece of particular poem is set under a particular Tāl and it is then danced out accordingly. While dancing this poem the dancer also uses his gestures and expressions of the face. But the abhinaya or Nritya part in this item is not significant. What is important in this item is the rhythmic pattern or the Tāl under which the poem is set, generally a Natwari piece is also added in the end of the poem. It may be taken as a link between the pure dance, i.e. the Nritta in Kathak and the expressive dance i.e. the Nritya. All other preceding items heretofore mentioned, are prima facie Nritta, and the items which follows this item are mainly Nritya. After this item Kathak dance programme consists in mainly bringing out the expressive element of the dance.

XI. GAT BHĀVA OR NRITYA:

The Nritya element in the Kathak dance comes into prominence in this item. Gat Bhāva may be demonstrated in two ways. Firstly, an idea of a particular theme is selected and it is danced out with the help of gestures and expressions. This is known as Gatkari. Gatkari consists of Gat Nikas which means a very short piece of expression bringing out one particular mood; Gat Bhāva which consists in bringing out a definite and particular emotion; Gat
Prasang (Choti Gat) which depicts some short incident usually drawn from the life of lord Krishna; and Gat Lila (Bari Gat) which narrates some episode in detail. In Gat-Kari "the Bhava is expressed without the accompaniment of song or words, and is hence a kind of 'mook Abhinaya'." Secondly a whole song is selected and it is danced out with the help of expressions and gestures. This is known as Artha Bhava and it is in this item that the abhinaya aspect of dance gains predominence.

In this item a particular song is picked up in a particular raga and then each line of that song is recited in its raga again and again; and the dancer gives the meaning of those lines through his expression and abhinaya. Usually these Gat Shava items are named corresponding to the ragas in which they are sung. For example, under this item there are Horis, Shrupads, Bhajans, Thumris, Ladars, Peertans and Ghazals etc. The inclusion of such varieties of songs as Thumri and Ghazal tells us a great deal regarding the Muslim influence in the Kathak dancing. The greatest patron of music and dance in Cudh, Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, introduced the Thumri style of singing and this style was also adopted.

in the Kathak Nritya. Similarly the adoption of Ghazals in Kathak Nritya is also due to Muslim influence. Both Thumri and Ghazals are usually love lyrics and the raga is simple. In both Thumri and Ghazal the dancer generally sits on the stage and sings a line of Thumri or Ghazal as the case may be and then brings out the same idea with the help of expressions and gestures. Same is the case in Dadra.

The adoption of Bhajan, Keertan and Hori are very ancient in the expressive dance in Kathak. In fact the Kathak style of dancing adopted those things right from the very beginning because of the Vaisanavites influence. In the very beginning Slokas, Chhandas and Prabandhas were adopted from the Sanskrit texts and were used as song material for Kathak. After these initial song materials, the Kathak dancers adopted such songs as Hori, Bhajan, Pad, Dhamar which were recited according to its own raga and composition. Then Muslim influence crept in; and Thumri, Dadra and Ghazals were also included in the expressive portion of Kathak dancing. Mainly because of the fact that Kathak dance flourished during the Muslim rule in northern

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India due to the patronage of the kings and Nawabs, the Kathak dancers had to confine their art and had to adopt the Thumri, the Dādrā and the Ghazal style as well in order to please and entertain those rulers.

One of the most subtle and fine aspects in Gat 1 Bhāva is to depict the various moods of a Nāyikā, which means a lady in love. Here the dancer does various actions and movements to show a particular style of woman depicting a certain type of mood in her, which is representative of that Nāyikā. This is popularly known as Nāyikā Bheda. This aspect is also time and again shown while expressing a Thumri, or Dādrā or Hori or a Ghazal etc.

In all these expressive items the hand gestures play an important part. "There is a definite system of representing objects and ideas through the hastas, which confirms to the rules laid down in the ancient texts on dance and dramaturgy". It is needless to point out that the expressive element of dance would become meaningless without the help of hand gestures.

It may again be mentioned that the Nritya item of Kathak is found at its peak in the depiction of the Rāsa

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Līlā of Krishna and Rādhā. So much so that, apart from the solo Kathak performance, the Kathak style has also adopted a group dance or a duet dance where Rāsa Līlās are depicted. In these Līlās events or anecdotes from the life of Krishna and Rādhā are picked up and performed. Here also the expressive element is dominant. The Rāsa Līlā of Vrindavan is regarded as the most ancient and most developed folk drama. Certain writers have expressed doubt and are of the view that there is no link between the Rāsa Līlā of Vrindavan and the Kathak dance. But if one witnesses the various dance technique employed in the Rāsa and the bolas used in it and the movements of hands, he can never ignore the close resemblance between these Rāsa Līlās and the Kathak dance.

SCHOOLS OF KATHAK:

Whatever may be the origin of the Kathak and its historical growth, this style of dance came to be localised finally in two main centres, Jaipur and Lucknow. Besides these two main centres (gharānās) of Kathak dancing, there have been some noted Kathak dancers in Varanasi, Bhopal and Rampur.

The Lucknow Gharānā owes its existence to the

patronage of the Nawabs of Oudh. It may be said that Lucknow did not have any particular style of the Kathak dance before the emergence of this school. During the peak days of the Muslim rule in India, Delhi was the chief centre of art and culture due to the patronage given to it by the Mughal rulers of Delhi. It is believed that Lahore and other centres sent many artists to the Delhi Court. When the Nawab rule in Oudh was at its hey-day, artists started flowing into the court of the Nawabs to seek their patronage. It is said that the great Kathak dancer Prakash ji came to Lucknow during the time of Nawab Aṣf-ud-daulā and enlisted himself as a dancer in the Nawab's services. It was he who laid the foundation of the Lucknow Gharānā. Opinions are not unanimous about the exact place to which this great master belonged. Some say that he came from the Allahabad district, while others maintain that he belonged to the village of Jalatna, in the former Jodhpur State of Rajasthan. Whatever may be the exact place of origin of Sri Prakash ji, it may be noted that before the Lucknow Gharānā as such was started, Prakash ji and his famous and worthy son Thakur Prasad ji danced in the Rāsadhari tradition. The beginning may be traced, in some form or


2. Ibid.
the other, in the original Rasadhari dancers around Vrindavan. Thakur Prasad ji was the court-dancer during the reign of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Oudh. Barga Prasad ji, his brother, was also a court-dancer with him.

Prakash Narain thinks that Swami Hari Das, the reputed saint musician of Vrindaban and the guru of such noted musicians as Tansen and Baiju Bawra, used to impart training trained in dance. With his efforts many dancers are said to have sprung up in Punjab and Delhi. When the Mughal kings started looking down upon dancing and placed many restrictions on it, the dancers found new patronage at Lucknow under the Nawabs of Oudh and the Rajas of Jaipur.

Few early Kathak dancers of some repute are however known. Even such noted writers as Ragini Devi do not go before the time of Kalka Prasad ji and Binda Din Maharaj, who were the sons of Thakur Prasad ji. Projesh Banerji has given an account of the Lucknow school from the period of Kalka Prasad and Binda Din. Similarly Ram Gopal, Seeozh Dadachanji and Kay Ambrose have started with Binda Din Maharaj and Kalka Prasad ji. G. Venkatachalam traces

4. Indian Dancing, page 73.
5. Classical Dances and Costumes of India, page 77.
some features of the Kathak dance in the great Mahabharata
and some other ancient works. He then refers to the influence
of the Muslim period and starts with Binda Din Maharaja.
The same is the case with Manjulika Bhadury and Santosh
Chatterji. There seems to be some omissions in the study
of the Kathak presented by the noted American scholar on
this subject. While describing the centres of Kathak
dancing in India, he mentions the Lahore, Lucknow and
Jaipur schools. He observes: "Kathak was formulated in
its present school by Kalika Binda of Lucknow a century ago.
Although he was, in the opinion of many, nothing more than a
teacher of prostitutes, his art and the success of his
proteges was such that he became recognized as a master
and was given the honorary suffix "maharaja" to his name".
Surprisingly he believes that Kalka Binda was one person,
whereas the fact is that Kalka Prasad ji, Binda Din Maharaja
and Sri Bhairon Prasad ji were three brothers and each of them
was a great exponent of Kathak in the court of Nawab Wajid
Ali Shah. Their father Thakur Prasad ji was also recognised
court-dancer. Kalka Prasad ji had three sons: - Jagannath
Prasad ji (Achhan Maharaja); Baij Nath Prasad ji (Lachhu
Maharaja) and Padma Sri Shambhu Maharaj. Achhan Maharaja's

1. Dance in India, pages 123-124.
2. The Art of Hindu Dance, (June 1945), page 237.
3. The Dance in India, (1953), page 98.
son Brij Mohan (Birjoo Maharaja) is at present the most noted Kathak dancer. Padma Šri Shambhu Maharaja is at present the Head of the Kathak Dance Department of the Sangeet Nātaka Akadami, New Delhi.

The chief characteristic of the Lucknow school is the prominence of Bhāva. The Lucknow school excels in the Gata Bhāva and the exposition of Hori, Thumri, Dādrā and Ghazals specially. Due to the patronage of Muslims the Lucknow Ḡharānā concentrated more on the Lasya and on Bhāva and thus "came to be characterised as a dance which was graceful, decorative, suggestive, expressive and sensuous".

JAIPUR GHARĀNĀ:

The Jaipur Ḡharānā of Kathak is also quite famous. It has contributed a good deal to the development of the Kathak as a dance art. This school has prospered under the patronage of the rulers of various states in Rajasthan. Primarily this school concentrated more on the Nṛtta aspect of dance as against Nṛtya or Bhāva, which was emphasized more by the Lucknow Ḡharānā. As a matter of fact, at present

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1. Mohan Khokar, Schools of Kathak, MARG, Vol. XII, No. 4, (September 1959), page 11. Also see J.V.V., Classical Indian Dances - A discussion with Rukmini Devi, The Illustrated Weekly of India, Sunday November 17, 1963, page 42, wherein it is mentioned "Kathak reflects skillfulness of a high order, with a baffling variety of foot work. - - - - The contribution of court patronage has heightened the voluptuous note. But no other dance style can equal Kathak in 'Laya' and 'Tāla' - footwork and time".
both the schools give equal importance to both the elements and do not emphasize on the one to the exclusion of the other. The Jaipur gharānā traces its history from Bhanu ji, a great devotee of lord Śiva who practised Śiva-Tāndava. Bhanu ji's son Malu ji continued this tradition. Then Malu ji's sons, Lalu ji and Kanhu ji also learned Śiva-Tāndava from their father. Kanhu ji then adopted the Pāsa Līlā of Vṛindāvan and tried to develop the Lasya element in the Kathak style of Jaipur. His two sons, Geedha ji and Sehja ji, then practised the Tāndava and the Lasya styles respectively. One of the sons of Geedha ji, Girdhari ji later on settled at Jaipur and he practised both the Tāndava and the Lasya styles. Hari Prasad and Hanuman Prasad, sons of Girdhari ji, then took up this line. Mohan Lal, Chiranji Lal and Narayan Prasad were the sons of Hanuman Prasad, who took to dancing in the Jaipur style. Hari Prasad and Hanuman Prasad were as famous in the Jaipur school as were the two reputed brothers Kaḍka Prasad ji and Binda Din Maharaja of the Lucknow school. Hari Prasad and Hanuman Prasad trained their cousins Shyam Lal, Chunni Lal, Durga Prasad and Govardhan ji in the Jaipur style. Chunni Lal's sons, Jaya Lal and Sunder Prasad are at present famous.

exponents of the Jaipur school of Kathak.

It is generally believed that there are at present only two schools of Kathak, namely the Lucknow and the Jaipur gharānā. But it may be mentioned here that the Varanasi gharānā of Janki Prasad is also known. It traces its origin in Rajasthan. Janki Prasad travelled all the way from Rajasthan to Varanasi and settled there. It is in the Varanasi gharānā that we hear the name of the famous exponent Sukhdev Prasad who was one of the court-dancers of the king of Nepal for quite a long time. "All the families commonly grouped as 'Jaipur gharānā' have been the natives of western part of Rajasthan"; and the Varanasi school is merely an off-shoot of the Jaipur school.

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