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## Life and Works of Kumudini Lakhia: A Study in Modern Kathak Choreographies

Suman Bhagchandani

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### I

Post-independence India, the preservation and exhibition of art heritage, earlier a part of the nationalist project, took a different shape. Though syncretism was celebrated as an integral part of the Indian culture during this period, differing opinions on art hindered its effective development in the progressive years. What began as 'constitutional patriotism'<sup>i</sup> (Ahmad, 44) here, specifically 'cultural nationalism' (44), in the building of the nation-state was divided into an argument between technique, exquisiteness and authenticity. In a sovereign state, institutions thus became a significant space for organising the disparate opinions on performing arts in the country. As Maya Rao, an eminent Kathak dancer observed, there persisted a "'fragmented" approach in dance' with unsystematic methodology (Walker 123).

In 1950, the Ministry of Education laid the foundation of The Indian Council for Cultural Relations which aimed at encouraging international relations with neighbouring countries, through the medium of education, culture and fine arts. Arts revivalism was furthered with the establishment of Sangeet Natak Akademy, in 1952, an institutional body funded by the State but autonomous in its management. In the same year, Nirmala Joshi created a dance academy, as part of the Sangeet Natak Academy, which offered patronage to dancers like Shambhu Maharaj and Sundar Maharaj from Lucknow and Jaipur *gharana*, respectively. At this time in the history of dance restoration, two oppositional forces were activated. At an initial level, the government sought help from the people to restore and preserve the lost culture, an effort which began in 1945 with the establishment of the National Cultural Trust in Bengal (which was a failure). This was followed by a Conference on Art in 1949, Calcutta and two more in 1951, Delhi, to reconsider the predicament of art and culture in post-independence India (Azad 226). The issues raised in these conferences were disclosed to the public in Maulana Azad's (the president of ICCR) speech in 1953. The speech was addressed to the public to participate in arts restoration movement, seeking their contribution especially through active engagement in development and preservation of culture. Provisions for research in the fields of culture and tradition were promoted for scholarly minds by publishing expansive literature on these studies. To encourage amateur researchers, printing of dictionaries and handbooks on technical terms were also proposed as a part of this project. One of the many ways in which artists were invited to participate in this endeavour was by offering individual awards to them besides, promoting cross-country cultural interactions and funds through State institutions (226-7).

While the common public was encouraged for active participation, the project reserved itself to bourgeois art liberators and heritage artists. The oppositional force which was stimulated through these efforts was the development of art beyond the ancestral patronage. In this article, I will look at the progress of Kathak in post-independence India, which was revitalised as a classical form with a formal pedagogical structure, through the efforts of dancers like Maya Rao and Reba Vidyarthi. As non-hereditary dancers, they could experiment with the close, intricate structure of inherited art, thereby expand and reform the style of Kathak. The language of dance in post-independence India was highly Sanskritised and formalised thus restricting the form to elite members of the society. The article proposes to trace the mutations which followed in reaction to classicization of Kathak with the changes in the political structure of the State. To contend the above proposition, I will follow Kumudini Lakhia's career, an artist who considers the *guru-shishya parampara* limiting in its pedagogical scope; the *guru* can become a threat to the *shishya's* identity, inclining him to clone his guru rather than learn the art form.

Kumudini Jayakar (later Lakhia) was born in Bombay in 1930 to Leela and Dinkar Jayakar. Kumudini's mother learnt Hindustani Music from Narayan Rao Vyas and was inclined to continue the tradition in the family. However, seeing her daughter's talent in dance, she hired Ashique Hussein (an actor, dancer and singer) to train Kumudini. A few years later, Radhelal Misra of the Jaipur *gharana* was pursued for the same task. Kumudini's training in Kathak had already diverted from the traditional *guru-shishya parampara* and continued in the same manner in the years to follow.

Leela Jayakar had an early death and Kumudini resolved to continue her mother's dream for her. She brought Kathak under an inquisitive vision which was her first initiative towards modern classical dance forms. Kumudini's initial contact with Indian dance was established through Uday Shankar and Anna Pavlova's dance on an international stage. Fascinated by the fusion of western and eastern elements in dance, Kumudini too sought to expand the scope of Kathak in post-independence India. In 1948, Ram Gopal and Kumudini Lakhia, in a dance performance in London, bridged the gap between Bharatnatyam and Kathak schools (respectively) of Indian classical dance. By retelling the mythological tales of India in a dance style that was free from 'reference to Western choreography' (Shah 50), they sensitised the audience to the national dances of post-independence India. However, even these choreographies were not entirely divorced from western influences. Ram Gopal's acute knowledge of stagecraft in international performances was evident in his preference for lights, choice of the colour of costumes, use of space, et al. Indian classical dance post-nationalism witnessed a different interface of western and eastern styles of performance. While indignity of art was still a primary focus, scientific knowledge of choreography was also important to sustain dance in the changing vocabulary of international relations. Employment of these techniques in Ram Gopal's choreographies redirected the flow of cultural superiority eastwards. Kumudini Lakhia too, in the following years engaged herself with nationalising art by refreshing it with developments across nations. I will explore Kumudini's contribution towards growth in aesthetics, on a global scale, in detail in the last section of this article.

In India during this period, restoration of art and culture was directed towards its classicization through institutional teaching. The nationalist project initiated by art scholars and social reformers of tracing contemporary culture in ancient Hindu tradition was undertaken by the new generation scholars towards its application in colleges for performing arts. Unlike traditional dancers namely Shambhu Maharaj who associated themselves with the courtesan culture<sup>ii</sup>, non-traditional performers (Maya Rao, Reba Vidyarthi and Kumudini Lakhia) were able to alienate Kathak from its Mughal past. Maya Rao was one of the major exponents on Kathak who resuscitated it in modern India by bridging contemporary dance with its Sanskrit past. In 1955, she introduced Saraswati Vandana as a part of the Bhartiya Kala Kendra regime. The students had to perform the prayer each morning before the classes commenced (Walker 125). Rao's initiation was thus unanimous with the sanitization project started in the early 20s. Dance became synchronous with Hindu rituals and was received as a sacred activity in which middle-class women could also indulge. An interesting development in the political front, in the same year, was Indira Gandhi's appointment in the Congress Working Committee to 'represent the rights of the women' (Guha 283). Gandhi's touring in India for the propagation of women's rights had its impact in the cultural domain as well. The dominance of male Kathak gurus was gradually fading away and women artists considered teaching dance a credible profession.

In the years that followed, Reba Vidyarthi joined Bhartiya Kala Kendra as faculty and constituted methodological training in theory and practice of Kathak in the institute. Vidyarthi's project to modernize Kathak was comparatively more secular than Maya Rao's; though Sanskrit *vandanas* were not interfered with, Reba Vidyarthi promoted innovation and experimentation in dance. She once said, 'When we saw the *gharana* people change, then we were free to change' (qtd. in Walker 126). In the mid twentieth century, the *gharanas* underwent osmosis due to free cultural interactions, especially made possible in the

institutional spaces<sup>iii</sup>. Unlike traditional artists who reserved themselves to the inherited skills, the new generation dancers were engaged in a cosmopolitan approach to Kathak. As exhibiting oneself through performance became the means to success in the contemporary class ideology, the artists too borrowed skills from different *gharanas* for sustenance.

As the cultural capital of India, Delhi attracted budding artists to explore the field of performance. Funded by the government and well received by the new middle class audience, most artists were captivated by the cultural shows that took place in the city. Kumudini Lakhia in her biography recalls these events as city's nostalgia for the lost heritage. The shows were styled in an imitation of the courtly *bethaks* often organised by the businessmen, as a private function (Shah 101-2). Grandiose sets were constructed amidst which a solo artist performed on an elevated stage and at a distance from the audience. The space between the spectators and the performers legitimised the presence of modern courts by the new sponsors of art. In such performances emphasis was limited to settings rather than the technique of dancing. Commoditisation of art and artists was an inevitable consequence of capital distribution in the country; the artists depended on the bourgeois members of the society to organise events for the maintenance and propagation of art. Lakhia's disgust for the cultural capitalism prevalent in Delhi is obvious in her comparison of dance festivals to circus shows (Shah 102). Kumudini soon refused to commerce Kathak for a living. Circumstances favoured her and she moved to Ahmedabad to explore the potential of art beyond both ancestral and bourgeois patronage. This leads me to the second part of the article which explores Kumudini's career as an independent artist.

## II

Ahmedabad in the mid twentieth century was the industrial centre of India, second only to Bombay. The culture of performing arts was still in its nascent stage when Kumudini shifted to the city. Though there was Darpana Academy of Performing Arts, a private institute for Bharatnatyam, the people did not welcome dance, especially Kathak, as often as other dance forms. Kumudini thus sought to reinvent the culture of dance in the city in a new light. Since Ahmedabad had not been influenced by traditional Kathak, it was a challenging endeavour for Lakhia to retell its history, in the language of the common folk. Kathak was once again relocated in the shared history of the people – the subjects for the dance changed and so did its objectives. One of the steps in this direction was to expand the scope of Kathak beyond its transcendental religious themes and to incorporate contemporariness in it. Innovative and abstract themes were introduced to Kathak performances which encouraged the audience to receive the tradition without prejudice. Though artists like Sitara Devi showed contempt towards Lakhia's 'impure' Kathak (Shah 213), Kumudini and Atul Desai (her accomplice in music) had a broader vision for dance (and music). Desai believed that tradition and innovation follow the cyclical movement such that "When an art is saturated with innovation...it will naturally return to tradition for new life. Innovation has to extract meaning from tradition, which is like an axis. It does not rotate much but innovation revolves around it." (qtd. in Shah 152)

Desai and Lakhia's experiments with classical Kathak deconstructed the binary between innovation and tradition – wherein the existence of each depended on the presence of the other. While tradition was not entirely rejected, innovation became the channel through which the local audience could be addressed. Elements of classical dance like *tukra* and *tatkar* were heavily employed in her choreographies framing it within the modern methodology of performance. Her vision for dance at this stage of her career can be seen in congruence with Nehru's nationalist endeavours of the local transcending to the national scale<sup>iv</sup>.

This logic of transcendence does not reject or disregard the local. Rather it affirms the centrality of the local. At the same time, the focus is on how the local is historically transcended into higher levels of generality and abstraction; the insistence is that it is only through attention to these higher levels that the meanings of the local become clear. (Confino and Skaria 8)

Confino and Skaria analyses Nehru's speech as relieving local from the contingencies of the national to integrate it into the whole. By placing the local space and time into an abstract frame, the particular is subsumed into the general. Another example of the local assimilating with the national is Lakhia's experiments with Kathak. In her choreographies, as we shall later see in detail, the local can be equated with traditional Kathak appealing Indian audience, perhaps restricted to a certain class or a community. However, these performances transcend to incorporate the general themes like ego (*The Coat*), women prowess (*Shakti*) and others, which concern the masses outside the local tradition of Kathak.

Kumudini by the 1960s had advanced to objectively analyse Kathak rather than continue to imitate her gurus on the stage or even follow the tradition of miming mythological tales through dance. Seeing Kathak through the prism of philosophy allowed her to examine its possibilities in the field of choreography. For her the traditional Kathak soloist on the modern stage was a misuse of talent since most members amongst audience are not acquainted with Kathak's vocabulary. To prevent classical dance from withering away, it was essential to disseminate it in a manner that appeals contemporary audience. Kumudini endeavoured to bring the polar ends of classical Kathak and popular dance together, though not discrediting either art form in the process.

In a video recording archived by Sangeet Natak Academy, Kumudini Lakhia teaches choreography to college students at Meghdoot Theatre, New Delhi (2007). The video gives an insight into Kumudini's style of pedagogy which maintains a balance between discipline and fun. The class begins with a brief session of yoga, in which the students are made to perform breathing exercises. It continues with instructions about appropriate body posture, distribution of energy, and the manner in which each movement of the body can be dissected into smaller physical movements, and the emotional essence which it carries with it<sup>v</sup>. One can say that Kumudini's study of architecture prompted her to compare Kathak performance to the construction of structures in space. Her style of pedagogy upon the way a dancer's body occupies the space in which it moves; it's relationship with other performers on the stage and the audience; and the distribution of energy at the time of performance.

A seminal characteristic in her choreographies is the performer's relationship with the centre of the stage. Unlike Shambhu Maharaj, who insisted that the soloist must consistently dance at the centre of the stage, Kumudini Lakhia believed in the contrary. According to her the dancers should occupy the space around the centre, and at the same time not neglect its presence (Lakhia in an interview with Priya Kanungo). Kumudini's communication with the centre, from the periphery of the stage is also symbolic of her shift from the Centre (and traditional Kathak) to the city of Ahmedbad in which she cultivated modern pedagogy and performance for Kathak. This technique of performance is most apparent in Kumudini's first major performance called *Dhabkar (Pulse)*, also her magnum opus, as she takes a leap into modernity.

In 1973 Kumudini organised a group of five dancers from Kadamb, with the help of her friend and musician Atul Desai, for Kathak composition. Based on an abstract theme, with its emphasis on the placement of dancers on the stage, Kumudini experimented with choreography in Kathak for the first time. The dancers in *Dhabkar* were placed on three different platforms, of varying heights. As the music begins, one dancer follows the other to the centre of the stage, in a diagonal. Each dancer mimics the previous one after a beat, creating a sense of continuity on the stage. 'As they move closer to the middle, the view gradually incorporates the whole stage into the picture.' (Shah 168) One of the many ways in which this choreography was novel was in its experimentation with the classical form of Kathak. *Dhabkar* was the first performance in the history of Kathak in which the performers not only wore a white costume, but also did not adorn a *dupatta*. In her later choreographies (including *Dhabkar*), Kumudini has heightened the potential of colour of the costumes to a new choreographic level. The costumes are designed in a manner that each colour is a gradation of the other, for instance, in her choreography 'Atah Kim' we the same shade of

yellow worn by two groups of dancers at forty-five degrees to the stage, and those in the centre, background, in a lighter shade of yellow. 'I see that the colours don't clash and sometimes they come together in a way that they themselves create a design. Rather than the dancers, the colours make a design.' (Lakhia in an interview with Priya Kanungo). Kumudini considered the redistribution of *tihais* (a rhythmic beat that the dancer follows) between dancers on the stage (Shah 168-9) and what followed was modern Kathak for the first time. The critics at the time of its first performance were sceptical of the term 'choreography' as a threat to the classical dance forms (Shah 176). Yet, *Dhabkar* was avant-garde in the field of classical dance and continues to be performed as recent as February 2002, at Kathak Kendra Festival.

Kumudini's success in Kathak however has not remained unchallenged. As a mother of two and married in a conservative business family in Gujarat, Kumudini had to often negotiate with expectations and passion. The bisected life that she led was expressed as *Duvidha* (*Conflict*) in 1971.

In "*Duvidha*" or "*Conflict*", I examined the plight of a middle-class woman who is chained to the traditions of Indian life. She is restricted to domestic circles, is forbidden from wearing sleeveless blouses, must wear her hair in a bun and must cater to her husband. Yet, from a small window she sees the newspaperman waving images of a woman with a bold streak of white in her short hair, who wears sleeveless blouses, is surrounded by men who listen to her intently, is widowed but wears colourful saris. Moreover, she commands a country with millions of people. Yet, while the woman looking out of the window is intrigued by this image, she experiences conflicting emotions. The character in "*Duvidha*" is torn between two-lives she feels an emptiness within her, but is not sure what but is not sure what she wants. This is something I have felt often...' (Menon 40)

In the 1970s, at the time of Indira Gandhi's governance in India, the foremost concern of the nation, in the social sphere, was the emancipation of women. The ICSSR (Indian Council of Social Science Research) had introduced seventy-five subjects of study on the status of women concerning education, law, economy, health, etc. The Congress took to its shoulders the responsibility of providing equal opportunity to women, especially in case of employment. However what began as a socialist movement towards the upliftment of the marginalised was largely an elitist programme that addressed the cities only. The ICSSR research concluded 'that society has failed to frame new norms and institutions to enable the women to fulfil the multiple roles expected of them in India today.' (Guha 471)

At the same time, even though the feminist movement could not percolate to the lower classes, the 1971 survey shows a significant increase in the number of girls enrolled in schools and universities, since Independence (Guha 472). Kumudini's acknowledgement of female power and autonomy thus follows the same path. In her choreography (*Shakti*) and her performance (*Duvidha*), Kumudini petitioned for the rights of women and disseminated it through cultural shows.

Intrestingly, Kumudini can be seen as Indira Gandhi's disciple in the cultural front of a 'magnified figure' (Khushwant Singh, qtd in Guha 447). Vaishali, a student of Kadamb speaks of Kumudini as a "challenge-driven woman" who "must always be amongst the best." (Shah 245) This characteristic behaviour is also apparent in Kumudini's works in which she replaces the customary presence of mythological figures with herself. *Duvidha* (1971) was her first most autobiographical performance which pioneered a shift from mythological themes to personal experiences<sup>vi</sup>, and later to universal themes (like emotional and physical prowess in women, *Shakti*, 1973), or abstract ideas (like ego, *The Peg*, 1985). Kumudini's choreographies paved way for her students like Parul Shah, Prashant Shah, and Aditi Mangaldas to continue the tradition of engaging in contemporary themes that usually have autobiographical undertones.

Once Kumudini had achieved success in amplifying the scope of Kathak performances, she confronted a new dilemma—choreographed as *Atah Kim* (*Where Now?*)

In particular, I wanted to feel powerful; I wanted to have control over a large group of people. In 'Atah Kim' I address the desire to possess power. And yet once you possess it, what do you do with it? Once you reach your goal, where do you go from there? It's a question without an answer, but I believe the question must be asked. (Lakhia qtd. in Menon, 40)

*Atah Kim* was first performed in 1981 at the Sangeet Natak Akademy Kathak Kendra Festival, in 1984, at East-West Dance Encounter, New Directions in Indian and European Dance, Bombay and in 2001 in Uday Shankar Dance Festival in Delhi. The basic theme is of uncertainty which has haunted her since her mother's early death. The memory of her relationship with Kathak (which she initially regressed from), and what must follow in the years to come is composed in a choreography which begins with a *shloka*, 'The face of truth is covered with a brilliant golden disc, that thou dost remove, O Sun God, that my eyes may see the truth of *Dharma*' selected by Atul Desai. The performance begins with a golden frame in the corner of the stage, as the music slowly rises, a dancer enters and stands behind the disc. A relationship of strain is developed with the frame, expressed through the performer's facial expressions. Gradually more dancers fill the space of the stage and establish a similar tension with the disc. Unlike conventional props which serve a limited purpose in the performance, the frame too participates in the choreography and occupies the conscious of the dancers on stage.

Critical reviews for *Atah Kim* were diverse and was compared to a spiritual pursuit for truth (Srinivasan qtd. in Shah 207); fading spiritual reality, replaced by the quest for wealth and power, symbolised by the golden disc (Kothari qtd. in Shah 207); and a performance which cannot even be called a dance (Sitara Devi qtd. in Shah 214). Kumudini's own reflections of the performance have been equally uncertain and the meaning of the golden disc varies from the significance of power to the externalisation of one's self-perception. The tension stirred during the performance is in reality directed at the audience by Kumudini. Scepticism becomes the eyeglass under which Kumudini places *Atah Kim*—a frame through which the spectators are prompted to question traditional practices in Kathak and in life, at large<sup>vii</sup>.

On an apolitical stance, Kumudini's dilemma is of an artist who has witnessed her art achieve a level of homogeneity. This aspect of standardization is most apparent in Kumudini's students like Parul Shah, Prashant Shah and Aditi Mangaldas who have actively engaged in the stylistic and thematic features of Kathak initiated by her. Though Kumudini has tried to establish free-thinking and independent artists, she still 'needed them and required them to give themselves to Kadamb first' (Shah 243). However, artists like Dakhsa Sheth, Maulik Shah and Ishira Parikh broke away from her domineer to expand the potential of contemporary Kathak. This has led to the dissemination of Kumudini's style of Kathak which no longer is unique to her.

The indigenization of Kathak which was channelized through print capitalism in the twentieth century was promoted to a new level of globalisation in the following years through electronic media. Maulana Azad's initiative at disseminating diverse cultural forms through print media was the first step towards its homogenization. Since international relationships have eagerly contributed in developing an exchange policy in the field of culture and arts. Kathak too has undergone mutations to accommodate these changes in the social and political front. Kumudini's innovations in introducing group choreography has also participated in enlarging the scope of 'collective imagination' (Appadurai 161) on a global scale. In 1988, Kumudini Lakhia was requested by the ICCR to organise choreography for the Festival of India in the U.S.S.R<sup>viii</sup>. The challenge was executed with twenty-four

dancers performing contemporary Kathak in a piece called *Aroha (The Climb)* (247). The festival was a successful dawning into the new age of globalisation.

Propagation of Kathak across nations, especially through electronic media, in the twenty-first century is congruent with Appadurai's views of technological advancement in the age of globalization. Transnationalisation of cultural beliefs has been facilitated by popular media which connects the local groups into a national project. However, multiple diasporas have also emerged in the process of globalisation which challenge the project of cultural homogeneity. Students of Kumudini Lakhia, like Aditi Mangaldas, Dakha Sheth and Maulik Shah, have furthered her style of contemporary Kathak, but have also stirred anxiety in 'traditional' Kathak dancers. Aditi Mangaldas' choreographies inspired by Kumudini's teachings were largely autobiographical and advocated for the emancipation of women. Mangaldas had later joined Birju Maharaja's troupe to learn traditional Kathak, but often questioned the gender roles assigned to performers saying, 'Maharaji would tell us, "Shiva can raise his leg but Parvati can't." But why? I can raise my leg as high as Shiva.' (Shah 237). As an independent artist, Mangaldas like Lakhia could freely experiment with abstract ideas like time, choreographed in traditional Kathak style (*Infinite Journey*) or in contemporary dance based on Kathak (*Now Is*). Daksha Sheth's choreographies are more intertextual in its style, incorporating traditional dance forms like Kathak, Mayurbhanj Chhau, Martial art of Kalaripayattu and few others, blending it with contemporary themes. Her performances have undertones of rebelliousness that dissociate itself with even a small quantum of imitation from her gurus. 'When I start working, I don't think of Kumiben. I don't want to repeat. If I see something that resembles that, I destroy it.' (Shah 237)

The rise of multiple voices of Kathak has led to the museumization of gharanas making space for countless independent artists imitating fractions of traditional Kathak in a contemporary choreography. Transnationalisation of culture in the age of globalization has promoted the diasporic voices of Kathak to express itself on a larger platform. This has led to increasing heterogeneity in an erstwhile closed, traditional dance form. As these changes echo Appadurai's fear of the disappearance of the nation-state ('In the longer run, free of the constraints of the nation form, we may find that cultural freedom and sustainable justice in the world do not presuppose the uniform and the general existence of the nation-state.' (23)), we are reminded of the existence of State institutes like the Kathak Kendra. At this point in the study of Kathak one cannot overlook the impact of globalization on the pedagogy of Kathak, as much as one needs to trace the changes that are sensitive to the interests of the new generation audience. Hence the need to strike a balance between tradition and innovation becomes even more urgent as global dialogues take place across nations that transcends the chronotopes of the origins of Kathak.

## End Notes

<sup>i</sup> Aijaz Ahmad uses Habermas' term, 'constitutional patriotism' to look at nationalism as a bourgeois project, in order to mark the point of 'transition from the colonial to the postcolonial, from subjection to citizenship.' I refer to Ahmad's theory on cultural and linguistic multiplicity outside the bourgeois construction (constitution) to look at the manner in which an apparently chaotic situation had arisen in performing arts. Hence the urgent need for institutions to reorganize the performing arts post-independence.

<sup>ii</sup> Shambhu Maharaj's reluctance to accept mutations in Kathak was apparent in his informal style of teaching (Walker 123) and his rejection of important modern stage instruments like lights and set designs (Shah 109). His inability to coordinate with the shift in chronotopes of performance (especially from private to public space) led to frequent indulgence in drinks and bribery, and eventual downfall (Shah 119).

<sup>iii</sup> Kumudini Lakhia's training in Jaipur gharana and Lucknow gharana (Shambhu Maharaj) is an example of the modern pedagogy in which the traditional *guru-shishya parampara* is not followed.

<sup>iv</sup> In case of Kumudini's experiments with dance, the local is equivalent to innovation and the national is the traditional, classical Kathak.

<sup>v</sup> The subdivision of each movement in dance into smaller movements, in congruence with the physical joints in the body, is not a modern methodology of teaching. Before Kumudini, Uday Shankar (in an interview with Shambhu Mitra) had discussed the manner in which a singular dance move can be dissected into small, but diverse movements. Reba Vidyarthi too organized exercises at nrtya Kala Kendra on similar lines. Kumudini Lakhia's vision of pedagogy is therefore not novel a technique in dancing. However, what distinguishes her from earlier dancers is her insistence on the circulation of energy at the time of dancing and as well as its dissemination around the dancer's body.

<sup>vi</sup> In an interview with Kanungo, Kumudini defends for the autonomy of Kathak; rather than imposing mythology on the dance form, it should be fluid and receptive in its thematic structure.

<sup>vii</sup> Once again, Kumudini's choreography echoes the political uprisings of the 1980s; disbelief in the constitution of democracy; and Mrs. Gandhi as a political juggernaut. *Atah Kim's* second performance in 1984 was thus entirely in congruence with the nation's question to Indira, 'What Next?'

<sup>viii</sup> The Festival of India was a series of lectures, seminars and exhibitions organized by British scholars in collaboration with the Government of India to display the immeasurable beauty of India. This began as a venture to exhibit India's glorious past that reached new heights with Mrs. Gandhi's suggestion to showcase 'not only India's past, but also its dynamic present, and its hopeful future.' (Desai 286)

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**Abstract:**

This article marks the maturing of classical Indian dance Kathak in the history of the cultural identity of the nation. With close reference to Kumudini Lakhia's biography, *Movement in Skills: the Dance and Life of Kumudini Lakhia* (Reena Shah, 2005), I have traced the pedagogical evolution in the study of Kathak and its implications on proscenium stage. It is a study of how socio-political changes are reflected in the reception and interpretation of a classical dance form that breaks away from its mythological past to explore its potential in the global market. The choice of subject is a deliberate one whereby the changes in the cultural history of India explored through the medium of Kathak, and Kumudini Lakhia, I have highlighted the nationalist attempts at developing international relations.

**Key Words:** Kathak, Kumudini Lakhia, cultural nationalism, globalization, pedagogy and performance, tradition and modernity, *guru-shishya parampara*, cultural homogeneity.

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