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Dancing into Modernity: Multiple Narratives of India's Kathak Dance

Pallabi Chakravorty

Modernity, once a prerogative of the West, is now ubiquitous, experienced diversely by people all over the world. The changing notions of modernity are historically linked to the development of the public sphere. This article broadly attempts to map the discourse of modernity to the evolution of Kathak, a premier classical dance from India. The article has two threads running through it. One is the development of the public sphere in India as it relates to anti-colonial nationalism, the formation of the modern nation-state, and globalization. The other focuses on transformations in Kathak as they relate to changing patronage, ideology, and postcolonial history. I emphasize the latter to mark the transitions in Kathak as emblematic of Indian national identity and national ideology to a new era of cultural contestation. This emergent public domain of culture is coined as "public modernity" by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai in contemporary India. It is linked to economic reforms, or "liberalization," leading to globalization and a resurgence of communal politics. Both of these make culture, tradition, and identity central to the contestation of power among the diverse social formations in India.[1]

The idea of public modernity is derived from a new understanding of the public sphere, an idea once rooted in Euro-American history and its bourgeois national domain (Habermas 1983; Freitag 1991; Eley 1994). The role of media and communication are integral to the development of public sphere (Benjamin 1973; Anderson 1983). Appadurai (1995) argues that the speed and reach of global communication due to electronic media has ushered in fundamental changes in the concept of the public sphere. Thus, modernity today is no longer bounded by the Euro-American discourse, or by the narratives

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of the nation-state. The emergence of this new modernity in India is linked to economic liberalization and globalization, resulting in the blurring of national identities and the formation of Westernized, transnational, hybrid identities due to global flows of goods, information, images, and people on the one hand, and various consolidations of identities (linguistic, religious, regional, caste, gender) on the other. Public modernity in India is not about homogenization or massification of Indian culture, nor is it about resistance to neocolonialism, but it is manifested in the array of distinct local cultures produced by the interaction of transnational flows and local practices. This study uses Appadurai's idea as the point of departure to examine the intersecting forces of nationalism, regionalism, gender, class, market, and media that have relocated classical Kathak from "high culture" to a contested space. More concretely, the article focuses on the organization of Kathak by the state-controlled public sphere of the past that established a hegemonic narrative of national culture to a globalized public sphere where the narrative is in disarray.

My argument progresses in three main sections with several subsections. First, I briefly recapitulate the birth of classical Kathak from the *nautch* soirees of colonial India as a symbol of classical Brahminical tradition of ancient India.[2] Second, I trace the organization of Kathak by the central government, with its center in Delhi, for propagating this hegemonic national narrative. This was/is established through various state initiatives such as festivals, workshops, seminars, and through the beaming of national programs on state television. Third, I show how the state-imposed narrative of Kathak is changing due to the forces of "public modernity" linked to economic reforms and the explosion of electronic media. I analyze the role of cable networks, satellite television, Bollywood films, and diaspora dancers in disrupting the earlier narrative and creating a multitude of narratives in the global public sphere of contemporary India.

Between Nautch and Kathak

The pre-colonial context

I begin with a brief history of the emergence of classical Kathak from what the British called *nautch*, and its institutionalization as an "authentic" Indian tradition in postcolonial India. Note that I do not discuss the court history of Kathak and the emergence of the various *gharanas* (schools). There are several sources that do this work, and interested readers can see Kothari (1989). The reader should be alerted that these folk and court histories of Kathak usually construct a linear history of the dance (with no mention of significant events like the anti-*nautch* movement), with patriarchal lineages starting from Hindu temples, through the royal courts, to modern proscenium presentations.

The women dancers who graced the courts of north and east India became popularly known as *nautch* dancers during the British rule. The performance events by these dancers (known as *tawaifs* in the royal courts of north India and *baijis* or *nautch* dancers in nineteenth-century Bengal) were popularly known as *bai-nautch*. *Nautch* is a distortion of the word *naach,* or dance, which is derived from the Sanskrit *nritya* through the Prakrit *nachcha*. But it signifies more than that. It represents cultural and political transforma-

tions in India due to the impact of British colonialism. Although the British commonly patronized the *nautch* of north India, various regional dance styles including *sadir* of South India (which later became Bharatnatyam) were lumped together as *nautch* during this time.

The dancers were predominantly Muslim women who were trained in north Indian music and dance and once held high status in the royal courts. The importance of dance and music in the court life of Lucknow and Jaipur is well documented (see Erdman 1985; Sharar 1975).[3] The suppression of the "Sepoy mutiny" (a rebellion by elements of the Indian army which is now referred as the First War of Independence) by the British in 1857 accelerated the decline of the kingdoms in north India. This resulted in musicians and dancers being displaced from north Indian cities. Many migrated to Calcutta, the new capital of the British Raj, in search of patrons. Thus the city became the prime destination for displaced dancers and musicians from the north, who found new sources of patronage among the Bengali elite (see Banerjee 1989). One of the greatest patrons of Kathak, Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Avadh, surrendered his crown to the British in 1856 and arrived in Calcutta with his entourage of court dancers and musicians.

North Indian *nautch*, which evolved from the royal courts of the Mughals and Rajputs from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, and later in the music rooms of the Bengali *zamindars* (landlords), became associated with low culture and women of loose morals towards the turn of the century. Much of this was a direct result of Hindu social reform movements of the nineteenth century, especially the anti-dance or anti-*nautch* movement of the 1890s. Although the anti-*nautch* movement targeted the *devadasi* system in the south and was most effective in Madras and Bombay, its consequences for dancers were widespread. In Calcutta the Bengali patrons of *bai-nautch*, influenced by the ideals of *Bramho Samaj* (a reformist Hindu sect), withdrew their support of indigenous cultural practices including *nautch* during this time (Banerjee 1989). The *tawaifs* and *baijis* became dissociated from courtly splendors and religious festivities and were stigmatized as prostitutes. The advent of All India Radio, the new theater, and cinema provided opportunities for a handful. Some reinvented themselves as *Thumri* and *Ghazal* singers by eliminating the dance element from their performance. The very first artists recorded by the Gramophone Company in 1902 were two obscure *nautch* dancers (*baijis*) Shashi Mukhi and Fani Bala, who belonged to the New Theatre in Calcutta (Dasgupta 1998). The lives of the *baijis* and the social stigma they suffered are detailed in many Bengali books such as *Thumri O Baiji* by Reba Muhuri (1986), *Kolkatar Baiji Bilash* by Somnath Bhattacharya (1991), *Baiji Mahal* by Gopa Mukherjee (1999).

Dance revival

North Indian *nautch* was given new respectability in the 1930s by Madame Menaka and Ruth St. Denis. Their interest in reviving *nautch* brought national and international attention to a dance form associated with feudal debauchery and prostitution. Ruth St. Denis came to India in search of *nautch* in the 1920s and was captivated by the performance of Bachwa Jan (a famous dancer in Calcutta). Inspired by St. Denis and Anna Pavlova and exposed to many *nautch soirees* in Calcutta from an early age, Leila Shokhey,

known as Madame Menaka in the dance world, refashioned *nautch* as an artistic expression of modern India. Trained by Kathak gurus but possessing the personal sensibilities of a modern dancer, Madame Menaka rose to national and international significance as a choreographer between 1935–38. In 1935 she produced *Deva Vijaya Nritya*, a dance drama following the choreographic technique of western ballet using the vocabulary of Kathak. This was followed by other choreographies such as *Menaka Lasyam* and *Malavikagnimitram*. The refashioning of *nautch* by Madame Menaka not only made it acceptable among the emergent middle classes during this time, but elevated dance in general from a mere virtuoso technique to art. Note that Madame Menaka never employed professional (or *nautch*) dancers in her troupe but took girls from middle-class, respectable families and trained them (Joshi 1989).

The use of Sanskrit dance drama for choreographic works on Kathak pioneered by Menaka were continued in the All India Dance Seminars and All India Drama Seminars. For the first All India Dance Festival in Calcutta in 1945, Acchan Maharaj (who had worked with Madame Menaka a decade earlier) directed Braj-Lila and Kumar Shambhava (Kothari 1989). The dance drama format became a standardized compositional structure for Kathak institutions in Delhi. Nirmala Joshi, a leading disciple of Madame Menaka, started the Delhi School of Hindustani Music in the 1930s; this is where Acchan Maharaj taught Kathak. Joshi brought Shambhu Maharaj, the icon of the Lucknow *gharana* (from the lineage of Bindadin Maharaj who was employed in the court of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, the most famous royal patron of Kathak), from Lucknow to teach at Bharatiya Kala Kendra. Bharatiya Kala Kendra was later renamed Kathak Kendra (the national center of Kathak under the umbrella of the Sangeet Natak Academy).

The revival of classical dance after independence led to the establishment of the national cultural Akademies in 1953. The establishment of Sangeet Natak Akademi (for music, theater, and dance) announced that the central government at New Delhi was now the official patron of cultural heritage. The national institution (not surprisingly) promoted the *gurukul* system (the male hereditary lineage system) that authorized the males of traditional families or the *gharanedars* to be the true bearers of authentic Indian tradition. Male masters of Kathak had been arriving in Delhi since the 1930s (with the establishment of the Delhi School of Hindustani Music and Dance). Shambhu Maharaj, Acchan Maharaj (brother of Shambhu Maharaj), and later Birju Maharaj (son of Acchan Maharaj) were brought to Delhi to teach at the newly founded cultural institutions. The modern architects of Kathak like Madame Menaka, Sadhana Bose, the Pooviah sisters (who were early women pioneers of Kathak) were given little significance in the official history of Kathak. The male teachers were now the official bearers of the nation's history and timeless tradition handed down through male lineage of *parampara*. The elite, upper-middle-class woman now had to recognize the male teacher as her guru, who had to be served from a subservient position according to the tradition of *guru-shishya parampara*.[4]

By tracing the origin of Kathak back to the Brahmin *Kathak* caste, with a brief link to the high culture of the Mughal courts, Kathak became primarily a male-dominated Brahminical practice (Khokar 1984; Kothari 1989). In the process, the multiple cultural influences on

Kathak and the contribution of the courtesan (*tawaif*) to its artistic richness were glossed over.[5] The national ideology of a pan-Indian Hindu culture, derived from ancient Sanskrit texts like the *Natyashastra* (dating back to the second century CE) helped to textualize Indian dances regardless of their specific regional or religious histories. The Brahminical lineages of Kathak were emphasized by dance historians such as Sunil Kothari. For example, in his book on Kathak, Kothari shows the strong relationship between Kathak and the *Raslila* tradition of Vraja and Mathura in medieval times but fails to show how they are traced back to Vedic antiquity and the Brahmin Kathak caste—a gap of over 2,000 years (Kothari 1989). Interestingly, Mandrakanta Bose traces the origin of Kathak to a much later text, *Nartananirnaya,* written in Akbar's court in the sixteenth century. She argues that Kathak does not belong among the *margi* styles of dance described in the *Natyashastra* but represent, the popular *desi* genre (Bose 1998, 52). In fact, the legendary Kathak maestro Shambhu Maharaj explained during a rare interview in a leading English newspaper:

> My great grandfather, six generations ago was blessed by Lord Krishna and was asked to compile a text of Natwari Nritya. . . . Three generations later in the time of Ishwarji this dance spread all over India . . . Prakashji (eldest son of Iswarji) . . . moved with the family . . . to Lucknow then known as Laxmanpur. It was during this time, when Prakashji was Nawab Asaf-ud-daula's court dancer that Natwari Nritya came to be known as Kathak. (Jung 1969, 58)

From this account, it appears that Natwari Nritya (Natwar is another name for Hindu deity Krishna) was formalized and the name emerged during the reign of Nawab Asaf–ud–Daula in the eighteenth century. The *gharanas* or schools emerged later (as Neuman 1980 as argued in a different context), perhaps to establish authorship for stylistic variations.

In the royal courts Kathak performances began with a Muslim-style *salami* or salute or *thata* marked by slow movements and stillness (Saxena 1991, 95–98). Now, virtually no Kathak performance begins with a *salami.* Other markers that have disappeared include the Islamic *farmayishi* (or request performance) as discussed by Purnima Shah (1994), the Muslim style headgear that was common well into the middle of the twentieth century, as well as expressing *bhava* (facial expression/miming) in a seated position with *Thumri* and *Ghazal* music. In post-independence India the various organs of the state began to selectively authorize the Brahminical narrative of Kathak and other Indian dance styles. The national and international context that shaped the *official* history of Kathak quickly obliterated the local history of the *nautch* dancers who were mostly Muslim women and gradually diluted the Muslim influence.

National Hegemony

State patronage

The central government became the official patron of culture after independence. The social organization of dance and music shifted from princely patronage, such as the *gunijankhana* of Jaipur or department of virtuoso artists (Erdman 1992), to the Minis-

try of Education of the Indian government. There were also a few industrialists like the Birlas, the Tatas, and the Rams who patronized the arts. However, the task of protecting, preserving, and promoting India's cultural heritage became a function of the central government. Following the Nehruvian vision of "unity in diversity," the central government took a leading role to showcase India's plural cultural heritage. The president of the All India Music Conference in 1958 made the following remark: "The resurgence of our ancient culture and desire to draw inspirations from its traditions are both a cause and effect of our political freedom" (written in the foreword of the conference newsletter). Centrally funded institutions like the Sangeet Natak Academy promoted dance by organizing seminars, festivals, and by providing dancers with scholarships, programs, and funding. Exponents of various classical forms were invited to serve on committees for annual awards, and to teach in schools sponsored by the Sangeet Natak Academy. To serve the interest of dancers, a post of assistant secretary for dance was created within the administrative structure of the academy (for details see Erdman 1984).

The ICCR, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, was a separate administrative body created and financed by the Ministry of External Affairs. Its primary objective was to establish and continue cultural relations between India and other countries. ICCR officials selected artists and performers to be sent abroad on official delegations. The "Festival of India" was introduced in the United Kingdon, the United States, France, Japan, Sweden, Germany, China, and the former Soviet Union to remove perceptions of Indian culture as fossilized and to highlight tradition and change (Singh 1998). Although designated autonomous, the Sangeet Natak Akademy and the ICCR were dependent on government grants and administered by government agents. As a result, performing artists had to politically align themselves with the central government. Delhi-based artists largely benefited from this arrangement and a hierarchical system emerged that reflected regional disparities. The lack of professional art managers and coherent cultural policies fragmented the institutions from their inception.

Kathak Kendra, one of the most important units of Sangeet Natak Akademy, became a constituent body of the Akademy in 1964. To develop a unified standard of Kathak appreciation, several festivals, workshops, and dance competitions were promoted by the central government. The new dance standards set by the Sangeet Natak Academy emphasized the importance of traditional *gurus* and *parampara*, which also meant subscribing to an old feudal order of patriarchy and subservience to *gurus.* A famous Kathak exponent, Uma Sharma, wrote (1972, 18):

> Gurus have been obstinate enough to allow neither themselves nor their pupils to remold and refashion Kathak to suit the changing needs of the times—it is heartbreaking to see that some of the surviving Gurus continue to entertain the medieval notion that an exacting personal dedication (traditionally known as "Guru Seva") is all that an aspirant needs to have.

To develop a consensus narrative on classicism, standards of Kathak appreciation were institutionalized at the Kathak Kendra in Delhi.[6] For instance, the prospectus of Kathak Kendra cites "defective initial training" as one of the reasons for not accepting an applicant

to the Kendra with his or her peer group. This implies that a student trained by some person outside the ambit of the Kendra needs to be retrained in the basics. As a result, the gatekeepers at the Kathak Kendra, where power was consolidated under the *gurus* of Lucknow *gharana*, de-legitimized the different regional inflections and the nuances of individual teachers of Kathak in order to give the dance a monolithic identity.

Moreover, to facilitate the further development of a consensus narrative regarding the male *gurukul* tradition, the Kendra organized various festivals and seminars and provided scholarships to aspiring dancers. The Kathak Kendra's newsletter for the Kalka-Bindadin Kathak Mahotsava, a festival celebrating the lineage of Kalka and Bindadin Maharaj of Lucknow *gharana* (1995, 3), notes:

> The Kendra has found from its experience that holding festivals is one of the most effective promotional activities. More than a decade ago the Kendra organized a seminar on Kathak dance, which was attended by all known gurus and front ranking dancers of the style. They were of the opinion that Kendra is like "the temple of Kathak" and it should give reasonable opportunities to the deserving.

What emerged from the centralization of Kathak in Delhi was the establishment of the lineage of Bindadin Maharaj of Lucknow *gharana* as the most prestigious Kathak *gharana*, with Birju Maharaj, the son of Acchan Maharaj, and the nephew of Shambhu Maharaj, as its most authentic torchbearer and ultimate authority and guru. Although his designation was head of the dance faculty, he was considered by many to be the true director of Kathak Kendra (Venkataraman 1996, 40). Many Kathak artists who were also trained by Shambhu Maharaj were marginalized due to the sole authority vested by the central government on Birju Maharaj. For instance, Pandit Bachanlal Mishra, a Kathak artist in Calcutta who was trained by the late Ramnarayan Mishra (a well-known disciple of Shambhu and Acchan Maharaj), calls his dance "traditional Kathak of Lucknow *gharana*." In a recent performance in Calcutta he demonstrated Kathak *hastak* (hand gestures) and *parans* (rhythmic structures composed liked poetry) that were the hallmark of Lucknow *gharana* in the past.[7] Calcutta-based Kathak artists who were disciples of Shambhu Maharaj such as Bandana Sen contend that much footwork has gone out of Lucknow *gharana* Kathak (personal communication).

Saxena (1990) writes that the most prominent Kathak festival, the Kalka-Bindadin festival, was initially conceived to assemble male masters of different *gharanas* (or schools) to resolve what they considered the "conflicting elements" in Kathak, in other words, its stylistic variations. However, due to the predominance of the Lucknow *gharana*, this resulted in the homogenization and standardization of the stylistic differences of different *gharanas* and the nuances of individual artists.[8] Natavar (1997) has detailed how the technique of Kathak is being codified following the dictates of Birju Maharaj. Describing the seminar on *hastas* held at Kathak Kendra in April 1993 to codify the improvised hand gestures, she writes:

> The greatest problem with this print-oriented codification of movements was that the information that would become accepted as "the right way" to do a gesture was

> being dictated by one man and his own style. After the book has been published, the improvisational and multi-variegated styles present in Kathak will probably wane or, even worse, [be] labeled as "incorrect" if they differ from Maharaj-ji's style. In this way, other individual and regional styles may become delegitimized. (Natavar 1997, 199–200)

The marginalization of the Jaipur *gharana* (the other prominent Kathak school) within the Kendra also has a long history, explains Keshav Kothari (the former secretary of the Sangeet Natak Academy and one-time director of Kathak Kendra) in an interview. According to him, "Jaipur gharana was never more than an also-ran in the Kendra." The prime reason for this, he argues, was the lack of a charismatic leader among Jaipur *gharana* exponents, except for the late Durgalal (Venkataraman 1996, 39). However, it is well known that Durgalal, a brilliant Kathak dancer, faced serious political problems with the power brokers in Delhi during his short tenure as a star Kathak artist before his untimely death (Venkataraman 1990, 19). It is no surprise then that in an official video produced by ICCR to represent Kathak ("Classical dances: Kathak"), archived in the library of Sangeet Natak Academy, the only performers featured are Birju Maharaj and his most prominent disciple Saswati Sen.

In an effort to decentralize the power structures in Delhi, the government created a separate Department of Culture in the Ministry of Human Resource and Development in 1985. It had eight government organizations under its jurisdiction and was accountable for thirty-nine other cultural institutions spread throughout the country (Singh 1998, 55). In the same year, the Zonal Cultural Centres (ZCCs) were established for covering cultural initiatives in every state and union territory. The emphasis was on the creative development of the performing and plastic arts. These centers were conceived as outreach institutions for ordinary people from different regions of India and for celebrating cultural plurality and diversity (Singh 1998). As part of the ZCC the Eastern Zone of Culture, consisting of Assam, Bihar, Manipur, Orissa, Sikkim, Tripura, West Bengal, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, was established in 1985–86 (Coorlawala 1994, 209). The West Bengal State Music Academy was established in 1982 as a special section of the Information and Cultural Affairs Department of the Government of West Bengal (in its capital city Calcutta). Their primary goal was the promotion of dance and music, defined as the "age old tradition in classicism," in the state and at the district level. An excerpt from the program newsletter (for the Uday Shankar Nrityaotsav of 1997, co-sponsored by the Akademy) is given below:

> Dance has always been a subject of parallel interest and the Academy has vested it with an equal importance as with music. Since the time of its inception, dance has been a regular subject of Academy's Annual Music Competitions; cash awards and stipends are allotted for the successful dance competitors who are also offered to join a special long-term training course at the Academy. (Kathak and Creative Dance are the two disciplines so far on which such training is imparted free of cost). Dance items are among the regular features of cultural programs organized by the Academy both in Calcutta and at district towns. (1997, 1)[9]

The gradual dissemination of Kathak via various state initiatives helped popularize the dance to a large cross-section of the population, primarily women, cutting across class, caste, and linguistic demarcations. Herein lies an interesting paradox: it is evident that even though the national public culture of post-independence India was hegemonic in its representation of Kathak as a male patriarchal Brahminical tradition, both the central government and the regional government played key roles in democratizing Kathak among a large cross-section of women. Media, especially television, played a key role in this democratizing process.

State television

The development of state television (Doordarshan) for "education, information, and entertainment" further reinforced the state's role as the official patron of culture. In 1982 Doordarshan introduced the nationwide coverage called the "National Programme," which connected Delhi to other states. The "National Programme" had the explicit goal of disseminating news, information, and entertainment for forging a "modern national culture" (Mankekar 1999). The mid-1980s to 1990s saw the dramatic expansion of television transmitters to various parts of the country, thus creating a renewed attempt to create a pan-Indian national culture. Television was meant to disseminate "high culture" to educate the general population and raise their cultural tastes and values. Classical Indian dance and music thus found a regular platform as exemplars of authentic and "high" Indian culture. The various regional dance styles such as Bharatnatyam, Kathak, Odissi, and Manipuri became symbols of "unity in diversity" forming the backbone for a pan-Indian national ideology. Folk dances were also presented, but the emphasis was on classical traditions and the promotion of "high culture."

Thus Kathak, as a significant symbol of the classical heritage, became a staple dance offering. The "National Programme" served as the national forum to present artists from various states, thereby promoting a unified Indian national identity. A new dance presentation format emerged where elegant women dressed in *saris* provided pre-performance explanations. Dance items were described in both Hindi and English. The execution of *mudras* (gestures) while offering verbal explanations also became a routine feature of classical dances (O'Shea 2002). Although this often helped a hitherto unknown artist to grace the national stage, the elitist posturing of the national programs was considered by many as the central government's attempt to impose a north Indian Hindi culture on the rest of the nation. Nilanjana Gupta observes the cultural politics of linguistic hierarchy:

> The Hindi and English telecasts do not appeal to the vernacular speakers of many regions. The kind of Hindi sanctioned by Doordarshan is seen as artificial and difficult, thus resulting in an alienation even among Hindi speakers. Thus, instead of uniting the nation, the Hindi and English newscasts often seem to create an opposite effect of reaction and perpetuate a sense of cultural domination of elitist English and chauvinist Hindi groups. (Gupta 1998, 31)

Many complained that the display of classical dances on television had limited aesthetic appeal, as the participatory and improvisational aspects of classical dances were lost before

an invisible television audience (Prahlad 1997, 296–98). Moreover, the lack of imaginative camera work and hackneyed studio settings further negated the aesthetic appeal of classical dances. Mekhala Natavar writes:

> During the 1970s and early 1980s Doordarshan aired a compulsory half hour a week of classical Indian dance. Cameramen were not trained in dance camera technique and the outcome was that often the dancers feet were cut out of the frame during footwork sequences or the camera would focus on the feet during narrative dances that lean heavily on facial and eye expression. (Natavar 1997, 127)

To counter the cultural domination of Delhi, regional centers like Calcutta Doordarshan reformulated the propagation of the national narrative and identity formation through their own vernacular versions of high culture. For instance, a program titled "Nrtiya Shekhar Ashar" (translation: "dance education session"), which appeared from the late 1970s through the 1980s, featured Kathak dance classes taught by Bandana Sen in vernacular Bengali. This helped to popularize the dance among the provincial middle class Bengali population, many of whom had been attracted to the dance by seeing Birju Maharaj or his disciple Saswati Sen perform on the "National Programme."

While Kathak was popularized via academies, seminars, festivals, workshops, and television programs, more recently, private corporations have emerged as an important supporter of the traditional arts. In the next section I show that the private corporations are now a catalyst for pushing the traditional arts to new and contested cultural domains where artistic production is often closely tied to commodity production.

Toward New Patrons, New Aesthetics

Globalization of media

Bimal Mukherjee declares in *Rasa*, a book proposing to summarize all of the Indian performing arts over the last twenty-five years, that "the present is an age of sponsorship and not of patronage" (1997, 2). The national state, the original patron of the classical arts after India's independence, still remains a significant patron. So does, to a lesser extent, the local/regional state. However, what is noteworthy is the extent to which the local and global corporate sectors in postliberalization India have emerged as important providers of patronage. This section of the paper focuses on the ways in which changing patronage and stylistic innovations are changing the past narratives of Kathak in the emergent domain of "public modernity" in India.

A homogenous, bourgeois national domain, once tied to modern Eurocentric ideas on high culture, no longer dominates public culture in postliberalization India. The public culture of contemporary India is now shaped by both the national ideology of the past and the dictates of the burgeoning market economy. It now exhibits the characteristics of postmodernity seen in the advanced capitalist world where the national space is represented by various transnational collectives and diverse cultural forms (see Jameson 1998 for a discussion on postmodernity). This proliferation of multiple cultural narratives is tied

to the global expansion of capitalism, resulting in, among other things, the unprecedented expansion of communication networks. Appadurai (1995) explains that "print capitalism" has only been a modest precursor to the technological explosion of communication and information today. He further develops the communicational scope of globalization by linking it to the explosion of mass media due to electronic mediation. He argues that this has ushered in fundamental changes in the concept of the public sphere and that narratives of the nation-state are no longer shaped only by the print media. One of the main developments in postliberalization India is the rapid growth of electronic media (especially satellite/cable television) and the proliferation of consumer culture. Appadurai writes: "Electronic media give a new twist to the environment within which the modern and the global often appear as flip sides of the same coin" (1997, 3). Elsewhere he writes: "To enter into the discursive world of the new public modernity, Indians have to buy its vehicles of dissemination. They must purchase subscriptions to magazines—gain access to television sets, and pay for meals at restaurants. In consuming the array of media-dominated images and symbols associated with these settings, they are drawn into the commodity world more generally" (1995, 10).

The economic reforms triggered what many called the "cultural invasion" of satellite and cable networks. It created a dramatic shift from Doordarshan's narrative of national integration and the creation of a consensus national narrative. The new channels were powerful agents of a new kind of consumer culture where entertainment became linked to westernization of national culture. David Page and William Crawley observe:

> After years of state monopoly, the arrival of satellite channels was like a breath of fresh air for India's middle-class viewers. Those with cable and satellite connections were suddenly liberated from Doordarshan's paternalistic programming and were offered access first to a wide range of international channels and soon afterwards to popular commercial programming specially made for Indian audiences. (2001, 140)

The advertising and media industries were eager to sell their products to the growing middle class by offering new kinds of television programs like fashion shows, game shows, and popular music and dance videos. Doordarshan responded by changing its programming strategy by permitting advertisers to sponsor programs and shifting from educational and information to entertainment. For instance, new channels such as DD2 were organized only as entertainment channels offering programs ranging from soap operas to music videos.

The increasing involvement of multinational and other private corporations in claiming the cultural sphere for marketing consumer products has ushered in a new phase in classical Indian dance. Now, one of the high-profile occasions to showcase Indian culture in its traditional and modern splendor is the beauty contest. A prime example is the *Femina* Miss India contest, sponsored by *Femina* (a women's magazine) and the Colgate-Palmolive Corporation (makers of personal hygiene and grooming products). The January 1998 Palmolive *Femina* Miss India contest on the premier cable channel Sony

was very different from previous representations of traditional Indian identity. Amid the traditional classical songs and *ragas*, trendy costumes, and various imitations of Broadway musicals, the audience was presented with a dynamic fusion of Kathak and Flamenco. This glamorous spectacle is not an isolated event. The Graviera Mr. India contest, for male models, sponsored by Graviera Suitings (also on Sony in January 1998), began with a Kathak duet, amid the usual cosmopolitan extravaganza.

Cable channels such as Sony, Zee, and Star (among others) offer versatile programming to a growing, Westernized urban middle class that is increasingly resistant to watching the mundane programming on Doordarshan channels. Dance programs such as "Footloose" and "Boogie Woogie" on cable networks showcase a new kind of commercial dance genre where *filmee* (dances from Hindi film songs), classical, folk, rap, break, and disco are packaged for consumption by the young. In "Boogie Woogie," which is presented in the format of a dance competition, performers as young as six or seven amuse the audience with spicy numbers incorporating everything from hip-hop to Kathak. Images of glamorous fashion models and beauty queens now compete with the traditional images of Radha or Sita as ideal symbols of Indian womanhood. The ideals of youth, beauty, femininity, and modernity have become a clarion call for a new generation of Indians who have been fed by the media frenzy over the success of Sushmita Sen and Aishwariya Rai in Miss Universe/World contests. However, the "new Indian woman" is not constructed only through beauty pageants (Rajan 1993). The representation of classical dances in the media is an important element in the construction of the modern/global Indian woman. The comments made by a student at Padatik, a leading Kathak academy in Calcutta, reflect this ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity:

> Although we cherish the classical traditions and appreciate the classical dances in old films by actresses such as Meena Kumari and Madhubala, we are equally attracted to the catwalks by the beauty queens and fashion models today. They may be Westernized but what they do is as difficult as Kathak. In a way they are also Radha, we are also Radha—we just have separate ways of communicating our womanliness to the audience. (personal communication)

One of the biggest forces blurring the fine line between classical/high culture and commercial culture has been Bombay commercial cinema. Although song and dance sequences have been an important feature of commercial Hindi cinema in the past, they have reached new heights in recent years. *Filmee* dance has emerged as an important genre in the metropolitan cities like Bombay and Calcutta, and among the Indian diaspora. It has taken the discourse of innovation to another dimension where new filmic technology has fused with traditional dance techniques to create lavish spectacles such as in the recent mega hit from Bollywood: *Devdas*.[10]

Diaspora

With the surge of innovation, the popularity of classical Indian dances has also grown especially among diaspora Indians. Many Indians who have settled abroad have started

schools in various metropolitan cities. Countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and France now have sizable Indian populations, and classical Indian dance is important for Indians who want to be connected to their cultural identity and tradition. This is particularly true in the United States where young Indian-American girls from the upper-middle class almost routinely learn classical dances, whereas their appeal is fading among girls of similar socioeconomic status in India. Many NRIs (nonresident Indians) have established successful dance schools where Indian dance (both classical and Bollywood), is a way of learning dance and also Indian mythology, history, culture, and values. Thus, classical dance events such as *arengetrams* are important rites of passage to emerge as "sufficiently" Indian for the Indian-American girl-child. These are also occasions presided by *gurus* and musicians from India who are brought in to lend an aura of authenticity and authority to the event.

However, classical Indian dance is not just limited to the Indian community. Bharatnatyam and Kathak are increasingly integrated with course curricula in United States colleges, cutting across many disciplines, not just dance. Technical training in Bharatnatyam was incorporated into the dance course curricula at University of California, Los Angeles, as early as 1960s with Balasaraswati. Later, her disciple, Medha Yodh, continued that teaching tradition. Such isolated, often sporadic attempts have been replaced to some extent by a more holistic approach to Indian dance by contextualizing technical knowledge with history, culture, and politics. A new generation of self-conscious Indian American students have demanded to study their own cultural forms and history, not in terms of mere exotica, but as concrete practices that shape their understanding of self. This has prompted the growth of Asian American Studies, a lucrative and expanding new academic field. Classical dance practices have become complex sites: techniques to morph with other dance forms for the creation of original works for the contemporary dancer, as well symbols of tradition and heritage (Chakravorty 2003).

The presence of Kathak in the Western dance scene, especially in the United States, is not new. The interest was initiated by the Kathak maestro Chitresh Das in the 1970s, when he started his career in the then newly founded Ali Akbar College of Music. His vision to create a California *gharana* of Kathak is being followed by his disciples based in the United States and Canada, among whom are Gretchen Hayden in Boston and Joanna Das in Toronto. Birju Maharaj has also popularized Kathak in North America by performing, holding workshops, and selling videotapes of Kathak workshops and instructions. For example, "Kathak Parichaya" is a Kathak appreciation video he produced that explains the fundamentals of Kathak dance to an international audience. The mechanical reproduction of the Kathak dance repertoire through videos and television programs has fundamentally altered the previous culture of secrecy that was associated with classical performance (Marjit 1995).[11] Moreover, the easy availability of various dance videos has transformed the traditional exchange between *guru* and *shishya*, once based on a special long-term relationship, into something more akin to commodity production and exchange. The new discourses of globalization and innovation are resulting in many new experimental and collaborative ventures that go beyond the past idiom and pedagogical

practices of Kathak. "Kathamenco" (fusion of Kathak and Flamenco) and "Ka-tap" (fusion of Kathak and tap) are some of the new cross-styles that have emerged in this global context.

Anjani Ambegaokar, based in California, has produced collaborative work on Kathak, tap, and Flamenco and has been recently honored with the National Heritage award by the National Endowment for the Arts. Deepti Gupta, a Kathak dancer based in Canada, has also experimented with Flamenco and Kathak in a composition titled *El Calor*. Her other experimental productions have included fusion of Kathak sounds to that of Ghana, and Kathak and Chhau dance from India. Janaki Patrik, a Kathak dancer based in New York and a disciple of Birju Maharaj, has also experimented with Kathak and tap. Rita Mitra Mustafi, based in Minnesota, has created experimental works with Kathak such as *Hungry Stones*, based on Rabindranath Tagore's *Khudita Pashan*, and to Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's poetry. An attempt to find the common roots of tap and Kathak (however farfetched this might sound) is being researched by Jane Goldberg, also based in New York. I have explored in my own dance-works, through my ensemble Courtyard Dancers, global and local themes using a Kathak sensibility. A choreographer who has stormed the international scene recently is Akram Khan. Based in London, this young dancer has already received high accolades for his blend of Kathak and modern dance, which he calls "Contemporary Kathak." He was recently featured in the Philadelphia Fringe festival where he presented his choreographic piece *Kaash*.

Hence, a monolithic classicism no longer binds Indian dances and global networks, nor is the flow of dancers and choreographers unidirectional; that is, from the East to the West. Innovations and new directions in Indian dance are now a part of contemporary dance movement in India and various parts of the globe such as the United States and United Kingdom. The close relationship between globalization and contemporary dance is marked by revolutions in communication networks and technology. Thus, the cultural specificity of movement has become unmoored and combined with various dance forms and identities. The Attakalari Festival of Movement Arts in Bangalore, held in 2002, was an intercultural exchange for a new generation of artists who are creating new definitions for dance. Aditi De writes:

> The dynamic face of dance to come is glimpsed through a trial piece by Erik of Denmark, working with an ensemble of dance volunteers. As Ziegler fragments real time images on an off-centre screen, the western club music sound and post-modernist distorted dancing suddenly melds with five seconds of classical Kathak by Birmingham based Anurekha Ghosh. (2002)

Innovations

"Innovation" is now the buzzword in Indian dance circles. The term is an amalgam of the emergent multiple trends in dance presentation and, as I argue, is linked to economic liberalization and globalization of culture in India. The term does not only imply aesthetic shifts from the same hackneyed classical dance routines of the past but functions to entice

the urban audience back to the auditoriums and theaters. However, innovation is not new to the classical dance discourse. During the revivalist movement of the late 1920s and early 1930s, when dance became associated with "ancient forms," key figures like Uday Shankar and Rabindranath Tagore imbued new aesthetics into traditional forms (see Erdman 1996). What is new in today's "innovation" is its link to consumer culture. Even the traditional gurus are repositioning their views in response to the new situation. The dance festival and seminar in Delhi titled "Creativity in Tradition" in 1994 reflected the need among traditional gurus to mediate the forces of modernity and tradition. Geeta Sharma (1994) reports:

> The gurus likened their dance forms to deep-rooted trees that were imbued with freshness and beauty through innovative creations. However, in a note of restraint they added that there was enough within traditions to innovate on and there was no need to step out of it.

Consider how different gurus have innovated. The Kathak *guru* Birju Maharaj, who has been instrumental in popularizing Kathak nationally and internationally through his charismatic performances and choreography, communication skills, and subtle aesthetic sensibilities, has himself become a proponent of innovation. However, his version of innovation remains bounded by the traditional patriarchal *gharana* ideology and strict adherence to the "pure" technique of Lucknow *gharana* as he interprets it.

On the other hand, Ahmedabad-based Kumudini Lakhia has pioneered innovative themes based on a modern sensibility. In her words: "I tell my students to think on their own and think of today, I tell them not to be a Xerox copy, but be an original, even if bad" (personal communication). She has created works like *Samsamvedan* and *Atah-Kim* that are distinctly modern. In the former she examines themes of alienation and social integration, and in the latter she explores the moral conflicts inherent in seeking power and status. A point to note: although Kumudini Lakhia has worked on innovative choreographies since the 1970s, her works became known and acceptable to larger audiences beginning in the 1980s. Some of the events that triggered interest in her works are the "Kathak experience" sponsored by Seagull Empire (a publishing company) and Regeant Special Filter (a cigarette brand) in Calcutta in 1980, and the "East West Dance Encounter" sponsored by Max Muller Bhavan and the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Bombay in 1984 (Kothari 1980, 1984). Aditi Mangaldas (the performer in the Miss India contest mentioned earlier) and Daksha Seth, who were her early students, now are leading Kathak artists working on contemporary themes.

Innovative choreography both in India and in the diaspora now include intercultural fusions or cross-styles such as Kathak with tap, Flamenco, or modern dance, and intracultural fusions like Kathak with Mayurbhanj chauu (a martial art tradition in eastern India).[12] The following comments by Sushmita Banerjee, a well-known Kathak dancer in Calcutta, give a clear example of the changing context:

> People kept telling me to do something different. They said they were bored with the same Kathak routine. They encouraged me to do something new. Some sug-

> gested that I do Shakuntala because I am fair-complexioned and I will make a good Shakuntala. I decided to do my own research. I showed Ravana dressing up for Sita. Although this is there in Ramayana, previously we only showed women dressing up and waiting for their lovers, like Radha waiting for Krishna. This happened because we only had male gurus creating dance for us. The situation is different now. I am on my own and I do my own experiments. We cannot think of dance in such narrow terms, nor in the terms of our local community, we think in terms of the national and international markets. (personal communication)

Amita Dutta, another Calcutta-based dancer, is just as direct:

> Nowadays individual artists have to take responsibility for producing successful shows—which means getting the right kind of commercial establishments to sponsor the shows so that they have the right kind of publicity. This is the only way to get good audiences for classical dance. I have been sponsored by private corporations like Tata Tea, Exide, IFB Agro, Birla Jute, ITC to name a few. In my choreographies I use what people know; which means I often depart from conventional classical themes. I try to select themes that will appeal to the audience. I have even used Hindi film songs for Kathak choreographies. (personal communication)

The corporate sector is now an important claimant to India's cultural heritage. It competes with the state in constructing narratives of tradition and innovation. Thus the innovative choreographies in Kathak are a reflection of the disparate threads of public modernity in India. Interestingly, these choreographies also show that even within globalization the nation-state continues to be important in the project of modernity in India. I look at the narrative of two works by Kathak exponents from the local context of Calcutta to analyze how the new forces of a freer market and the growth of electronic media have not only pushed the classical traditions into new arenas of dance fusion/confusion, but have also created new spaces for re-imagining the nation in ways that both contest and reinforce the dominant ideology of classicism. As Appadurai reminds us: "Globalization is itself a deeply historical, uneven, and *localizing* process" (1997, 17). I focus now on how local identity is produced through dance by the forces of globalization.

Padatik, a leading Kathak Academy in Calcutta, launched its most ambitious project, *Ramkatha-Ramkahani*, in Kolkata in 1995, with a cast of forty-five performers and a budget of Rs. fifteen lakhs. This hybrid theater-dance-song ensemble was directed by Kathak exponent Chetna Jalan and theater personality Shyamanand Jalan in the hope of creating a new dance-theater idiom. The production proposed to confront the ills of contemporary life through the traditional narrative form of Kathavachan or storytelling. The Jalans chose the *Ramayana* because of its large following that transcends caste and linguistic boundaries in India. The story of Rama's life was the narrative thread, which was interspersed with critiques of contemporary evils like drug addiction, fashion shows, the education system. The eclectic blend of Kathak dance with *Ghazals*, poetry, drama, rap, disco, acrobatics, and ballet was aimed at the general public, which is fed by Hindi film songs (as Chetna Jalan explained during an interview). For example, the popular

Bhajan Thumaka Chalata Rama Chandra was choreographed following the traditional conventions of Kathak in a modern group setting, but the commercial Hindi film song "*Ek Larki Ko Dekha To Aisa Laga*" was choreographed using eclectic movements to show men serenading and harassing women.

The creators proposed to recontextualize esoteric Kathak by making it relevant to modern life. With *Ramkatha* they attempted to revive the universal values embedded in the ancient treatise with a new pragmatic vision. By fusing Hindi film songs, Western pop, and ballet, with Kathak, this production successfully collapsed the boundaries of high and low cultures, and East and West. However, it is hard to ignore the fact that Padatik's version of pragmatism and eclecticism could be easily appropriated by the forces of Hindutva (the right-wing Hindu nationalist philosophy espoused by the Bharatiya Janata Party). The politicization of Rama by the forces of Hindutva before and after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in December 1992 has made Rama and religion the key tool for inciting communal violence in modern India. The plural nature of the text was lost within the overarching symbolism of the Hindu epic hero Rama as the national symbol of modern India.

Contrast this with another local production by another Calcutta-based dance group, Nupur Dance Academy, headed by the veteran Kathak Guru Bandana Sen, this time to analyze the articulation of innovation within the parameters of regional cultural identities. This experimental piece, which used a medley of dance styles including Kathak, was titled *Mahajibaner Pathe*, loosely translated as "the journey of a great life," and was based on the life of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, a Bengali nationalist leader of mythical stature. This low-key production is also a window into a contested and fragmented national terrain, where Kathak dance, in the imagination of Sen, narrates a modern tale of nationalism and nation-building within a middle-class, provincial, and local context.

Mahajibaner Pathe was presented in the style of a dance drama, with the main narrative in Bengali, and with Bengali songs of India's freedom struggle. It was undoubtedly geared toward the local Bengali audience fed on Tagore dance dramas known as "Rabindra Nritya Natya."[13] The character of Bose, played by a male Kathak dancer of Sen's group, used *abhinaya* (facial expressions) more than the fast and energetic dance movements of Kathak. The women dancers, sometimes dressed as young male freedom fighters and sometimes as women soldiers of the Indian National Army, were seen engaged in combat and revolutionary activities using the vocabulary of Kathak and a combination of Kathak pirouettes and folk and martial art movements. The production used intracultural cross-styles (that is, various regional dance styles from India were integrated, rather than the more celebrated intercultural ones associated with the fusion of Eastern and Western styles). It represented Netaji as a national hero who disappears into world history, but within the context of a local, vernacular Bengali identity. Encouraged by the new discourses on innovation a traditionalist like Bandana Sen created this new work for a local Bengali audience. Hence the articulation of locality/regional identity in this Kathak choreography appears to be ultimately prompted by the wider context of globalization and innovation.

Conclusion

The three main sections in this paper—"Between Nautch and Kathak," "National Hegemony," and "Toward New Patrons and New Aesthetics"—aim for a historical periodization to mark the changing patronage in Kathak as it moved from the royal courts to state patronage and, in recent years, to corporate sponsorship. I argue that the evolution of Kathak from a traditional practice in the precolonial and colonial periods to a national art form of modern India is linked to the changing discourses of modernity as it shaped and continues to shape the postcolonial nation state. Appadurai's notion of "public modernity" is especially useful in analyzing the new identities of Kathak dance and Kathak dancers in the new global public culture in India. Appadurai has explained that the globalization of culture in recent years has reformulated the ideology of nationalism and modern nation-building in multiple and discursive ways. As a result, the intersection of what Appadurai calls different "cultural zones" (i.e., global, national, and regional or local spaces) with different forms of capital (i.e., public and private) has created critical new sites for examining how identity is shaped. Innovation is the trend that describes this new situation. Although used as a buzzword in popular media, the term is significant for articulating changes in national dance styles such as Kathak due to the various forces of modernity. The proliferation of intercultural and intracultural collaborations resulting in hybrid cross-styles are now challenging the past ideology of "pure" classicism.

I briefly return here to questions of nation and identity in this multiplicity of narratives and styles. The two choreographic examples at the end showed how innovation might be articulated through both national and local/vernacular aesthetics, expressing identities that are national or local. In fact, it is possible to argue that the Kathak innovations on television beauty shows are perhaps expressions of transnational/global identities. Thus, as national cultures become increasingly globalized due to transnational flows of capital, media, goods, services, information and aesthetics, blurring geographic boundaries, a counter politics of localization and vernacularization reaffirms the complexity of contemporary cultural politics.

The fieldwork for this research was carried out in India between 1998–2004. The initial phase of the research was supported by a grant from the India Foundation for the Arts and the latter phase was sponsored by a travel grant from Swarthmore College. Some parts of this paper appear in my forthcoming book from Seagull, India, titled *Bells of Change: Kathak Dance, Women and Modernity in India.*

Notes

1. Since postmodernism and globalization are both associated with changes in capitalist production and consumption, I want to clarify my use of the latter term for analyzing contemporary conditions of dance production in India. Usually historographical narratives of colonialism, postcolonialism, nationalism, and globalization in India are centered on the discourses of the "modern" and the "global." Postmodernism is concerned with certain aesthetic and stylistic

choices largely associated with Euro-American culture and politics. In this sense the analytical terms "modern" and "global" rather than "postmodern" are most relevant for analyzing the contemporary Indian context. Moreover, modernism and postmodernism are concerned with certain aesthetic or stylistic choices whereas modernity and post-modernity relate to specific historical periods. Although they are inextricably linked, this distinction is important.

2. I analyze this section in-depth in a paper titled "Kathak in Calcutta: A Story of Tradition and Change." See Gupta (ed) 2004.

3. The development of *Thumri* and *Ghazal* (semi-classical music genres) was directly linked to the courtesans or dancing girls of Lucknow (Manuel 1987). However, despite their high status, the women performers had to legitimize their professional identity within a patriarchal and patrilineal system by claiming a male as their *guru*.

4. Special student-teacher relationship that existed in pre-colonial times.

5. Purnima Shah (1994) notes the importance of the court genre and the contribution of the secular attitude of Hindu and Muslim rulers to the present richness in the Kathak repertoire, yet, in a later work (1998), following the nationalist narrative of Kathak, she reiterates that it is a predominantly Hindu practice.

6. The Government also sponsors the Kathak Kendras in Lucknow and Jaipur, but they do not enjoy the national status of the Kendra in Delhi.

7. The performance was held in Gyan Manch, Calcutta on August 9, 2004.

8. The two major *gharanas*, Lucknow and Jaipur, are marked by sensuous and delicate movements of the limbs and complex and vigorous footwork respectively.

9. A report on the State Music Academy in 1989 claims that 14,000 students had already participated in their dance workshops.

10. I have analyzed Hindi film dance in "Courtesan Dance in Hindi Films: Nation and the 'Other' Woman in India's Public Sphere" (2004) and in "Remix: Dancing Desire in Bollywood Films" (2006).

11. The esoteric knowledge of north Indian classical dance and music was traditionally transmitted only through the male family line, except for special groups of women like the courtesans. It is argued that even in the modern context traditional male gurus only teach their most cherished knowledge to the immediate members of their families, in spite of having students who are more promising than their offspring.

12. I use the term intercultural fusion to denote experimentation with styles that are identified as Indian with styles that are Western in origin, and intracultural fusion to denote experimentation using different regional and national styles from within India.

13. Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore wrote many dance dramas where he combined dance, songs, and dialogue. The dance style he created for his dramas is a blend of many Indian movement styles (focusing primarily on Manipuri) and is called "Rabindra Nritya."

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Glossary

Abhinaya: Expressive movements focusing on gestures and facial expressions.
Baiji: Courtesan, prostitute.
Bainautches: Dances by north Indian courtesans.
Farmayishi: Request performance.

Filmee: Slang for "like in films."
Gharana: School, stylistic division, lineage.
Gharanedar: One who belongs to a *gharana*.
Guru: Teacher, master.
Gurushisya parampara: A special student teacher apprentice system.
Hastas/Hastak: Hand gestures.
Kathakas: Caste of storytellers in north India.
Lasya: Soft, feminine dance.
Margi: Classical.
Mudras: Hand gestures.
Natyasastra: Ancient treatise on dance.
Parampara: Tradition.
Parans: Syllabic compositions that are sometimes handed down through generations.
Rabindra Nritya: Dance styles pioneered by the Bengali poet laureate Rabindranath Tagore.
Salami: Salute in the Muslim style.
Sabhas: Gatherings.
Tawaif: Courtesan, dancing girl.
Tandava: Vigorous dance associated with the destructive dance of Shiva.
Thumri/Ghazal: A semi-classical genre of north Indian classical music where the songs are about sensuous and romantic love.
Vandana: Invocation to a Hindu deity.