

Major Exponents of Kathak from the Early Times to Mid - 20th C. : An Overview

- M. Nagabhushana Sarma

The word “gharana” comes from the word “ghar” “house” – and the word “gharana” would mean anything that belongs to a household and its traditions, and by extension, would denote the tradition of an art which continues, uninterrupted, from father to son, and in a more symbolic way, from the guru to the shishya. Indian art forms owe much of their sustenance and continuity to this “home-spun” finery. Thus “gharana” indicates a family tradition; it also means a strong teacher-student continuum, where the special qualities of art are avowedly safeguarded and protected. Until the urban and non-familial discipleship homogenized art practices, “gharana” has a strict identity and a distinctly recognizable speciality. This is more so in the forms where dance and music training have long been jealously guarded by families of practitioners and indulgently supervised by the local Rajahs, Jamindars and Nawabs and the rich land lords. Thus, over years, “gharanas” speak of long-drawn out individuation attempts successfully signifying the special strength and genius of succeeding generations of masters. It is interesting to note that a “ganda bandh” ritual is as much to establish a bond between the teacher and the taught as it is a symbol of taking a ‘son’ into a family whose pious duty is to protect the rules of behaviour of the family and also to be creatively instrumental in furthering the “style” of the “gharana” to the next generation. Thus “style” is not merely “man”, but “style” is “family tradition” and all the values it cherishes.

The history of Kathak has always been seen as the history of its famous gharanas: viz the Jaipur gharana, the Lucknow gharana, the Benares gharana and the Raigarh gharana. The Benares gharana is also known as the Janaki Prasad gharana, named after its most influential progenitor, Pt. Janaki Prasad. Sometimes, it is possible that other independent “styles” can become vital when either a teacher or a

disciple attains fame and is a force to reckon with in a particular era and he or she would see that the practices followed by them are so special and varied from the others that it deserves to be called a separate gharana. But a mere special identification cannot be construed as a gharana; at best it is a *bani* or a branch of a major gharana. One example that can be mentioned is that of Sukhdev gharana seen by the followers as a separate gharana, but, in the larger context, can be considered as a branch of the Benares gharana. But the first mentioned four gharanas have developed as separate centres of distinctly different Kathak practices, though the basic patterns used in performance are the same.

The Jaipur Gharana

The Jaipur tradition, considered to be the most ancient seems to have a hazy past, since in its early days of practice it was mostly nourished in the precincts of the royal households or in the closed-door amusement arenas of jagirdars and, in fact, was not limited only to Jaipur. Its pervasive practice indicates that the tradition was spread all over Rajasthan.

Eversince rulers of kingdoms and principalities in Rajasthan embraced vaishnavism when, during the continuous attacks by Muslim invaders, divine images of Sri Govindji, Srinathji and Chaturbhujnathji and other gods from Brindavan were installed in Jaipur, Nathdwara and Kakaroli and along with the gods came the retinue and the traditions of singing and dancing. When Krishna bhakti had spread over the common people, the poets and singers happily sang in praise of Lord Krishna and soon Kathak nritya, as a visual expression of a sringara - based religious avocation followed and flourished. Though textual references of Kathak are found since 11th c., its popularity and wide practice can be deduced from the *Hastak Muktavali*, written in 1673 during the reign of Rajah Ram Singh. Several Maharajahs including Savai Pratap Singh, Savai Ram Singh, Savai Madho Singh and many others were great patrons of the art of Kathak and its accompanying arts of pakhawaj and taala playing.

According to available sources, the Jaipur gharana is said to have started with one Bhanuji who taught the art to his son Maluji and, who in turn, taught it to his two sons Lajuji and Kanhuji. The last mentioned performer who was adept in the hierarchical dance of Shiv-tandav, travelled all the way to Brindavan and learnt the lasya tradition and taught his two sons Geedhaji and Sohaj ji both tandava and lasya traditions. Out of the five sons of Geedhaji, one son named Dulhaji, who was also called Girdhariji, came back to Jaipur. His two sons were Hari Prasad and Hanuman Prasad, who are the first known dancer-duo and the presentday tradition of Jaipur gharana owes its reputation and recognition from these two brothers.

1. Shri Hari Prasad and Hanuman Prasad

Sons of Giridhariji, both Hari Prasad and Hanuman Prasad had their initial training under their father and later under Dhannalaji. Known as the first duo in Kathak, they were also adept in music. Often called “Devpari Ki Jodi”, the duo served as the court dancers of the Jaipur darbar. While Hanuman Prasadji was known for his ‘lasya pradarsan,’ Hari Prasadji excelled in ‘akash chari’ as well as in scintillating spins.

Hanuman Prasadji was said to be highly devotional and never missed to perform during the Holi or ‘Phagotsav’ festival at the local temple of Govindji. Local legends are abound with stories of his devout singing and dancing abilities that, on one occasion when he arrived late at the temple, and the doors were closed, he pined for the Lord’s *darshan* standing outside the temple and started dancing and singing and the doors of the holy place opened on their own!

Hari Prasadji had no children. Hanuman Prasadji was blessed with three children – Mohan Lal, Chiranji Lal and Narayana Prasad, all of them devoting their entire lives in performing and teaching Kathak. Among the three sons, Mohan Lal, after having his initial training under his father, went away to Lucknow where he became a disciple of Binda Din Maharaj. When he returned to Jaipur, he was appointed as a dancer in the royal darbar. He also stayed at many places like Mumbai and Delhi and later served the Kairagarh “Indira Kala Sangeet Viswa Vidyalay” as a Kathak teacher.

Chiranji Lal, in his turn, had his training from his father and later, like his brother, went to Lucknow and became a disciple of Binda Din Maharaj. After serving at

Udaipur, Raigarh and other places, he settled down as a Kathak teacher at Delhi's Gandharv Mahavidyalay.

Both Mohan Lal and Chiranji Lal had, in their repertoire, a large number of the Jaipur gharana's specialized items of nritta patterns, which they inherited from Hari Prasadji and Hanuman Prasadji.

2. Shri Narayan Prasad

Born in 1908 to Hanuman Prasadji, Narayan Prasad started his dance learning from his father at the age of 8 and gave his public performance at the age of 17 and was regarded as a 'composite' and perfect Kathak master as he combined in his dance not only the nritta patterns of highly complex movement structures, but also enriched his meritorious dancing ability with equal mastery over singing and tabla-playing. Seeing his virtuosity in all the branches of Kathak presentation, Raja Chakradha Singh of Raigarh honoured him as his court dancer. Adept in tala and laya, Narayan Prasad is said to have mesmerized his audiences and extensively toured several independent states of Western India such as Baroda, Rampur, Jaipur, Kanpur and Ajmer and performed in crowded royal courts and was greatly honoured.

Narayana Prasad was hailed for his mastery over both 'bhava paksh' and 'kala paksh' in his recitals, in which the layakari, abinay and the poetic grace have all found a synthesis. He was honoured with the title "Nrityacharya" by the Akhil Bharateeya Gandharv Mahavidyalay in 1975. He was also a popular teacher imparting training to several laterday masters such as Kundanlalji, Chamma Khan, Upendra, Teerth Ram Azad, Babulal Patni, Pushpa Brata, Sakuntala Jain, Rani Karnaa (after the demise of Chiranji Lal), Rita Bhandari and several others.

Narayan Prasad had two sons – Charan Giridhar 'Chand' and Tej Prakash 'Tulsi' – both of them having been trained by his father. While the former, with his authority on 'layakari' mesmerized his audience with a single foot pirouettes, his brother "Tulsi" became a master of tabla, playing on it the intricate rhythms with grace and ease. Charan Giridhar 'Chand' imparted training in Kathak at several places including Jodhpur, Delhi, Alwar, etc., and 'Tulasi,' an able practitioner of the art form,

especially in presenting parana-s and complicated tala patterns, was not only famous in India but abroad as well. Both of them kept their art in the strict parameters of the tradition; in vigour, vivacity and a rare ingenuity possible only to the most creative.

3. Shri Jailal and Shri Ram Gopal

Jailalji, born in 1885, inherited the best of the tradition of Kathak, from his father Chunnilalji and his grandfather Giridharlalji. Jailalji spent his active years in the court of Jaipur and later of Jodhpur, Sikar, Raigarh and Mehar. For sometime he was in Nepal also. He died in 1949 at Kolkata.

Jailalji's son Ram Gopal and daughter Jai Kumari established themselves as major dancers during the early quarter of the 20th c.

Having mastered the nuances of Kathak and tabla playing, Ram Gopalji was the first to learn other forms of Indian classical dances. He learnt Kathakali from Guru Kunj Kurup and Bharatanatyam from Guru Meenakshisundaram Pillai, as well as from Ellappa and Gauri Amma. He was always a welcome attraction in national conventions of dance and was duly honoured for his expertise. He taught music in Mumbai and Chennai and taught Kathak at Vani Vidya Veedhi in Kolkata and was associated with Kala Vikas Kendra, Cuttuk. He also started a Kathak teaching centre in London and helped the propagation of Kathak outside India. In India he started an institution, "Ram Gopal Arts and Culture Centre" in which Bharatanatyam and Kathakali were taught, besides Kathak. Unfortunately, he passed away in 1979 and all his ambitious efforts had come to a stop. Some of his choreographed items like "Dharani Nritya," "Shiv-Tandav," "Sandhya Nritya," "Indra and Sachi," "Rajput" and "Prardhana" and "Godhuli Vela" are justly famous.

Jailalji's only daughter Jaikumari has also earned a name as a Kathak exponent of high merit.

4. Shri Sundar Prasad

Younger brother of Jailalji, Sundar Prasadji had his early training from his father Chunni Lalji and brother Jailalji. Early in his life he was taken by Binda Din Maharaj under his protection. As such, he became adept both in Jaipur gharana and Lucknow gharana and became identified as the custodian of a synthesis of both the

styles of Kathak. He toured extensively both in India and abroad giving recitals and lec-dems. He moved to Mumbai and then to Chennai and later to Delhi teaching Kathak.

Among his disciples are Poovaiah sisters, Menaka, Mohan Rao Kalyanpurkar and film dance directors Sohanlal and Hiralal, Roshan Kumari, Uma Sharma, Rani Karnaa, Urmila Nagar, etc. After a long and successful career as a dancer and teacher, Sundar Prasadji breathed his last in 1970.

5. Pandit Gauri Shankar

Born in 1918, Pt. Gauri Shankar had his initial training under his father Devilalji and his uncle Shivilalji. For sometime he had also undergone special training from Pt. Sundar Prasad. He started giving prestigious public performances at a young age – at the age of 16. He spent sometime in Gurudev's Santiniketan. He joined Ms. Menaka and toured extensively in Europe and when the team performed at the International Dance Olympiad in 1938 held at Berlin, Gauri Shankarji was adjudged the best dancer. He also took a whirlwind tour throughout India to perform and acquaint people about Kathak. He started his own institution – “Pracheen Nritya Niketan” – in Mumbai and trained scores of young men and women. Pandit Gauri Shankar choreographed a few ballets also among which “Gautam Buddha”, “Ramayan”, “Draupadi Vastra-Haranam” and “Sankuntala” are notable. He also served as a dance director to some Hindi films.

Noteworthy among his disciples include Sundarlal Gangani, Rameshwar Lal Gangani, Damayanti Joshi, Sheila Irani, Menaka Desai, Sadhana Bose and others.

6. Shri Kundanlal Gangani

One of the foremost practitioners of mid – 20th c. Kathak is Kundanlalji Gangani, whose early discipleship under his uncle Narayan Prasadji took him to Raigarh, following his guru, to continue his training. After several years of rigorous training, practice and performances all over Northern India, Kundanlalji stayed at Mumbai and trained several film personalities in Kathak. He joined the Baroda University as a staff member in 1953 and continued there for a few years. He later became a Guru at the Kathak Kendra, New Delhi. Among his several prominent disciples, mention must be made of Prerana Srimali and his own son, Rajendra Gangani.

7. Shri Sundarlal Gangani

Hailing from a family of musicians – both vocal and instrumental – Sundarlalji Gangani learnt music and tabla-vadan from his father Sathyanarayanji and sarangi from his grandfather. He had his training in Kathak from a number of well-known Kathak maestros of the time – Shivanarayanji, Jagannath Prasadji, Sundar Prasadji and Gaurishankarji. An accomplished dancer, singer and performer, Sundarlalji's art showed a perfect blend of the angik and sattvik elements of Kathak. He was also an established teacher and penned a number of Kavit-s and toda-s. Since 1951 he taught at Baroda and trained several notable dancers.

8. Smt. Roshan Kumari

A well-known figure in the dance circle of the entire country during mid 20th c., Roshan Kumari is known for her agility, technique and her musical mastery. Born into a musical family to Jahara Jan, a well known accompanying singer for Kathak recitals and to tabla-player Fakir Ahmed, Roshanji started learning music from her fourth year. Trained in Kathak of the Jaipur gharana by Pt. Sundar Prasad and in Bharatanatyam by Govindaraja Pillai at the Raja Rajeswari School in Mumbai, Roshan Kumari became a dance director in films like “Jansi Ki Rani, Mirza Ghalib, Waris, Parineetha, Basantha Bahar,” etc. She toured with her team in Afganisthan under a Government of India Cultural Exchange Programme. She was honoured by several institutions for her innovative ballets including “Abhisarika” written by Rabindranath Tagore.

9. Smt. Rohini Bhate

A prominent contemporary dancer and choreographer of eminence, Smt. Rohini Bhate who passed away recently had carved a niche for herself.

A detailed essay on her work is published separately in this volume.

10. Pt. Durgalal

With his charming personality, perfect technique and extremely communicative abhinaya, Pt. Durgalal is a cynosure to audiences' eyes wherever he performed. Having his initial training from his father Pt. Omkarlal, he also underwent rigorous training under the tutelage of Pt. Devilal and Pt. Sundar Prasad. He was also an able singer

and perfect tabla player. With his multi-talented genius in the art and his pleasing personality and stage presence, Pt. Durgalal stole the show whenever he performed. He was with the Kathak Kendra, New Delhi until early death snatched away a great performer from our midst. Notable among his disciples are Smt. Uma Sharma and Shri Jayanth Kastuar, presently the secretary of the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi. A separate essay on Pt. Durgalal is published in this issue.

Many notable artists are presently active in the field and are continuing the traditions of their gharana. Among prominent contemporary practitioners of the art belonging to Jaipur gharana, whose work has frequently been reviewed in *Nartanam*, mention must be made of Rita Bhandari, Teertham Azad, Kanhailal, Babulal Patni, Dr. Puru Dadheech, Urmila Nagar, Shashi Sankhla, Prerana Shrimali, Jagdish Gangani and Rajendra Gangani. All these talented dancers work hard to keep the flag of the gharana afloat with a strong tradition as their firm ground and innovations of a high order revealing their ingenuity.

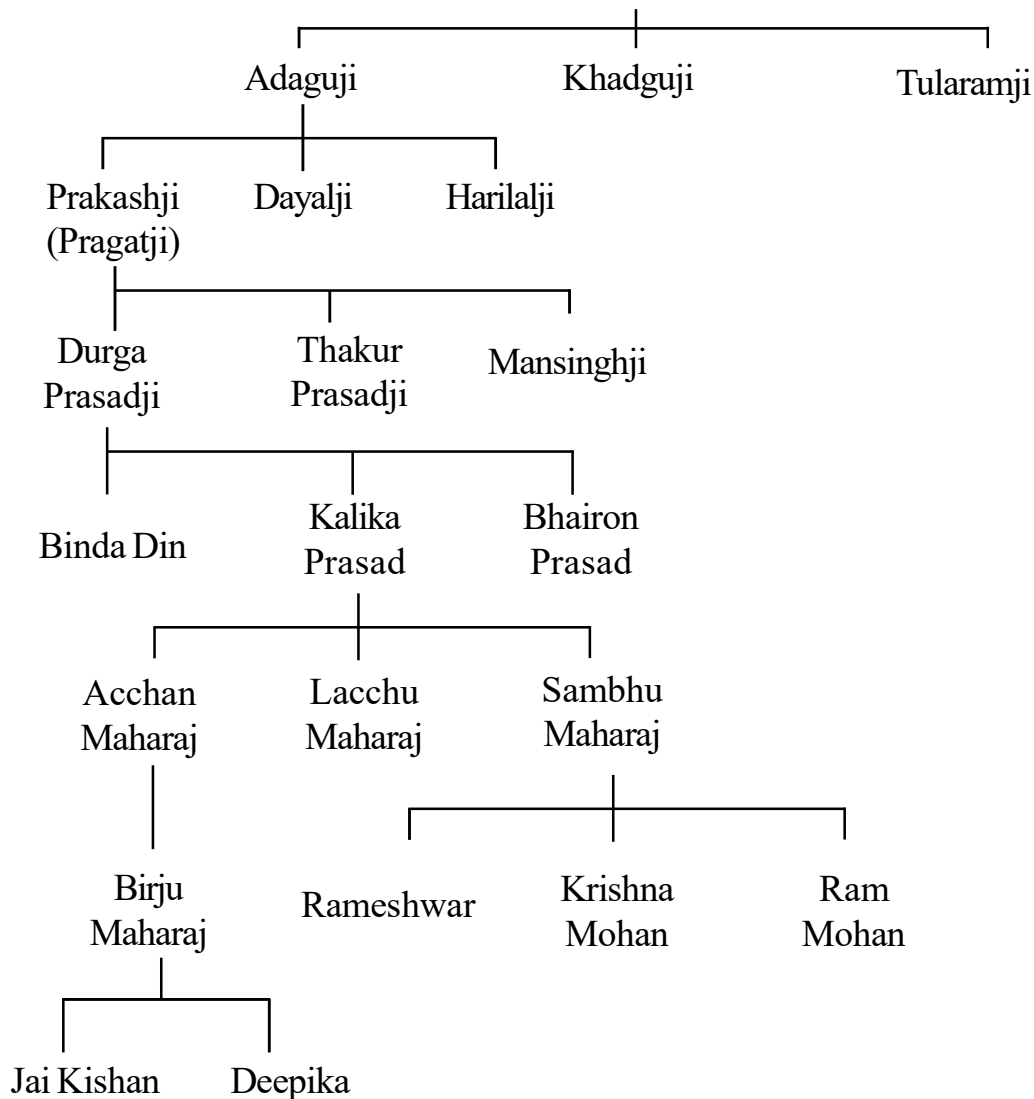
Lucknow Gharana

Lucknow gharana of Kathak, to say the least, is a prominent and fertile gharana which sustained the importance and popularity of the dance form. A long line of notable maestros, generation after generation, enriched it with their hard work, with profound respect for the gharana, and yet, with innovations and creativity that alone can further the growth of the art form. It is imperative to note that right from the days of Kalka Prasad and Binda-Din until today, with Pt. Birju Maharaj holding fort, the gharana has a long and unbroken line of excellence. These masters have brought into Kathak new and scintillating variations of foot work, pirouettes and meaningful *angika* with a strong emphasis on the *bhav paksh*.

The origins of this gharana owe much to the dance and music loving patronage of the Nawabs of Oudh. The unstinting support Nawab Wajid Ali Shah had extended to this art form consolidated it and the extremely sensitive aesthetic responses of the

courtiers affirmed its ability to please spectators of varying sensibilities. It is often said, in the circles of Kathak connoisseurs, that the Kathak tree had its initial blossoming in Jaipur and got implanted firmly in the Lucknow soil, where it flourished and grew into a ‘maha vriksh’. Though scholars differ on the origins of Lucknow gharana – whether the style has been a transported one from Jaipur or it is native born – this much can be said that this branch has evolved for itself an identity of content, form and technique, even from the early days of known history and that is enough to recognise the originality and strength of a style that bespeaks its present-day popularity. The genealogy of the Lucknow gharana shows the relationships clearly :

ISHWARI PRASAD



The Lucknow tradition seems to have its origins during the reign of Shuja-ud-daula and Asaf-ud-daula, when “Sushi Maharaj” was said to be renowned teacher. During the reigns of successive Nawabs – Saadat Ali Khan, Ghasiuddin Hyder and Nasiruddin Hyder, Hilalji, Prakashji and Dayaluji were noted dancers. From the days of Muhammad Ali Shah to those of Wajid Ali Shah, the sons of Prakashji – Durga Prasadji and Thakur Prasadji were prominent dancers. Durga Prasadji was Wajid Ali Shah’s guru in Kathak. After the two brothers, Durga Prasadji’s sons – Kalka Prasad and Binda Din - became leaders of Kathak. Since their days the Lucknow gharana earned a very respectable history.

The Lucknow gharana is known for its graceful sensuousness, lyrical beauty and expressive beauty. It is strong in its *bhav paksh*, especially through the short lyrical pieces called *thumri-s*, denoted with each *bol* properly nuanced, giving greater emphasis to ‘abhivyakti’ of the sub-textual meanings, often varied, providing an intellectual delight derived from the *dhwani*, *vyangya* and the richness of alankaras of the text.

Known for its ‘natvari nritya,’ largely singing and dancing in praise of Radha-Krishna Leela-s, a significant emphasis of the tradition continuing from the days of its early exponent, originator, Ishwari Prasad, the Lucknow gharana is graceful, delicate and emotive. Into this gharana were born many a noteworthy dancer, their work deserving an appreciation, and that of a few others demanding our reverence.

1. Shri Thakur Prasad

A son of Baba Pragasji (or Prakashji), who came to Lucknow (presumably from Allahabad) when Asaf Ud-daula, was the ruler. Thakur Prasad, was one of the earliest exponents of the art form. He was in the court of Nawad Wajid Ali Shah and, was in a way responsible for the Nawab’s keen interest in Kathak and the Nawab considered him as his guru. Thakur Prasad was given an equal status in the royal durbar as that of the Nawab himself.

Thakur Prasad called the style “Kathak-Natwari Nritya.” He taught the art to his nephew and the later-day custodian of Kathak, Binda Din Maharaj.

2. Shri Kalka Prasad

Kalka Prasad, Durga Prasad’s son, was always talked about in the same breath as Binda Din, his brother, for, both of them together firmly established the supremacy of Kathak in general and the Lucknow gharana in particular by their own expressive performances and by grooming several future masters of Kathak.

Kalka Prasad moved on to Benares, where he taught several devadasis the arts of tumri singing and emotive expression through *satvika*.

3. Shri Binda Din Maharaj

Known as a master-performer, Binda Din was trained in Kathak by his father, Durga Prasadji, said to be an expert in layakari and his uncle Thakur Prasad. By his twelfth year, he became so adept in nritya that he performed with the then pakhawaj master, Kudvu singh accompanying him in the court of Wajid Ali Shah and received applause.

Binda Din’s name had soon spread far and wide and invitations to perform in the courts abounded. He went to the courts of Bhopal and Nepal, where he was duly honoured. In spite of his close association with Muslim darbars, Binda Din remained a staunch vaishnavite and made Krishna lore central to his thumri-presentations. He is said to have penned about 1500 thumris and presented all of them before discriminating and elite audiences. Though he did not have any sons to carry his tradition, the three sons of his younger brother – Kalka Prasad - namely Acchan Maharaj, Lacchu Maharaj and Sambhu Maharaj – had kept the tradition and glory of Binda Din’s proficient qualities of performance.

4. Shri Acchan Majaraj

Elder son of Kalka Prasad, Jagannath Prasad alias Acchan Maharaj was born into a noted hierarchical tradition of Kathak and attained fame both as a notable performer and a revered teacher. He had his early training from his father and later from Binda Din Maharaj. He learnt the art so quickly and perfected it so soon that he was praised “accha!” (very good) by every one and so came to be known as “Acchan”

Maharaj! He was employed by several rulers to be their chief court dancer. They included the rulers of Raigarh, Nepal and Ranipur. He was unparalleled in the art during his time. An authority on laya and tala, Acchan Maharaj intentionally chose complex tala patterns and with his expert hasta-mudras and netra-abhinaya would give new meanings to the text each time he repeated the bol. This was said to be his major achievement as a performer. This was more pronouncedly appealing in his performance of Krishna-Radha sringara episodes and Acchan Maharaj used to do this with great aplomb. Besides the evocation of bhakti sringar, Acchanji was equally efficient in the expression of *veer*, *raudra* and *shanti rasa-s*.

Acchan Maharaj, after a fruitful life passed away in 1946, leaving his son, Birju Maharaj, to continue his tradition.

5. Shri Lacchu Maharaj

A renowned dancer, teacher, poet and noted dance director in films, Lacchu Maharaj was born in 1901. His name was Baidyanath Prasad. Since he was a prattler in his young days and enjoyed himself in making fun of people, he was called 'luccha' (a vagabond, an unwanted lad) and the approbation, in course of time, became 'lucchu' and then Lacchu. He learnt his dance under the able protection and supervision of his grandfather, Binda Din Maharaj. He visited several courts and principalities to give performances and wherever he performed he stole the show.

Lacchu Maharaj also excelled in choreographic work. He created dance-dramas on the stories of Daksha-Yagna and Arthanareeswar which earned him recognition. His other directorial works include Malati Madhav, Chandravali, Gokul Ki Gali, Amrapali, Gautam Buddha, Bapu ki amar kahani, etc. He gave importance to 'sattvik bhav,' which according to him is the soul of a performance and without which dance would be mere mechanical.

Lucchu Maharaj, besides writing and directing over 15 dance dramas, also wrote, like his mentor Binda Din, several ghazals, lori and kaviti-s and choreographed them himself and performed.

After teaching kathak for several years at Lucknow, Lacchu Maharaj moved to Kolkata and worked in the New Theatres for a while. He later served as a dance

director for films. He also worked with Madam Menaka. His dance numbers in films like “Gadda,” “Teesari Kasa,” “Mughal-e-Azam” and “Pakeeza” earned him wide recognition.

The Sangeet Natak Akademi honoured him with the Akademi award in 1957 and in 1958 he received the Rashtrapathi medal and in 1974 honoured by the Uttar Pradesh State Akademi. Lacchu Maharaj taught several later-day luminaries including Sitara Devi, Damayanthi Joshi, Rohini Bhate, Malavika Sarkar, Kum Kum Dhar and many others. He passed away in 1978.

6. Shri Sambhu Maharaj

An expert in all the areas of Kathak presentation, Sambhu Maharaj is a dancer par excellence, besides being a singer, a tabla and pakhawaj player and a celebrated harmonist. Sambhu Maharaj was trained both by his father Kalka Prasad and his father’s elder brother, Binda Din. When the latter died he came under the tutelage of Acchan Maharaj. The discipleship of all the ‘greats’ of the gharana enriched Sambhu da’s art. Having attained sufficient mastery over the art by the time he was 13, he was sent to Ustad Rahimuddin Khan to learn thumri singing.

Superb presentation of thumris and expressive potentialities rendered him the unparalleled monarch of Kathak of his times. In 1960 he attended the All India Dance Festival at Hyderabad. When he was requested to perform a poem on Radha-Krishna, he sat in the midst of the stage and started showing the variegated feelings of Radhaji in such a heart-throbbing emotional exuberance that after the one-hour long performance the whole auditorium stood in standing ovation. (And next morning he was at Pakhawaj, when he made his nephew, the little master – Birju Maharaj – hardly nine years then, danced with ease and superb grace to the intricate tala patterns that Sambhu da sang – a soul filling opportunity!) The innumerable ‘bol-s’ and ‘tukde’ were so pleasing to the ear that one would mistake him to be a singer first and dancer later. He was awarded ‘Padmasree’ by the Government of India in 1958. He was one of the earliest who was chosen an awardee first and, later, a ‘Fellow’ of the Sangeet Natak Akademi.

Sambhu Maharaj worked at the Bharatiya Kala Kendra, New Delhi for over 20 years. Then he joined the Kathak Kendra of the Akademi. He died at the age of 63 in 1970.

The renowned Kathak guru, Maya Rao, a disciple of Sambhu Maharaj, pays her tributes to him, published in this issue.

7. Shri Birju Maharaj

A contemporary giant in the field of Kathak, Shri Birju Maharaj excelled in all the branches of presentation. With his long career as a teacher producing more than 200 dancers of commendable standard, Birju Maharaj has been the fountainhead of the imaginative boldness that Kathak today is famous for.

A special issue of *Nartanam* (Vol.VII, No.2: April-July 2007) is devoted to Birju Maharaj's life and work and included articles of critical appraisal by his foremost disciples and admirers including Kumudini Lakhin, Sunil Kothari, Munna Shukla, Janaki Patrik, Anuradha Nag, Prabha Marathe and Saswati Sen.

8. Smt Madam Menaka

Leela Stoke in her real life, Madam Menaka was born in 1899 in a well-respected Brahmin family of Kolkata. Her father, Pyarelal Roy was a Zamindar of repute and a High Court Vakil. Leela (Menaka) had her early education in Darjeeling and later left for London to study at the famous St. Paul Girl's school. After two years of successful study, she chose to learn violin and continued her studies for two more years. She married Sahib Singh Stoke, who later became the Major General in the Medical Service of India.

Menaka learnt the rudiments of Kathak from Pt. Sitaram Mishra and later from Maharaj Vaidyanath Mishra and Rama Dutta Mishra. She also learnt Kathakali from Guru Karunakar Menon and Manipuri from Baba Kumar Singh. But Menaka's major contribution to Kathak is in her writing nritya-natikas and choreographing them. Writing dance dramas, choosing appropriate ragas and other musical score had been her most passionate calling and soon she became a known performer of dance-dramas. She even started an institution with expert musicians and dancers to undertake this onerous task of preparing nritya-natikas and performing them extensively both in

India and abroad.

When Menaka presented a dance recital in Mumbai in 1926, Anna Pavlova was in the audience and, after the performance, congratulated Menaka and asked her to continue her efforts in creating nritya-natikas based on Kathak and Kathakali techniques.

Menaka's troupe participated in the 1986 International Dance Olympiad at Berlin and bagged three coveted prizes. She successfully choreographed Dev-Vijay, Krishna Leela and Menaka Lasya successfully.

Menaka's Malavikagnimitra was considered a daring experiment since she judiciously used, besides Kathak, Kathakali and Manipuri styles wherever necessary and this synthesis of three of the important dance styles in a single dance-drama was new and impressive. She started a dance school 'Nrityalay' in Khandla in 1942 and some of the students like Sevanthi Rajeswar, Malathi Pandya, Sirin Vajifdar and others have later proved to be potential young dancers of merit.

Though the school could not function for long due to World War II, Menaka and her troupe continued to perform in India and abroad. She extensively toured in Europe. She also experimented with dance music in which she ably combined North Indian music with western music. Since she was exposed to western ballet tradition, Menakaji also brought in substantial changes in costume and make-up. Thus she modernized the presentation of Kathak.

Madam Menaka is a pioneer in Kathak dance in many ways : she brought in a sophistication in the presentation with appropriate costume, make-up and other technical innovations; she started choreographing ballets for the modern box stage, with careful entries and exits, scintillating stage movement and beautiful stage pictures. Finally she gave Kathak a dramatic style which was originally narrative in form and solo in its format.

9. Shri Mohan Rao Kalyanpurkar

Born in Bangalore in 1913, Mohan Raoji graduated in Science and only afterwards took to music and dance. He went to Mumbai to learn music from Ustad Mohammed Khan and was simultaneously trained in tabla by Ustad Ghulam Mohammed Khan. Since he was more attracted towards Kathak, he learnt the art

form, first from Sundar Prasad of the Jaipur gharana and later by Acchan Maharaj and Sambhu Maharaj of the Lucknow gharana, thereby trying to bring a synthesis of the two.

As a teacher Mohan Raoji started his career at Binda Din College of Kathak, Mumbai. In 1937 he joined the Binda Din School of Kathak in Lucknow. After a couple of years he went to the Maurice School of Hindusthani music and served there as the Head of the Dept. of Dance. Mohan Raoji wrote several kavit-s and 'tode' for Kathak. Among the several dance dramas choreographed by him are "Sakuntalam," "Malati Madhavam," "Vikramaorvaseeyam" and "Meghadutam."

In his long and fruitful career he trained several youngsters and gave a direction to their artistic careers. Swarnalata Syal and Yashodhara Katju gained recognition as dancers in Mumbai and had also worked in films. Mrudula, Uma Gupta and Poornima Pandey taught Kathak in colleges. Rohini Bhate started an institute of her own in Poona.

As he was associated with Kathak training programmes in schools and colleges, Mohan Raoji was often invited to chalk out and plan departments of Kathak all over the country. He received the Sangeet Natak Akademi award in 1962. He was also a recipient of the Karnataka State Akademi award. Mohan Raoji was also an able writer and his articles in *Marg* and other journals have earned him recognition as a scholar. He was also associated for a short time with the Kathak Kendra, New Delhi.

10. Smt. Damayanthi Joshi

Born into a traditional Maharashtrian family, Damayanthi came to learn Kathak by sheer love and insistence. A mimic of dancers since her childhood she was naturally attracted towards its beauty and elegance. When her father passed away at her young age, her mother took upon herself to steer her daughter's interest to safer shores. Confronting criticism from kith and kin, she admitted her daughter under the tutelage of Pt. Sitaram Prasad. Damayanthi later learnt the art from Madam Menaka and became an important member of her dance team touring often in India and abroad. Still later, in 1942, she became a disciple of Acchan, Lacchu and Sambu Maharaj-s

and thus mastered both Jaipur and Lucknow styles of Kathak. Damayanthi Joshi also learnt Kathakali, Bharatanatyam and Manipuri, the four dance styles that were by then recognised as classical dances.

Her tours abroad in China (1953) and Japan (1958) brought her into limelight and she was recognised as one of the foremost Kathak dancers of the country. Her most creditworthy work lies in her in-depth studies of the psychological states of the Nayikas of the Reeti Kaal. Having studiously gone into the poetic texts of the Reeti Kaal poets she gave innumerable performances and lectures on the subject all over the country.

She received the Sangeet Natak Akademi award in 1969 and Padmashree in 1970.

11. Smt. Kumudini Lakhia

One of the foremost Kathak dancers, Kumudini stands unique not only for her work as a solo dancer, but also as a choreographer of great imagination. She was associated with Birju Maharaj and Ram Gopal and toured extensively in India and abroad. A detailed appraisal of her work is published in this special issue.

12. Smt. Maya Rao

Soft spoken and strong willed, Mayaji has attained several 'firsts' in her long and fruitful career. She is the first South Indian woman who has mastered Kathak. She is the first to start a Kathak institute in the South in Bangalore. She is also the first who has imaginatively combined Kathak training and training in choreography, thereby facilitating the next generation dancers towards understanding both the technique of Kathak and its application in choreographic works.

Mayaji has kindly obliged *Nartanam* and has given an exhaustive interview on her work, which is published in this issue.

Several other prominent Kathak dancers and gurus of the Lucknow school who belonged to the contemporary era established themselves as significant performers. Since they are still continuing their work with an exceptional zeal, we hope they will live up to the honours Kathak holds for them. Among those that have already made a mark in the field, Anuradha Guha, Sirin Vajifder, Uma Sharma, Munna Shukla,

Shoana Narayan, Kum Kum Dhar, Saswati Sen, Ram Mohan and Vaswati Mishra and Jaya Kishan Maharaj have already attained a position of importance in the field of Indian dance and would surely contribute to the enrichment of this unique art form.

Benares or Janaki Prasad Gharana

It is often claimed by those adhering to Benares gharana that this gharana was the most ancient one and give local evidences to say that originally Kathak's only gharana was "Shyamlal gharana" (Sawal Das gharana) and this gharana had two styles and have come to be known as Jaipur gharana and Janaki Prasad gharana. While the Jaipur style has been prevalent in Rajasthan, the second branch flourished in Benares since Janaki Prasadji migrated from Bikaner and stayed in Benares and propagated the art there and hence his style has come to be known as Benares gharana.

Janaki Prasadji's disciples - Chunnilal and Dulha Ram (also known as Ganeshilal, who was Janaki Prasad's younger brother) were dancers of merit. While Chunnilal stayed behind in Rajasthan, Ganeshilal made Benares his home. Both of them spent their life time in teaching Kathak.

Dulha Raur had three sons – Biharilal, Puranlal and Heeralal. Biharilal, after travelling far and wide giving performances, finally settled as a court dancer at Indore. He was said to be a master of laya and could dance in 74 talas.

Biharilal had three sons – Kishanlal, Mohanlal and Sohanlal. Kishanlal migrated to Mumbai and Sohanlal to Dehradun and taught Kathak there.

Dulha Ram's second son Puranlal stayed in Mumbai for a considerable time. He had two sons – Madanlal and Ramgopal. Both of them chose Patiala as their place of work.

Janaki Prasadji's other brother was Ganeshilal who had three sons – Hanuman Prasad, Shivilal or Gopal Das. Hanuman Prasad spent most of his life as court dancer in several states such as Jammu, Patiala, Bikaner and Nepal. He also worked for sometime in "Sangeet Bharati" in Delhi. He was three sons – Naval Kishore, Vamseedhar and Omkar Prasad. All of them were engaged as Kathak teachers at various places.

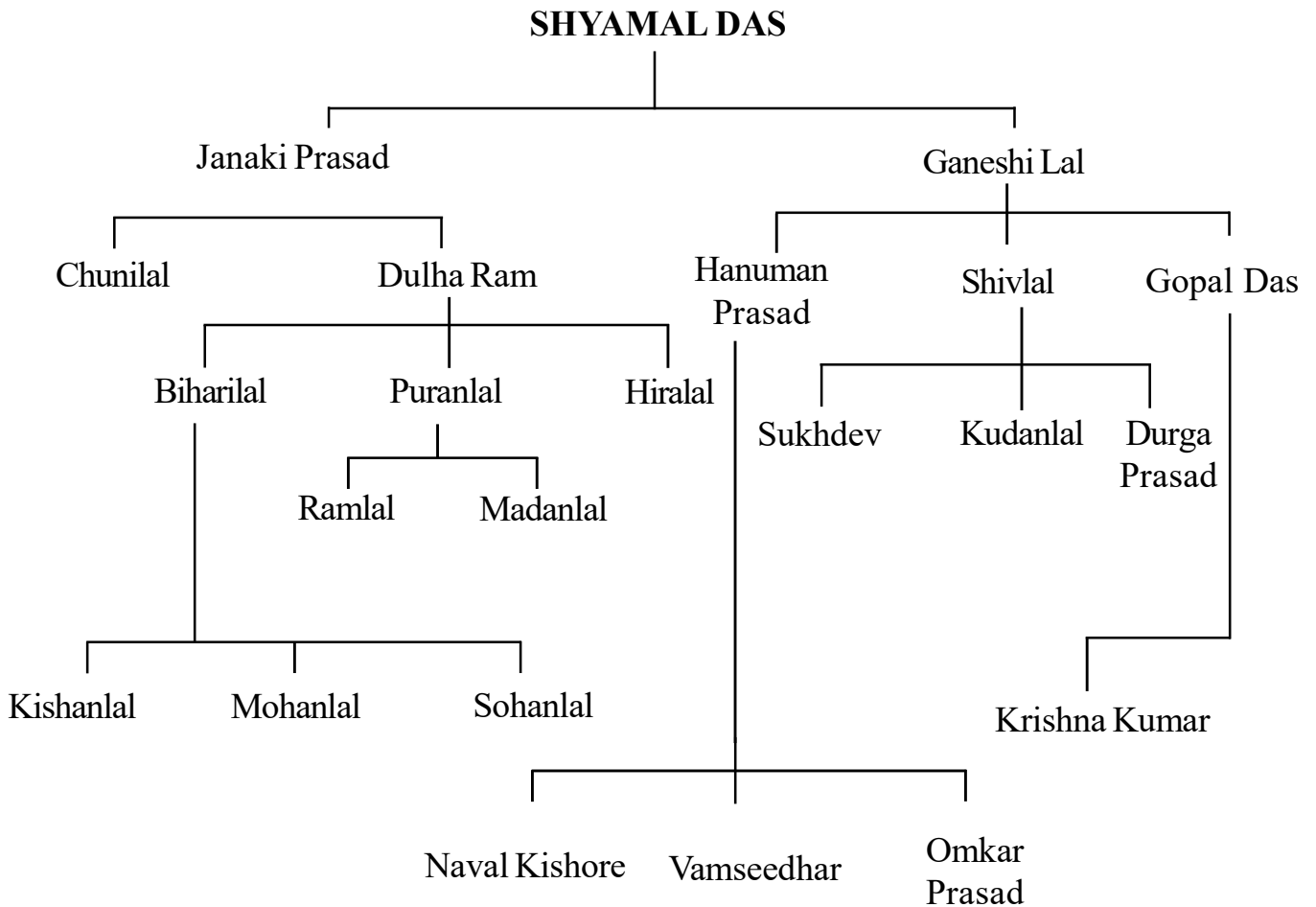
Ganeshlal's second son, Shivalal, was an able dancer and also tabla player. Among Shivalaji's three sons – Sukhdev, Durga Prasad and Kundanlal - Sukhdev and Durga Prasad stayed in Rajasthan and were active teachers and performers of Kathak. The third son, of Shivalal, Kundanlal Gangani stayed at Delhi teaching Kathak. Ganeshlal's third son, Gopal Das, taught Kathak in Lahore. He also served the Patiala Durbar for sometime as court dancer. His only son is Krishna Kumar, who became a famous exponent of the Benares gharana. Among Gopal Das' disciples, the most prominent are Hazarilal and Tara Chaudhuri, the later known for starting a Kathak school in Sri Lanka.

Ashiq Hussain:

One of the prominent performers and gurus of the Benares gharana was Ashiq Hussain. His maiden name was Bhure Khan. He learnt under Pandit Gopal, who gave him another new name, Jyothi Prasad, but the dance cinema, and especially the cinema world knew him only as Ashiq Hussain. He was known for his agility and instancous choreographic abilities. His only son migrated to Pakistan and is said to be teaching Kathak there. His numerous disciples are Qutubuddin and Ruknuddin and, in the next generation. Bhure Khan, Relu Khan, Bihari, Sager, Suleman and others. To this gharana belong Hazarilalji, Ajurigi, Tara Chaudari and Sunayana.

Among the disciples of Hazarilal, mention must be made of Sudarshan Dheer, Sunaina Hazarilal, Rohini Bagle, Sidhi Jhaveri, Samjukta Panigrahi, etc.

The following chart may assist us to know the family genealogies better :



1. Shri Jagannath Prasad

Shri Jagannath Prasad, who was the first to bring recognition to Janaki Prasad gharana, belonged to Bikaner and had his training in dance from Chunnilal and Gopal Das. For sometime he learnt dance from the court dancer of Gwalior, Shri Nathulal. He served in the courts of Indore and Nepal.

2. Shri Krishna Kumar

The representative dancer of the Janaki Prasad gharana is Shri Krishna Kumar who earned a name both for his abilities in nritta and nritya and in singing. He had his training from his uncle, Hanuman Prasad and for a while he was trained in music by Ashique Husain. He also had training from Sambhu Maharaj on a Government of India Fellowship. He choreographed nritya-natikas which revealed his ability to adopt the Kathak style to a larger format of a dance drama. “Taj Ki Kahani,” “Shajahan Ka Swapna” and others were received well. In 1947 he started a Kathak school in Bareilly

and from 1958 he served as a Kathak instructor at Delhi's Bharateeya Kala Kendra.

Some of the contemporary dancers active in the field today belonging to the Benares gharana include Smt. Sunaiana Hazarilal, Shri Sudarshan Kumar, Shri Jitendra Maharaj and Messers Nalini and Kamalini.

Sukhdev Prasad style

A subdivision of the Janaki Prasad gharana is a style established by Shri Sukhdev Maharaj and some noted dancers belong to this style. Smt. Sitara Devi and Shri Gopikrishna belonged to this gharana.

1. Shri Sukhdev Maharaj

Born in 1884 at Kathmandu, Nepal to Ramadas Mishra, a musician of high order who was in the court of Nepal, Sukhdevji was initially trained in music by his father. Later he took his dance training from Ramadasji of Benares gharana. After several years of training, he was appointed as a singer in the Nepalese court. Through his second wife Sukhdev Maharaj had three daughters and two sons – Alaknanda, Tara, Sitara and two sons, Pande Maharaj (Durga Prasad) and Chaube Maharaj (Chaturbhuj Mishra).

Sukhdevji had to encounter opposition since he trained his daughters in Kathak and left for Kolkata where he had an occasion to meet young Acchan Maharaj and his two younger brothers. He instantly invited them to learn the Benares style from him. When the three sisters - Alaknanda, Tara and Sitara danced before Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, they were hailed as the “queens of Kathak.” Sukhdevji took the success of his daughters as an inspiration to do further work in the cause of Kathak and wrote several kavit-s and paran-s. He also developed a special technique in doing “bhramar” which Gopikrishna later mastered.

2. Smt. Sitara Devi

The dancer who represents the Sukhdev gharana is Smt. Sitara Devi, who learnt dance from her father Shri Sukhdev Maharaj. She was later initiated to Lucknow style by Shri Sambhu Maharaj. Having learnt from two masters and herself being an expert dancer, Sitara Devi started participating in festivals of dance. She also learnt

Bharatanatyam and Manipuri.

For sometime she entered the film field and she not only danced in films but also produced a few.

However, she came back to the field of dance in 1948. Eversince, she toured extensively in and outside the country giving Kathak recitals. She created a sort of a record by dancing for 12 hours non-stop. She was awarded 'Padmashree' in 1972.

3. Shri Gopikrishna

Another wellknown dancer in this gharana is Gopikrishna whose fame rested mainly for his work in movies. Gopikrishna's father Radhakrishna Sathaliya was a businessman in Kolkata. He passed away when Gopikrishna was young and so the rearing up of the boy rested on the shoulders of his gandfaher, Sukhdev Maharaj. For sometime Gopikrishna was sent to Shri Sambhu Maharaj to learn the Lucknow style. He also learnt Bharatanatyam under Govinda Raj Pillai. His agility in dance attracted directors of films to cast him in dance numbers. His one major work in the film 'Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baje' earned him a place in the film world and he continued to work in many films with success. He was awarded titles in many dance festivals. He also received Padmashree in 1975.

Among his many disciples from the filmdom are Madhubala, Sandhya, Sashikala, Indrani Rehman, Meena Kmari and others.

Sitara Devi's daughter Smt. Jayanthi Mala, has been a dancer on her own accord.

Raigarh Gharana

It was during Raja Chakradhar Singh's time (1904-1947) that Kathak's Raigarh gharana has come into prominence. A musician of high calibre, Raja Chakradhara Singh had a flair for Kathak dance as well as playing on the pakhawaj. He was also an able linguist, having known at least six languages and wrote books on literary trends and also on music and dance. His books include "Nartan Sarvasvam", "Tal-toya Nidhi." "Rag-Ratna-Manjari" and "Muraj-Parana-Pushpahar." Several scholars and

well known performers adorned his court. Among them are Jailal, Acchan Maharaj, Shiv Narayan, Mohanlal and Sohanlal, Pt. Sukhdev, Sundar Prasad, Hanuman Prasad. Besides, several musicians and musicologists were employed in the court. All the dancers in the court used to perform in the style prescribed by the Rajah in his dance texts. New bol-s and ‘Chakkardar Parana-s’ of the Rajah were popular in the court dances. The Rajah also prescribed an order of the various elements like Mangalacharan, ghat-achal- and chal, aamad-toda-paran-chakkardar, etc., the order being strictly adhered to by the dancers.

Two noted dancers belong to this gharana Shri Karthik Ram and Shri Kalyan Das Mahant.

1. Shri Karthik Ram

Born in 1910 in a farmer’s family, Karthik Ram was exposed to folk dances in his native village by his uncle, who was in charge of a Nautch Mandali. During one Ganesh Chaturdhi festival, Raja Chakradhar Singh saw this young boy’s sense of movement, brought him to his court and taught him dance. Later he was put under the tutelage of Mohanlal, Acchan Maharaj and Sambhu Maharaj from time to time. Karthik Ram then started performing in dance festivals all over Northern India including those at Kolkata and Mirzapur. When he participated in the All India Music Congress at Allahabad in 1936, he was awarded a gold medal. The Rajah was pleased over his ward’s success and gave him a village as a gift.

Among his many disciples his son Ramlal is an established dancer.

2. Shri Kalyandas Mahant

Born in 1921, Kalyandas had his early training in acrobatics and folk dances from his father, Kushaldas. “Gammath nrithya” was popular in Chathisgarh area and young Kalyandas learnt the dance. The Rajah of Sarangarh was pleased with the boy and took him under his protection. Since the Rajah of Sarangarh was closely related to Rajah Chakradhar Singh, having known that there were several well known dancers in the latter’s court, sent the boy there. Kalyandas studied under Shivilal, Acchan Maharaj and Lacchu Maharaj. Along with Kathak he also learnt singing and playing on

the tabla. In his later years Kalyandas spent his days in Nagpur, having been chosen by the Govt. of India to train students. He was a loving teacher and able guru.

3. Shri Phirtu Das Vaishnava (Phirtu Maharaj)

Son of a priest from Bundela, Phirtu Das, a singer and dancer in the folk style, born in 1921, went to Raigarh at the age eight at the instance of one Mukuth Ram, who was in search of boys who desired to learn Kathak. Raja Chakradhar Singh saw the boy, was impressed by the boy's case in and love for dance and put him under Jailalji to learn dance. Even by that time Karthik Ram was learning Kathak from Jailalji. Thus both Phirtu Das and Karthik Ram learnt dance together and later on danced as a due. Phirtu Das went back to his village, trained students and, after a few years presented them at a performance at Raigarh. The Raja was visibly moved and asked Phirtu to come back to the durbar.

4. Shri Burmanlal

Born in 1916 at the small village, Datod in Bilaspur district, who learnt folk dances from his uncles, especially in "Gammath" dance of Chattisgarh and become an accomplished dancer. Having heard about Burmanlal's expertise in "Gammath" Raja Chakradharsingh invited him to Raigarh. The Raja was impressed by his dance and asked him to stay on at Raigarh and learn Kathak. He has initial training from Jailalji and later from Sitaramji, Narayan Prasadji and Acchan Maharajji. When Lacchu Maharaj came to Raigarh, Burmanlal was handed over to him to specially learn "lasya." Thus he learnt several rare compositions of abhinaya and performed then with alacrity. He was considered to be real repository. If the rare traditional "Bhavas" of the Lucknow gharana.

Since this essay intends to present an overview of the various gharanas of Kathak and some of the well known exponents of the different gharanas, many others who spent their whole lives in teaching the art and performing have unfortunately not been mentioned. Almost all the "contemporary" dancers who are merely mentioned here and their artistic endeavours have not been assessed since all their efforts, from time to time, are covered in the 'Review section' of *Nartanam* from time to time. It is their sustained and intelligent work, in fact, that has been keeping Kathak's flag afloat and continues to do so.