

# Intergenerational Adaptation in North Indian Kathak Dance

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## Abstract

*Kathak*, a classical dance form from northern India, characterised by rhythmically sophisticated footwork, quick turns and storytelling, is traditionally passed down from teacher to student through a close relationship known as the *guru-shishya parampara* (teacher-disciple tradition). This article examines the shifts in teaching and dance techniques over three generations of gurus and shishyas within one *gharānā* (stylistic school) of Kathak. Both the culture of training and dance materials have been adapted to changing socio-historical realities, from the decline of the courtesan culture and the growing independence movement in northern India in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the dance's transplantation in North America in the latter part of the century. This close study of one dance lineage illuminates the impact that changing historical realities and individual proclivities have played in Kathak's stylistic development. It demonstrates that even the basic elements of this style of Kathak have been subject to change; furthermore, this flexibility has been a vital part of the teaching of this solo performance tradition since at least the mid-twentieth century.

KEYWORDS: Kathak, dance, India, adaptation, pedagogy

*Dance finely tunes sensibilities, helping to shape the practices, behaviours, beliefs and ideas of people's lives. At the same time, the multiplicity of ethnographic realities shapes the unique and historical occasion of any dance. All this raises questions about the transmission and transformation of dance from one cultural setting to another, as well as from one historical period to another (Bull 1997: 285).*

## Introduction

*Kathak*, a classical dance form from North India characterised by fast, rhythmically sophisticated footwork, quick turns, crisp stances, delicate hand positions, and storytelling, is traditionally passed down from teacher to student in a tradition of close relationship known as the *guru-shishya parampara* (teacher-disciple tradition). While this method of training is very different from student-centred pedagogical paradigms, it nevertheless is a system

responsive both to the individual needs of students and to changing socio-cultural dynamics. This article considers several generations of gurus and students within one dance lineage to illuminate this dynamic pedagogical process and the impact that changing historical realities and individual proclivities have played in kathak's stylistic development.

It is a basic tenet in ethnomusicology that 'music transmission and learning are fundamentally social achievements' in which practitioners 'engage in cognitive, kinetic, and affective operations that are informed by their participation in broader spheres of human culture' (Szego 2002: 707). Dance transmission, like that of music and other pedagogical processes, involves a reciprocity in which students affect not only how much is taught, but also the methods through which artistic knowledge is conveyed and, ultimately, the material itself. Thus, the artistic maturation seen over the course of gifted dancer/choreographers' careers is often profoundly influenced by his or her students. In the case of kathak as with many other traditions, these developments are a fundamental aspect of the tradition itself.

At least once each year, I teach an interdisciplinary undergraduate course titled 'Dance in India' that explores the ways in which select dance forms from the Indian subcontinent have changed and adapted through history. Our study of kathak focuses on four historical periods. In the Mughal period (1526-1857), kathak is commonly said to have synthesized elements of Hindu and Muslim cultures and developed the distinct characteristics for which it is known today.<sup>1</sup> At the time, noblemen and wealthy landowners patronised courtesans: women trained in song, poetry, dance and the art of seduction. Kathak experienced a significant decline during the period of British colonial rule (1858-1947) particularly due to the Victorian view of courtesans, who were misunderstood as being merely prostitutes. However, known in Indo-British society as 'nautch girls' (an Anglicised version of the Hindi word *nāch*, meaning dance) and as *bāī-jīs* or *tavā'ifs* in Indian society, these women were some of kathak's key exponents.<sup>2</sup> In the period leading up to and after independence in 1947, the dance experienced a renaissance. However, like other art forms in India, kathak's patronage shifted from the wealthy to a broader public and the much-maligned courtesans had no place in the dance's future as a symbol of national pride. In our historical examination of kathak, my class focuses on socio-cultural issues because of the problems in tracing changes to dance movement and repertoire discussed above.<sup>3</sup>

The fourth and most recent phase of kathak's history might be called its 'transnational period,' in which dancers, now middle- and upper-class artists, began travelling abroad. Some, such as early exponent Uday Shankar (1900-1977) and Kumudini Lakhia (b. 1930), incorporated elements and aesthetic preferences of foreign dances into their own

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<sup>1</sup> As scholar Ali Asani has noted, the Muslim world is too large and diverse for this designation to be adequate. The 'Muslim' aspects of kathak dance should therefore more properly be considered by their geographical origins in modern-day Iran, Central Asia and Afghanistan (personal communication).

<sup>2</sup> For further information on the role of courtesans in North Indian music and dance, see Post 1987 and Maciszewski 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Even this history, 'contains numerous gaps, contradictions and paradoxes' (Walker 2004: 5). Walker's dissertation, an important critical examination of kathak's history, problematises the dance's accepted history and examines where and how the term appears in historical documents.

creative work (Erdman 1987; Shah 2006); others, paradoxically, became more ‘traditional’ through their experiences in foreign lands. Both responses, in part, apply to the work of Pandit Chitresh Das, fieldwork collaborator and kathak dance master with whom I have studied since 2000, who moved to the United States in the early 1970s to teach and perform internationally.<sup>4</sup> As this article demonstrates, the style of kathak taught by Pandit Das’ guru, Pandit Ram Narayan Mishra and later by him has – even in its most basic elements – been subject to change; furthermore, this flexibility has been a vital part of the teaching of this solo performance tradition since at least the mid-twentieth century.

## Shifting pedagogical contexts in the era of independence

Pandit Das grew up in Calcutta (now Kolkata) at the end of the British *Raj* and the beginning of independent India. His parents, Nilima and Prohlad Das, were the founders of Nritya Bharati, one of India’s first institutions for dance.<sup>5</sup> The institutionalization of music and dance training happening across India at that time marked a fundamental change in the role of the guru (Rosse 1995). While the guru-shishya tradition of teaching involved a close one-to-one, often lifelong relationship in which disciples studied and sometimes lived in the guru’s home for a period of time, these new teaching venues functioned more like Western-style schools where students mainly interacted with teachers in the classroom setting, sometimes even taking classes from more than one guru. The broader ramifications of this institutional shift were certainly not lost on Pandit Das’ parents. Despite their work to make dance training accessible to a broader range of society through their institution, they saw to it that their son would be trained in the traditional guru-shishya method. Young Chitresh was formally ‘tied’ to the kathak guru, Pandit Ram Narayan Mishra, at the age of 10.<sup>6</sup>

Having lived during the British era and into independence, Pandit Mishra purportedly made his living solely from teaching courtesans until he was ‘discovered’ by Pandit Das’ father, Prohlad Das. His subsequent entrée into Calcutta society was facilitated by Prohlad Das, who helped him procure teaching positions at key dance institutions, including the Birla Academy, Sangeet Shyamala, and the Das’ dance school, Nritya Bharati. These early dance academies also played an important role in the changes taking place in India’s dance traditions. At such schools, dancing shifted from the responsibility of specialists trained with the expectation of earning a living through their dance to the practice of middle

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<sup>4</sup> *Pandit* is a Hindu term of respect given to teachers or performers who have demonstrated significant artistic achievement.

<sup>5</sup> In supporting and teaching several indigenous classical and folk styles through their dance institution, Nilima and Prohlad Das were part of a larger movement in the state of Bengal known as the Bengal Renaissance (*na-bajagoran*), which, as Sarkar notes, was ‘based on the intersection of the Oriental scholarship of rediscovery of ancient Hindu achievements and modern western thoughts inculcated through English education. This triggered a whole series of progressive changes resulting in an “awakening” to modernity’ (188, quoted in Chakravorty 200: 58–59). Himself a dance scholar and choreographer, Prohlad Das used these traditional dance forms to express modern issues, such as in his revolutionary work, *Abhyudaya* (meaning ‘awakening’), staged before Indian independence in 1947.

<sup>6</sup> This relationship is formalised in a *gandābandan* ceremony in which strings are tied around the guru and disciple’s wrists to mark this connection.

and upper class dancers for whom – regardless of their devotion to learning the art – the dance was not necessarily the source of their livelihood. For the remainder of his career, Pandit Mishra’s students included some of the early generations of upper- and middle-class Bengali society to study dance as well as women from the courtesan tradition.

Despite a moral climate in India strongly opposed to the courtesan culture, during Pandit Das’ youth his parents allowed him to accompany his guru when he taught courtesans in the famous Bowbāzār district. His experiences there, as described in the following newspaper article excerpt, were formative to the young student:

The Kathak master who would arrive every day in a rickshaw through the narrow alleys of Bowbazar was the famed Kathak guru Ram Narayan Mishra... He was accompanied by one of his young students, a boy named Chitresh Das. Das remembers his guru going from *bājī*-quarter to *bājī*-quarter, the burly bouncers touching his feet, mothers of *bājīs* in their *zāri* (gold)-bordered saris personally dressing a *pān* (betel leaf) for him. ‘It was very strange going from my respectable middle class Bengali home to the *bājī* houses of Bowbazar and then off to school with the Italia-brothers of Don Bosco [Prep School],’ laughs Das (Roy 2006).

These visits with his guru profoundly affected Pandit Das’ attitude toward courtesans, something he has commented on throughout his career including at an interview preceding his departure for the United States:

Sometimes with [my guru] I would visit the *bājī* quarters. You know, professional women dancers. People call them ‘nautch’ girls, immoral. Why? I don’t think so. Even today you will find the finest dancers, the finest *artistes* there (Das in Suraiya 1970: 18).

Perhaps he was permitted to accompany his guru to Bowbāzār because, being an atypical family to begin with, his parents realised that giving their son the chance to experience a dying tradition was more important than any accompanying social stigma.<sup>7</sup> However, Pandit Das certainly would not have been permitted to visit courtesan districts were he a female student; women of the middle and upper classes were kept at a remove from the culture and even movement styles of the courtesans. As his guru-sister Chetna Jalan recalls:<sup>8</sup>

He [Pandit Ram Narayan Mishra] deliberately of course, took that part away from me, because I was young and it... I mean it would have been fire at that time, that *koṭhā-kā* dance [dance of the courtesan quarters]. It would have been fire (2003).

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<sup>7</sup> Other ways in which Pandit Das’ parents challenged convention included their own marriage, which defied the norms of caste and religion. Pandit Das tells many stories in which his mother in particular challenged him to think critically about traditional beliefs and practices before adopting them.

<sup>8</sup> A guru-brother or -sister is not a literal sibling, but anyone who has studied with the same guru.

Where Pandit Mishra might have introduced the world of the courtesans to a male student like Pandit Das, whose liberal family allowed this contact, he would not have done so with female students of a high social standing. Pandit Mishra, then, is an example of a guru responding to his immediate social and political circumstances by purposely altering his students' learning opportunities to suit the expectations society had for students of different sexes and class backgrounds. As discussed below he, like other artists, also modified dance gestures based on the same criteria.

Most practitioners of kathak and other courtesan art forms faced similar decisions at the time of independence, which was accompanied by profound changes to dance's transmission, patronage, and performance. South Indian dancer and reformer Rukmini Devi, for example, consciously downplayed *shringār rasa*, or the depiction of erotic love (Allen 1997; Meduri 1988: 10–12). In movement, the suggestive swaying of the hips, an important element of courtesan dances, was discouraged in the kathak's transmission to middle-class students. Chakravorty reports that her guru Bandana Sen 'repeatedly made sure while teaching that we did not swing our hips akin to the "khemta" style prevalent among the *bājīs*' (2000: 54). Walker similarly notes that 'one is constantly reminded in dance classes not to move the hips' (2004: 5).<sup>9</sup> In Pandit Das' teaching, the use of hips is also largely discouraged, not generally because of its association with the courtesans, but rather because hip movement detracts from the speed his students can attain in their footwork.

Not only did Pandit Mishra modify his teaching according to a student's social status and sex, but also according to a student's individual inclinations. For Pandit Das' training, this meant emphasizing strong footwork, speed and power. According to him:

[Pandit Mishra] taught according to the personality, strength, and capacity of each individual. This was one of his great achievements, and it was very interesting to see the various disciples dancing the same compositions with totally different emphasis – either soft, or fast, or with extra turns or strong footwork. Due to my fiery nature as a child, for me it meant endless hours of practicing footwork, turns, and recitation, often to the point of exhaustion (1986: 29).

Though the style of movement Pandit Mishra encouraged in each dance student might have differed, strict discipline was an important aspect of his training method for all. As many scholars and artists have noted, in north India the discipline imparted by a guru is both intense and a source of pride (e.g. Neuman 1990; Nuttall 1998; Ruckert 1994). Chetna Jalan recalls Pandit Mishra's training style, saying that it was 'very torturous training for me... because of his strong regime, and no intervals in between' (2003). Jalan continued, noting that '*riāz*,' a term meaning practice involving effort, '*mane riāz*'—practice means practice. 'There [was] no sitting down, no chatting, nothing' (ibid.). But she also suggested that his intense training is what gave her a 'good spine' allowing her to dance strongly. Pandit Das wrote the following description of routine training with Pandit Mishra:

<sup>9</sup> Chakravorty notes that *khemta* is a folk dance tradition that is regularly conflated with courtesan dance (2000: 54, fn. 10).

My *guruji* came regularly to teach at my father's school and then he taught me privately.<sup>10</sup> I also went to his home for lessons twice a week. After the age of twelve, he allowed me to spend the night at his house every summer and winter vacation from school.

It would still be dark when I woke up and wrapped almost five kilos of bells around my ankles. I did my *pranām*, touched my *guruji's* feet and began my practice. I would dance from four until seven A.M. *Guruji* would have me start with a slow *tātkar* ... creating a continuous series of clearly defined slaps on the floor. Soon the pace would increase, and increase again, and continue for over an hour until I felt nearly consumed by the sounds of the bells. As the sky grew pale light, I would begin to dance compositions of various types, with fast turns and crisp stances. I would have to recite compositions without sounding out of breath. If I showed any signs of breathlessness I would be severely reprimanded. I danced on a polished concrete floor in a space approximately five feet square. Losing balance or accidentally touching anything was absolutely forbidden. In this way I learned to be constantly aware, developing the span, focus, and intensity of my attention (1986: 28).

As is typical of the guru-shishya style of teaching, his training also extended outside of the formal classroom context:

I had to be able to respond instantly to any demand. I remember times in the *bāṅjī* quarters in front of gatherings of other gurus and *ustāds*, my *guruji* would tell me to dance. There was no previous warning, no opportunity to warm up. It was a test of spontaneity, and a time for him to measure the speed of my thoughts against the speed of my movements. If I could not remember or present a composition with ease and accuracy, I would receive a stern verbal rebuke (*ibid.*).

Certain aspects of the training described by Pandit Mishra's students are continued in Pandit Das' teaching today, particularly the imperatives not to sit down, talk, or drink water during class, and the possibility of being asked to perform at a moment's notice; however, this intensive training was difficult to implement in the West. Moreover, teaching students with very different expectations of the learning environment and who looked and moved differently than students in India both frustrated Pandit Das' and called upon his creativity.

## Teaching the 'blondes and brunettes'

Pandit Das' American career began in 1970 when he won a Whitney Fellowship to teach kathak and study modern dance at the University of Maryland. After a year in residence at the university, he moved to the San Francisco Bay Area to teach at the Ali Akbar College of

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<sup>10</sup> The suffix *-ji* is sometimes appended to names or titles as an indication of respect.

Music in San Rafael, just north of San Francisco. By 1979, he had left the college faculty to form his own dance school called Chhandam and his Chitresh Das Dance Company was incorporated in 1980.<sup>11</sup> During this phase of Pandit Das' American teaching career, his students were, as he called them, all 'blondes and brunettes.' During the early years of his teaching, Pandit Das found that his American students were not expecting or looking for the kind of discipline that accompanied his own training:

This was the beautiful age of the flower children – the hippy [sic] generation. Their search for life's meaning was a mellowing experience. I was trying to reinforce an achievement-oriented discipline. The concept, which at that time had lost its popularity [sic]. A path to mutual understanding was going to be rough. At times, the obstacles seemed insurmountable. They were looking toward the East for answers, but I did not fit their idealised image of an Indian guru. I would tell them to be quiet, dance hard, and show respect – just as my guru and gurus before him had told their disciples ... Caught between two cultures, I had some difficulty with the informal lifestyle and egalitarian classroom banter that American students were accustomed to. Having been schooled in the old world traditions – to respect and obey my teachers and elders, and to assume a secondary stance in their presence – my amused bewilderment at my student's behavior never ceased. Daily they would appear with bare feet, men with long hair, women adorned with garlands of flowers in their hair, and bearing the names of Hindu goddesses and nature. My caustic objections aside, I was going through a tremendous learning process to understand the psychology of these young Americans (Das 1986: 32).

Despite the tensions created by this clash of cultures, Pandit Das retained the strict training methods he and other students experienced with his guru. However, he modified the dance style he taught in order to counter possible outside criticism of these white American students. Pandit Das stressed footwork accompanied by an angularity in the upper body; he felt that the strength and speed he was so drawn to in the dance would also serve as objective standards by which his non-Indian students might be favourably assessed. Later, the angular 'drill-drill-drill' pedagogical style he implemented in the first phase of his American teaching career shifted to one that incorporated greater musicality, variety, and flow (*ibid.*). But one element that remained consistent was his emphasis on proper training in the physicality of the dance, grounded in footwork exercises that began in the very first classes.

## Teaching Indians 'in the land of the immigrants'

Footwork is strong in this school of kathak in comparison to others in part because of Pandit Das' artistic preferences; he became known in the kathak world for his own

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<sup>11</sup> This school is now purportedly the largest classical institution of Indian classical dance in North America, with five branches in the San Francisco Bay Area, affiliate branches in Boston, and Los Angeles, and internationally in Canada, India and Japan.

exceptionally fast and complex footwork. This emphasis also was encouraged in his early experiences teaching non-Indians, for whom footwork speed served as an objective mark of their dance skill. An increased emphasis on the softer, more subjective aspects of the dance form coincided with and was influenced by the addition of South Asian and South Asian American students, who joined his classes in increasing numbers beginning in the late 1980s. At this time, several personal and professional changes encouraged a shift in Pandit Das' teaching towards the 'softer aspect of grace and expression' (Ghosh 1981: 6). Following the end of his marriage to Julia (Maxwell) Das, who had been with him since before his coming to the United States, he refrained from travelling to India for a period of approximately six years. Pandit Das describes this period as one of intense personal reflection. Grants for the arts were becoming scarcer and the South Asian population in the Bay Area was growing dramatically. Pandit Das recalled seeking counsel from modern dancer Murray Louis, who had helped him twenty years earlier in India and when he first arrived in America. '[Louis] said, "I cannot help you now. My best advice is to go to your Indian community; they are the ones who will support you"' (Das 2006).

Taking Louis' advice, Pandit Das shifted his attention from the dance company to his Chhandam School, and began teaching classes in the South Bay. Anticipating the changing demographics of his school and dance company, he observed that, along with his first students, the 'serious group of Pioneers who are helping preserve our Art form in America... a new generation of Indians is coming forth with their children to establish their heritage in the land of the immigrants' (Das 1988). The very next year, he officially opened a branch of his Chhandam School in Fremont, CA to serve the South Bay's growing South Asian community.

This demographic shift was reflected in Pandit Das' teaching and repertoire most clearly in the positioning of his students' upper bodies, which went through noticeable transitions. During this phase, his style softened dramatically, resulting in different hand positions (*hastaks*), upper body movements and repertoire. The very rigid, angular style that characterised the first fifteen years of his teaching gave way to rounder, smoother movements, sometimes gradually, sometimes with seeming abruptness as in the case of *hastaks*.

## **Changes upper body positions**

The course I teach on Indian dance includes reading, analysis of performance (both live and on video), and lessons in kathak. Initial dance lessons introduce students to basic footwork patterns and four *hastaks*. At first, students find these four hand positions difficult to produce and awkward to maintain and I stop often to prevent their hands from cramping. In later classes, they hold these hand positions while simultaneously producing footwork, turns and broader gestures with their arms. I teach these positions through a combination of verbal cues, demonstration, and individual correction when necessary. Like Pandit Das' current dancers, my students most often use what is called 'second *hastak*.' Although I give little other explanation of these hand positions, a change from the primary use of first *hastak* to second *hastak* is representative of a shift in Pandit Das' style that took place in the late 1980s as more students of South Asian origin joined his classes.

As in my own university classes, hastaks are now taught to students of Pandit Das' school in a fairly standardised way in which beginning students learn a choreographed flow, transitioning through several positions. However, when asked about his own training in hastaks, Pandit Das responded, 'my *guruji* never showed us; he would just say, "*hā(n), aise karo*"' (Hindi: 'yes, do it like this') (2006). Similarly, Pandit Das' early students were given little direct instruction. 'We used to just look at his hands and wonder how we could make ours do those same beautiful movements' (Dancer 1, 2003). Until the late 1980s, the most basic position used – the one to which dancers most commonly returned – was the first hastak. In this position, the hands are placed in front of the chest with palms down and elbows out. The top of each hand should be flat and the 'pointer finger' is bent at the largest knuckle and slightly at the smaller knuckle so that it touches the thumb (see Figure 1). In comparison to the angularity and rigidity of the first hastak, the second hastak is relaxed and delicate; the pointer finger, bent sharply in the first hastak, is eased into a gentle curve with the rest of the fingers fanning out behind (see Figure 2). A senior disciple describes the shock of this transition:

The first hastak that he hardly uses now: he did not change from that until the late '80s. To me it was all of a sudden that he was using all second hastak. ... [First hastak] had been in place for so long... let's say more than 15 or 17 years, and suddenly we had to change to this second hastak. We wondered why for all those years we had to do first hastak with elbows up, and suddenly he softened everything and used second hastak? We thought, 'Well, why did we have to go through that angularity?' (ibid.).

The shift from the first hastak to the second hastak symbolised a more profound transition from the style of teaching very rigid movements and stances to a softer more graceful style. In keeping with this newer style, when holding hands in front of the chest, dancers' elbows were slightly lowered, but not nearly so dropped as is taught in other styles of the dance.



Figure 1: First hastak (photo by Ron Clarke)



Figure 2: *Second hastak* (photo by Ron Clarke)

While the use of defined hastaks help to maintain uniformity across Pandit Das' school, he still rejects a certain level of exactness, preferring to let each movement fit the individual dancer's body. In this way, he feels he is remaining true to his guru, who taught according to what looked good for a particular student's form and way of moving. Despite Pandit Das' emphasis on the individual, certain other general trends in style can be traced through the years.

A posture in which the stylistic shift from angularity to softness becomes particularly clear is the final pose for Jaipur-style *chakkars*, or swift turns. Each Jaipur-style turn is generally completed using several rapidly placed steps (in contrast to Lucknow-style swift turns, in which the dancer spins on the heel). At the outset of the turn, the forearms draw close together just below the level of the eyes with the palms facing the dancer and they push away from the dancer's body at the end of the turn. The final pose of the Jaipur chakkar has gone through a series of changes. As shown in Figure 3, this position was initially rather rigid and angular. The arms were held out parallel to the ground with straight arms, and the hands were held at right angles, also parallel to the ground.



*Figure 3: Final arm position for Jaipur-style turns, first phase*

Later, the arms were softened and the elbows became slightly bent. The arms turned in from the shoulder, so that wrists were held diagonally rather than perpendicular to the floor, creating some depth to the arm position (see Figure 4).



*Figure 4: Final arm position for Jaipur-style turns, second phase*

In both of these styles, the dancer ended the turn facing the audience directly. More recent changes, however, have lent a greater three-dimensionality to the body. As seen in Figure 5, the arms and chest no longer face the viewer straight on. The torso is turned slightly to the left, moving the right shoulder forward and the left shoulder back. The head is cocked to the right side and the chest is lifted slightly, adding more depth to the pose.



Figure 5: The final position of a Jaipur-style turn (drawing by Esther Clinton)

In these newer Jaipur-style chakkars, a tilt of chest and head to the side might also appear in the final pose, as demonstrated in Figure 5. In addition, the arms are also no longer always perfectly horizontal to the floor; instead, the right hand drops and the left is raised slightly to create an angle moving upwards from front to back.

Another general shift in performance style involved the relationship of dance compositions to the way they are expressed by the body. In kathak, compositions are retained and expressed using verbalised syllables known as *bols* (from Hindi *bolnā*, to speak). As Pandit Das' style developed, less emphasis was placed on precisely replicating the spoken bols of a composition through footwork. One dance student from that era reminisced, 'Everything that we recited came out of our feet, whereas now they're doing more arm [movements]' (Dancer 2, 2005).<sup>12</sup> In this shift, rhythm produced by the feet became relatively less important, and greater emphasis was placed on movements of the upper body.

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<sup>12</sup> According to two former students, Pandit Das' attitude has shifted towards the style of dance involving more arm movement, which he earlier characterised disparagingly as 'spinning cobwebs' or 'snacky dancing' – dance that is unsubstantial rather than rich and satisfying like a full meal (Dancers 2 and 3, 2005).

## Contemporary challenges to the guru-shishya paradigm

As these examples suggest, subtleties of movement are modified over time, but the thread of tradition is based on a close relationship between teacher and disciple. This intense, longstanding relationship is vital for developing as a competent solo performer in an art form based on *upaj*, or spontaneity. Like other highly improvisational forms, such as jazz, there is an imperative to find one's own voice while remaining true to the tradition (Jackson 2000: 35). In the traditional kathak solo endorsed by Pandit Das as the most difficult and traditional form of kathak performance, one must interact in a spontaneous manner with a battery of accompanying musicians for two to three hours. Developing into a dancer capable of performing in such a manner requires not only a close teacher-student relationship, but also a pedagogical process in which the teacher responds to and corrects the student's attempts in forging a personal style.<sup>13</sup>

The guru-shishya relationship has been challenged both by the process of institutionalization, which began at the time of Indian independence, and by increased mobility, as gurus tour internationally and their students (or their parents) follow opportunities to new cities and countries. It is becoming more common and socially acceptable for dancers to train with multiple gurus and even for some of the most highly respected artists to teach workshops to large groups that meet only for a short intense period where very little personal relationship is created between teacher and student.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the trend in kathak performance has shifted from solo performance to the production of large-scale choreographic works for which dancers need far less training and function in a 'ballet de corps' in which synchronicity of movement is privileged over individual style.

## Conclusion

Dance scholars are particularly challenged in tracing historical changes to the details and quality of dance movement due to the shortcomings of dance notation or description and the relatively recent development of video technology. In the kathak tradition, we see that the dance has been profoundly shaped by historical change as well as individual and socio-cultural factors, which have shaped stylistic development and pedagogical practices. For Pandit Ram Narayan Mishra (1911–1972), what was taught was contingent upon students' body types and ways of moving, and more fundamentally, was determined by each student's sex and social status. Over forty years of teaching in the United States, Pandit Das' style of kathak also changed in accordance with the shifting demographic makeup of his student population. As a new generation of Pandit Das' students leave the San Francisco Bay Area to begin teaching careers in cities as diverse as Los Angeles, CA, Tokyo, Japan, and Mumbai, India, they will face the same challenges of responding to changing student populations and attitudes toward the dance while developing and teaching kathak to future generations.

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<sup>13</sup> The process by which a dancer develops the ability to dance in an *upaj* fashion is discussed at length in Morelli 2007, chapter 6.

<sup>14</sup> This tendency for students to study with more than one teacher is discouraged in Pandit Das' school, where school policy dissuades those who have significant training in another style from joining classes.

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## POVZETEK

Kathak, klasični ples iz severne Indije, ki ga zaznamujejo ritmično prefinjeno delo z nogami, hitri obrati in pripovedovanje zgodb, se je tradicionalno prenašal z učitelja na učenca prek tesnega odnosa, znanega kot *guru-shishya parampara* (učitelj-učenec tradicija). Pričujoči članek proučuje spremembe v poučevanju in tehnikah plesa v treh generacijah *gurus* in *shishyas* v eni izmed *gharānā* (stilističnih šol) za kathak. Tako kultura vadbe plesa kot sam plesni material, so se prilagajali spreminjajočim se družbeno-zgodovinskim realnostim, od padca kulture kurtizan in naraščajočega gibanja za neodvisnost v severni Indiji v začetku 20. stoletja do transplantacije plesa v Severno Ameriko v zadnjem delu 20. stoletja. Ta poglobljena študija enega roda plesa osvetljuje vplive zgodovinskih okoliščin in individualnih nagnenj na stilistični razvoj kathak plesa. Avorica dokazuje, da so bili celo osnovni elementi tega stila kathaka spremenjeni; še več, ta prožnost je bila celo vitalni del poučevanja te solo performativne tradicije vsaj od sredine 20. stoletja naprej.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: kathak, ples, Indija, prilagajanje, pedagogika

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