

CHAPTER - 2

HISTORY OF KATHAK DANCE

Vedas are the ancient epic in the whole universe. According to the description found in Vedas, Kathak was the most popular classical dance in that era. The status of Kathak dance in different eras says about the historic origin of Kathak dance. This historic origin can be divided periodically into three parts:

- (1) Form of Kathak during ancient times.
- (2) Form of Kathak during Madhya or Mughal period.
- (3) Form of Kathak in present time.

2.1 Form Of Kathak During Ancient Times:

During the ancient times Kathak dance had an important place. Dance and music had a deep relation with religion and spirituality. Dance was known to be the best medium to attain moksh and because of this thinking, Kathak dance flourished and developed under the protection of temples. There used to be dance along with story during ancient period. Subsequently these people were called Kathakas. They were brave excellent debaters of scriptures and were also expert in music and dance. They were known as Kathik in North India. Kathik people used to present leelas of Lord Krishna in the form of dance and music.

“ In the ancient period Ramayan, Mahabharat and other religious stories were also told to the people by these story tellers. Those who used to tell stories were called Granthik, Gathak, Pathak or Kathak. They used to convey the story through the medium of their dance, music, expressions.”¹ “It is mentioned that Mahabharat era was a revolutionary era for a dance and said that Lord Krishna was the supreme master in dance. He only started the use of Navrasa in dance. “There is also a mention that preachers of Buddha religion also propagated their religion with the medium of music and dance. In short during the ancient times the credit of keeping Kathak dance safely in the courtyard of temples goes to Kathakas i.e. the form of Kathak dance was pure, noble and devotional and this form was full of scriptures.”²

¹*Kathak Nritya Parampara – Dr. Prem Dave, Page no : 24*

²*Kathak Nritya Parampara – Dr. Prem Dave, Page no : 25*

2.2 Form Of Kathak During Madhya or Mughal Period:

India had a rich tradition of Kathak dance before the foreign invasion. Due to the attack of Muslims the Indian Classical Dance suffered a set back. Hence this noble dance of temples became prison inside the walls of darbars. Subsequently Kathak dance was nurtured in these Mughal darbars only. During Mughal period, religion, art and culture were neglected. Their forms were distorted, purity of dance was finished and finally Mughal Empire was established in North India. One prominent historian of that time wrote that an important period has started in the history of dance and music by the victory of Mughals on Hindustan.

“ From this time the downfall of dance begins. In this context a foreign historian says that “Mughal King did not have any respect for Indian artistes. They only respected those artistes whom they have brought with them. They had destroyed the unique literature of Indian music from its roots”. On the demand of Mughal emperor many technical aspects got included in Kathak dance.”³

All the technical terms related to Kathak dance were changed into Urdu languages like from Prastutui {prastuti} to Ada {adi}, from Stuti to Salami, Aagman {aigman} to Aamad {aimd}. Songs based on bhakti theme were replaced with mubarakwadi's. Artiste's inclination shifted from religion and philosophy to luxury.

Babar the first Mughal emperor and ruler in India very much supported Turkish and Arabian dance, as Mughals had different traditions, the Indian artistes of that time were trying to keep their traditional heritage intact. The Mughal ruler Allaudin Khilji respected Indian musicians in the same way as he respected other musicians.

“ Upto 15th century condition of music and dance was uncertain (precarious). On the one side dance and music were getting suffocated in the darbari scenario and on the other side great saints and social reformers were trying to strengthen the country's tradition once again through the medium of music, literature, dance and other forms of arts. In this direction Swami Haridasji changed the form of dance filled with lust to a dance filled with leelas of Lord Krishna giving it a form of Maharaas to the people. Thus the Indian culture does not suffer the complete set back.”⁴

³ *Kathak Nritya Parampara – Dr. Prem Dave, Page no : 25*

⁴ *Kathak Nritya Parampara – Dr. Prem Dave, Page no : 26*

Through dance and acting the stories of Krishna, Ram and Shiva were presented to the people by Sanskritik mandals in the whole country. These artistes who presented the stories through dance and music along with the emotions of spirituality were known as Kathakars or Kathakas.

In 16th century during the rule of Akbar, poets of Ashtachap wrote on many subjects like Krishna Janam Ki Badhai, Raas Hori, Basant Hindolna, Malhar etc. At the same time Gunijankhanas were being established in Jaipur, Jodhpur, Udaipur etc. under which musicians were supported. Shri Govinddevji and Shrinathji, the two main deities of Vaishnav community were brought from Vrindavan and placed in Jaipur and Nathdwara. Kirtankars and Pundits also came with them. At the time of Narayanji Vyas, Raas was attached with Leelas. That is at that time also King of Jaipur was able to keep intact this invaluable technique away from Mughal darbars. Thus he played a vital role in its development and provided a religious atmosphere for dance to grow again.

“ Up to the period of Shahjahan, music and dance were given due encouragement and protection. After that dance and music changed into the form of entertainment. Due to that not only its form but also its internal soul was distorted. The art of music and dance almost died at the time of Aurangzeb. But during the rule of Awadh's last king Wajid Ali Shah Kathak dance got revived. This was possible because Wajid Ali Shah himself was a good dancer and poet.”⁵

During the Mughal period Indian Classical Dance Kathak went through many ups and down. Sometimes it was on the path of progress and sometimes it got deteriorated. Whereas in Jaipur Kathak dance started flourishing with glory in a noble environment during 15th century. Rajasthan is the land of warriors hence the stories of their heroes were presented through dance, some artists settled in Banaras during Mughal period. Their the dance art form got developed in its truest form other than this quite a few eminent dancers got shelter in the court of king of Raigarh, where the contribution of Maharaja Chakradhar Singh is remarkable in the history of Kathak dance.

⁵ *Kathak Nritya Parampara – Dr. Prem Dave, Page no : 27*

2.3 Form of Kathak in Present Time:

After the Mughal period, the beauty of Kathak once again blossomed in today's free environment. Today Kathak art form has got the due respect, popularity and importance in the society. Due to the contribution of great Gurus, artistes, the status of Kathak dance has changed. The girls from respected families by adopting dance are doing an exemplary work and trying to bring back its glorious past. Government is also providing appreciable assistance in this direction through the medium of Sangeet Natak Akademi, Kathak Kendras and Music College in many states. So many universities, colleges, Kendras have included Kathak in the curriculum of their graduation courses thereby providing wholesome education in Kathak dance. There are scholarships for training and research work for the same.

Today whatever status Kathak dance has gain is the result of continuous devotion and contribution by the Great Gurus, Maestros and stall warts of Kathak dance.