

KATHAK

Kathak is the classical dance style of North India. The word Kathak is derived from katha , meaning "a story", and hence the word Kathak means a storyteller who recounted mythological tales in the temples and danced them in a state of ecstasy. Having its origin in the sacred text known as the Natya Shastra , set to be divinely inspired through the sage Bharata, it has become one of the most comprehensive and expressive languages of movement in the world.

With the advent of the Mogul rule in India (11th-18th centuries), it was transformed from a temple dance to court dance and became a brilliant entertainment. It was recognized in its innovative aspect by the Mogul emperors, especially the poet king Wajid Ali Shah who rescued it from oblivion, lent it dignity and founded the famed Lucknow Garana.

This dance form depicts "life" and is based on the philosophy of the trinity - creation (Brahma), preservation (Vishnu), and destruction (Mahesh). Its poses are seldom static and it has a continuous flow of movements very near to life. Equal stress is laid on intricate footwork and beauty of expression. It is two-dimensional in character; it conceives the space basically in straight lines and does not put emphasis on giving a three-dimensional effect. The human form is conceived as a straight line and there are very few deviations from the vertical median.

Kathak can be divided into nritta and abhinaya on the one hand and tandava and lasya on the other. Nritta and abhinaya are applicable to the movements in the dance style. Tandava and lasya have to do with the type of numerics which are played on the tabla or executed by the feet.

Kathak is unique for its Footworks and Circles. It is for both male and female.

Kathak is usually danced with the following:

(Kathak has a very wide range / variety)

1. Slokas (Sanskrit / Hindi) and Bhajans (devotional songs for Hindu Gods and Goddesses). Please see the Lyrics of Bhajans.
 2. Classical and Light Classical Songs e.g. Thumri, Dadra, Kajri, Hori.
 3. Film songs preferably based on Ragas
 4. Darbari and Ghazals (mainly Urdu) - songs based on love, admiration, infatuation, separation etc. For examples of Ghazals, you may see Ghazals of Mirza Ghalib. You may consult the English-Urdu Dictionary.
 5. Pure Classical type e.g. Paran, Tukda, Gat Nikas, Jugalbandi (a friendly competition), Sawal-Jawab (footwork with tabla or pakhawaj) and demonstration of different Beats. You may consult Taalmala.
 6. Tarana based on different Ragas.
- Please scroll below to see the definitions and links related to kathak.
7. Songs written by Ravindra Nath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam (Bengali)
 8. Folk Dances from different states of India e.g. Bhangra, Dandia, Garba, Machua, Chhau etc. and also gypsy dance. They have a unique style but they can be blended with kathak.
 9. Dance Dramas (mainly Hindi) example, topics chosen from the epic Mahabharata which was composed by Vyas Deva and describes the story of Vedic era. The other great composition is the epic called Ramayana written by Valmiki. It describes the story of Rama (a representative of God Vishnu), the king of Ayodhya. Rama's wife Sita was abducted by Ravana, the demon king of Sri Lanka. Rama fought a war against Ravana and defeated him. Ramayana presents the ideology of king Rama and his love for his country ; Shakuntala, Krishnaleela etc.
 10. Any musical (classical) composition e.g. Sitar, Sarod, Violin, Sarengi, Israj, Dilruba (String instruments), Sehnaï, Flute (Wind instruments) and Tabla, Pakhawaj, Naal, Dholak (Percussion instruments) based on an ancient (as #9) or modern theme (preferably on India).
 11. Kathak (specially footwork) can be blended with Tap dancing

Basic Footwork: Right and Left feet are stamped as follows using Keharwa (An eight count beat). Please see Taalmala for details. Click here to see Kathak bells.

1	2	3	4	
Ta	Thei	Thei	Ta	Bol/Phrase
Right	Left	Right	Left	

5	6	7	8	
Aa	Thei	Thei	Ta	
Left	Right	Left	Right	

Types of Circles: Static, Dynamic, Sitting circles.

Navras: Nine Sentiments (expression / acting)

1. Shant - Quiet
 2. Veer - Hero
 3. Krodh - Anger
 4. Adbhut - Surprise
 5. Vibhastsya - Disgust
 6. Karun - Pathos
 7. Hasya - Comedy
 8. Bhaye - Fear
 9. Shringar - Beauty
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Hand Gestures:

Asanjukta Hasta Mudra (Single Handed Gestures)

Sanjukta Hasta Mudra (Combined Handed Gestures)

Gat Nikas: A composition describing the movement of a bird (e.g. peacock, swan), animal (e.g. elephant, lion), a human character or Hindu Gods and Goddesses and is usually performed with the beats of a percussion instrument accompanied by string instruments e.g. Sarengi, Sitar, Swarmandal etc. Gat Nikas, commonly called Gat Vab, is named as follows.

Parvati Gat - movement of Hindu Goddess Parvati (Goddess of strength)

Stri Gat - movement of a lady

Mayur Gat - movement of a peacock

Gajagamini Gat - movement of an elephant

There are many other Gats e.g. Ghunghat (veil), Holi (festival of colors), Lahenga (a Hindu dress or costume), Selami (a Muslim way of salutation to the audience) etc. There are variations in eye, neck, feet movements.

Amad - It means arrival or appearance on the stage. The Tukda following the Hindu way of greeting the audience by doing Namaste is called Amad.

Selami - At the beginning of kathak dance, the way of salutation to the audience according to the Muslim culture is called Selami.

Tukda - The Bol / Phrase having one or more Avartan (one cycle depending on beats). Please see Taalmala .

Paran - Bols / Phrases recited with the rhythm of Pakhawaj (a percussion instrument). It can be of many kinds, e.g. Bol Paran, Jati Paran, Ghungru (bells) Paran, Pakshi (bird) Paran. Also Ganesh Paran, Kali Paran, Lakshmi Paran (by the name of the Hindu Gods and Goddesses) etc.

Tarana - It is usually sung after Chota Kheyal (consult Ragmala). It is composed of meaningless words or phrases e.g. 'Tana Dere Na Dim', 'Na Der Dani Ni', 'Tom Tana Na', 'Udanita Nana Der Der' etc. Tarana composition is the hardest one in kathak. It needs a clear conception in everything e.g. footwork, beat theory, circles, tukda, paran etc. It is usually accompanied with Tabla and can be performed in any Raga. It is fast and rhythmic, hence easily enchants the audience.

Costumes - Kathak is a wonderful blend of Hindu and Muslim culture. The costumes are very gorgeous for both Hindu (Lahenga-Choli) and Muslim - (Churidar-Kameez-Vest) called Angrakha.

Laey and Laey-Kari

LAEYS - The literal meaning of *Laey* in English could be related to Tempo.

Whenever a musical instrument is played, or a dance is performed there is an associated "*Laey*" with it. *Laey* tells the speed of your dance and singing.

3 major **laeys** are:

1. **Vilamvit laey** - The literal meaning of *vilamvit* in English is delayed. This says that in *Vilamvit laey* the music is played at a slower pace hence the speed of dance is very slow.

2. **Madhya laey** - The literal meaning of *madhya* in English is medium. This says that in *madhya laey*, the music pace is little faster than *vilamvit laey*, hence the dance is also in a higher pace.

This is usually the normal pace of singing and dancing. Broadly speaking, *madhya laey* is double the pace of *vilamvit laey*

3. **Drut laey** - The literal meaning of *drut* in English is double. This says that in *drut laey*, the music pace is very fast hence the dance is also in a higher pace. Broadly speaking, *drut laey* is double the pace of *madhya laey*.

The Dress and the Ghunghroos

Ghunghru

Ghunghru or ghunghroo are the small bells the dancer ties around his or her ankles. The Kathak bells are different from those of other Indian dance styles, as they are not affixed to a pad or strip of leather, but rather are individually woven along a thick string. The usual number of bells is 100 on each ankle, although for the initial stages of learning or for children, 25 and 50 belled strings are widely available to allow the dancer to get used to them.

There is a more or less accepted upper ceiling of 150 bells on each ankle. Greater figures

than this tend to involve the topmost circle of bells being tied further and further up a dancer's calf. This is generally regarded as unsuitable, because it is at some distance from the point of impact, giving rise to the upper levels of bells being prone to delayed sounding given the intervening space and amount of leg. Greater numbers are also unnecessarily difficult to control since they are more likely to sound at unwanted moments, being affected by the movement of the whole of the lower leg, rather than just the ankle.

Costume

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As the dance style itself has changed to reflect the different regions and cultures in which it found itself, so too has the costume and performance dress of the dancers.

PS: As a rule, the dancer should be tied from waist when performing Kathak.

Female costume



Traditional (and perhaps more specifically Hindu) costume sometimes consists of a sari, whether worn in an everyday style, or tied up to allow greater freedom of movement during dance. However, more commonly, the costume is a lehenga-choli combination, with an optional odhni or veil. The lehenga is loose ankle-length skirt, and the choli is a tight fitting blouse, usually short-sleeved. Both can be highly ornately embroidered or decorated.

The lehenga is sometimes adapted to a special dance variety, similar to a long ghaghra, so that during spins, the skirt flares out dramatically. The ghaghra is a long, very full, gathered skirt with a broad gold or silver border. Narrow silver or gold bands radiate all the way from waist to hem. The choli, worn with the ghaagra, is usually of a contrasting color and has embroidered sleeve-bands.



Mughal costume for women consists of an angarkha (from the Sanskrit anga-rakshaka 'limb-keeper') on the upper body. The design is akin to a chudidaar kameez, but is somewhat tighter fitting above the waist, and the 'skirt' portion explicitly cut on the round to enhance the flare of the lower half during spins. The skirt may also be cut on the round but beginning just below the bust; this style is known as 'Anarkali' after the eponymous dancer who popularised it.

Beneath the top, the legs are covered by the chudidaar or figure hugging trousers folded up giving the look of cloth bangles. Optional accessories are a small peaked cap and a bandi or small waistcoat to enhance the bust-line. A belt made of zari or precious stones is sometimes also worn on the waist.

Male costume

The traditional costume for men is to be bare-chested. Below the waist is the dhoti, usually tied in the Bengal style, that is with many pleats and a fan finish to one of the ends (although it is not unknown for dancers to tie the garment more simply). There is the option of wearing a men's bandi too.

The Mughal costume is kurta-churidar. The kurta can be a simple one, or again, adapted for dance to incorporate wider flare, but is usually at least knee-length. Men may also wear an angarkha (see costume, below). Particularly older variety costumes include the small peaked cap too.



GHARANAS OF KATHAK.

In this article we discuss the concept of Gharana and discuss 4 different gharanas of Kathak. The word "Gharana" literally means "house" and it implies the house of the teacher. It is linked to the very ancient concept of the Guru-Shishya-Parampara (lineage of teacher /disciple) certain stylistic and technical features began to fossilise and became hallmarks of a particular school, guru or group of teachers. The different styles are known as gharanas, and these are:

Lucknow Gharana

The Lucknow Gharana of Kathak dance came into existence mainly in the court of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah the ruler of Awadh in the early 19th century. It was in this period that the Lucknow Gharana of Kathak attained maturity, through the efforts of Thakur Prasad Maharaj, the court dancer and guru of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah and subsequently by his sons Bindadin Maharaj and Kalka Prasad Maharaj. Kalka Prasad's sons Achchan Maharaj, Lachu Maharaj and Shambhu Maharaj also contributed to the further development of this gharana style.

The Lucknow style or Kathak dance is characterised by graceful movements, elegance and natural poise with dance. Abhinaya (art of expression), concern for movement shape and creative improvisations are the hallmarks of this style. Presently, Birju Maharaj is considered the chief representative of this gharana.

Jaipur Gharana

The Jaipur Gharana developed in the courts of the Kachchwaha kings of Jaipur in Rajasthan. Importance is placed on the more technical aspects of dance, such as complex and powerful footwork, multiple spins, and complicated compositions in different talas.

Benares Gharana

The Benares Gharana was developed by Janakiprasad. It is characterized by the exclusive use of the natwari or dance bols, which are different from the tabla and the pakhawaj bols. There are differences in the thaat and tatkaar, and chakkars are kept at a minimum but are often taken from both the right and the left-hand sides with equal confidence. There is also a greater use of the floor.

Raigarh Gharana

This was established by the Maharaja Chakradhar Singh in the princely state of Raigarh in present Chhatisgarh in the early 20th century. The Maharaja invited many luminaries of Kathak (as well as famous percussionists) to his court, including Kalka Prasad and his sons, and Pandit Jailal from Jaipur gharana. The confluence of different styles and artists created a unique environment for the development of new Kathak and tabla compositions drawn from various backgrounds.