



CONFERENCE PAPER

ROLE OF MUSIC EDUCATION THROUGH THE GHARANA PADDHATI - ITS GROWTH, IMPACT ON CONTEMPORARY KATHAK REPERTOIRE, AND INFLUENCE ON SOCIETAL PERCEPTION OF ART

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Abstract

Indian performing arts originated in temples as Katha Vachan, later moved to Mughal and Hindu courts, and returned to temples during the Bhakti movement. An important outcome of this period was the Nathdwara Parampara of Pakhawaj playing, which developed in the 15th century at the Vaishnav temple of Nathdwara, Rajasthan, and is closely associated with the Pushtimarg sampradaya. The style was first created for temple rituals by Vallabhdasji and later continued by Shankarji during Ashtayam Seva. His son, Ghanshyam Pakhawaj, preserved the tradition and authored Mrdaṅga Sagar. This parampara is known for complex paran compositions offered as devotional prayers to Lord Shrinathji, blending rhythmic intricacy with spiritual bhava. This paper examines the development of the NathdwaraPakhawaj tradition and its influence on modern Kathak repertoire through prachinbols of parans, dhrupad, dhamar, and rāslīlā. The tradition expanded Kathak's creative scope while reinforcing its devotional roots, helping reshape societal perception of the dance from the stigma of "Nautch Girl's Dance" to a respected classical and spiritual art form.

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Introduction:-

The structure of Indian Classical Performing Arts is integrated and united by Geet, Vadya and Nritya/Natya. Acharya Bharata has also described same thing in below sholka,

एवं गानं च वाद्यं च नाट्यं च विविधाश्रयम् ।
अलातचक्रप्रतिमं कर्तव्यं नाट्ययोक्तृभिः ॥

(Bharata Nāṭyaśāstra 7/28)

[Meaning – Thus the song (Geet), instrumental music (Vadya) and dancing/action (Nritya/Natya) having different kind of appeals should be made by the producers of plays like a brilliant entity.]

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In earlier times song and instrumental music were separately mentioned, but dance and drama were very closely associated with music (Vocal and Instrumental) from ancient times. Due to very close association of these three art forms, the word – “Sangeeta” came into practice in about 3rd century A.D. In 13th century (1210 and 1247 CE) Śārṅgadeva has written in Saṅgītaratnākara – which acts as a bridge between ancient and medieval musical traditions.

गीतं वाद्यं तथा नृत्यं त्रयं संगीतमुच्यते।(21)

[**Meaning** – Gitam (vocal melody), Vadyam (playing on instruments) and Nrityam (dancing), all the three together are known as Sangeeta.](Saṅgītaratnākara of Śārṅgadeva – Text and English Translation – Vol. 1 by R.K. Shringy and Prem Lata Sharma – Page Number – 10)

Historical Genesis and Philosophical Frameworks of the Performing Arts:-

As per the history of Indian performing arts the Nāṭyaśāstra, written by the Bharatamuni was created to share knowledge and wisdom in a way that everyone in society could understand, not just scholars. The main idea behind creating Nāṭya was to help people deal with life's struggles, bring them joy and peace, and guide them toward better moral values and spiritual happiness through performances like dance, music, and theatre. The Chapter-6,7 of Nāṭyaśāstra gives knowledge about “Rasa” and “Bhava”, Chapter-8 to 26 primarily talks about four types of “Abhinaya”. These chapters are the base of any kind of performing arts. Chapter-33, 34 of Nāṭyaśāstra describes about “Covered Musical Instruments” and its origin. The story goes that – one day the Muni Swati heard the sound that heavy rainfall made on the lotus leaves in a lake, he got the idea of making drums out of it. Śārṅgadeva in Saṅgītaratnākara talks about “Naad Mahima” like this “Naad is the very essence of vocal music. Instrumental music is enjoyable, as it manifest Naad. Nṛtta follows both (Vocal and Instrumental Music), therefore all three together depends on Naad. Nartan Nirṇaya by Pandarika Viṭthala has a special section in Chapter-1 named – Mṛdaṅga Prakranam. He has described about Mṛdaṅga Player – his varieties, merits and defects of performer and his hands – instruments – instrumental techniques – varieties of instrumental compositions and repertoire for a recital – performing stances. In its Chapter-4 named – Nartaka Prakranam, he describes about orchestra like this,

अष्टौ च गायकवराश्चत्वारस्तालधारिणः।

मृदङ्गिणोऽपि चत्वारो वांशिकानां चतुष्टयम्॥(375)

[**Meaning** – An orchestra in which there are eight excellent singers, four cymbal players, four mṛdaṅga players and four flautists are there.]

(Nartananirṇaya, Volume III):-



(Krishna's Forgotten Poets, Page 44)

Journey from Mṛdaṅga to Pakhāwaj:-

It is hard to say exactly when the ancient Mṛdaṅga instrument started to be recognised as Pakhāwaj in texts and artworks in a similar and consistent way across India, even though sculptures and paintings from different regions show it with slightly different sizes and shapes. The Saṅgīta Makaranda (7th/11th century), the Saṅgītaratnākara (13th century), the Saṅgītopanisatsāroddhāra (14th century) or the SaṅgītaDāmodara (15th century) used the word Mṛdaṅga in the section describing the ensemble including singers, flutist and mṛdaṅga players. They also have used alternative names for the same instruments – mardala, and muraja. The changing features of the mṛdaṅga during the first half of the 2nd millennium parallel to the historical context. This period was marked by continuous warfare, new Hindu kingdoms emerged and various muslim dynasties also got established in our sub-continent. In these centuries

of transition, the invaders slowly settled in India, increasing their interaction with Indians, and absorbing aspects of Indian culture. Out of this period of transition and regional syntheses, a new barrel drum, a regional instrument called Pakhāwaj slowly emerged as the main drum. During 15th/16th century, Bhakti Movement gained importance all over India. During this period only Vallabhaharyaji started “Ashtayama Seva” in Pushtimarg rituals. The main aim of worship through seva in Pushtimarg is to arouse a particular emotion or state of mind (Rasa) in the devotee, with the most important rasa being love for God, or devotion (Bhakti). The entire activity of the Haveli and the town revolve around lord Shrinathaji daily routine marked by eight main Darshana, in which the lord is offered sumptuous dishes, fine and rich clothes and the composition of the Aṣṭachāp are played by an ensemble including singer, Tānpūrā or harmonium, Sāraṅgī, Pakhāwaj and Cymbals.

The history of Nathdwara Parampara of Pakhāwaj playing is described properly in Mṛdaṅga Sāgar (17th century). It says in the early 17th century, three brothers were forced by the circumstances of war to leave their village near Jaipur and live as wandering devotional musicians. After some time, one of them found a post at the court of Amber. After four generations they were still court musicians at Amber when the capital was moved to the newly founded city of Jaipur in 1727. According to MṛdaṅgaSāgar, Rupram was a “Master of TāṇḍavaParans” and “Rāslīlā”. This is particularly interesting since it suggests the presence of compositions like the contemporary “Stuti Parans” in the repertoire of the Pakhāwaj during the 18th century. Vallabhdas, son of Rupram received training of Pakhāwaj playing from Pahar Singh. He took over his father’s post as court musician from 1790. In 1820, he accepted the invitation and took over Pahar Singhji’s place in Shri Nathji Temple at Nathdwara. He had three sons, Chaturbhuj, Shankar and Khem. Shankarji was employed at the temple after his father’s death and Khem started working on the MṛdaṅgaSāgar. However, he did not complete the writing of the MṛdaṅgaSāgar before he died, and the task was accomplished by his nephew Ghanshyam, Shakar’s son, to whom the book is attributed.

A very interesting aspect of the history of this lineage of musicians is its being in a continuous process of change. It started as a family tradition of musicians playing in the courts, then it moved to the temples, remaining a hereditary profession, and finally it left the temple and became a Gharānā. While Vallabhdas had brought the tradition into the temple, Purushottam Das inaugurated a new phase in which the knowledge was transferred to other students also. He also spread the knowledge by teaching at the Bharatiya Kala Kendra and the Kathak Kendra at New Delhi. With him the repertoire of the Pakhāwaj played for lord Srinathji went out of the temple and the style spread among many students.



(Pakhāwaj)

Journey of Kathak from Temples to Contemporary Stage:-

Kathāvācan, an ancient tradition, basically started in temples to educate teaching of Vedas and Purāṇas to normal people who doesn’t know Sanskrit, with that keeping Indian Tradition and Culture alive. While many forms of teaching and preaching developed for this purpose, Kathāvācan developed its own unique style. Even in Nāṭyaśāstra, Acharya Bharata has explained the term “Tōryatrikam” terminology in the Chapter-28. Kathak’s origins can be traced to the Kathakārs, or Storytellers who travelled rural areas, telling tales from the epics and Purāṇas. Their performances included storytelling with dance and music. This practice was mostly devotional in nature, with a major focus on Krishna’s life.

Ancient texts suggest that dance forms like Kathak existed as early as 400 BCE. However, the dance's formal structure and defined style developed later. Even in its early stages, Kathak showed a powerful connection between storytelling, Bhāva, and Abhinaya. These features later aligned with the principles of classical drama. Kathak found its voice in the temples of North India during the Bhakti movement, especially dedicated to Krishna. The dance's main themes focused on devotion, such as the Rāslīlā. During Mughal Invasion, Kathak moved to royal courts, where it came across Persian influences. Still, it stayed to its Hindu origins. This blending of Hindu and Muslim cultural elements gave Kathak its distinctive character and the formation of the Jaipur, Lucknow, and Banaras gharanas.

During British rule, Kathak faced serious difficulties. British authorities and Western-educated Indians often criticized it as immoral, especially the nautch performances by courtesans. These criticisms ignored the artistic depth and spiritual roots of Kathak. Even as public support declined, many traditional artists continued to teach in private, helping the dance survive. After India's independence, classical arts received institutional and government support. Kathak moved from intimate court settings to formal theatres, expanding its scope and subject matter, all while preserving its classical foundation. Historically, both the art forms have transitioned from the temples to the darbars of Mughal and Rajput kings, before returning to devotional aspect during the Bhakti movement of the 15th and 16th centuries. This cyclical movement profoundly influenced the aesthetic priorities of the art forms. In the temple, the focus was on Bhakti (devotion) and narrative instruction, in the court, the emphasis shifted toward technical aspects.

Period	Primary Performance Context	Aesthetic Driver	Philosophical Core
Ancient / Vedic	Temples & Ritual Enclosures Pakhāwaj played as a part of orchestra	Narrative instruction (Katha)	Spiritual liberation (Moksha)
Mughal Era	Royal Courts (Darbars) Pakhāwaj played as a part of orchestra	Rhythmic virtuosity, Persian aesthetics	Secular refinement & sensuality
Bhakti Movement	Temples (Haveli Sangeet) Pakhāwaj played as a part of orchestra	Emotional depth, Krishna-Bhakti	Surrender (Atmanivedana)
Modern Era	Proscenium Stage / Academies Pakhāwaj played as a solo recital and part of orchestra	Standardization, Classical revival	National identity & professionalism

The Hierarchy of Performance in Textual Traditions:-

Nartan Nirnaya by Pandarika Vitthala talks about how important rhythm instruments are in performances. In the book, Vitthala first explains the roles of the cymbal player and the drummer (Pakhāwaj/ Mrdaṅgplayer) before talking about the singer and the dancer. This order shows that he believed rhythm comes first in a performance. According to him, the drummer leads the rhythm section and creates the timing pattern. This rhythm helps the dancer move in sync and makes the movements clear and understandable for the audience.

Mrdaṅga Sagar: The Rhythmic Literature of the Nathdwara Tradition:-

The most significant contribution of this Parampara to the academic study of Pakhāwaj playing is the book "Mrdaṅga Sagar", primarily written by Pt. Ghanshyam Das Pakhāwaji. This work is a detailed compilation of "taal chakras", "matra bheds", and hundreds of complex parans collected from ancient scriptures and ancestral compositions.

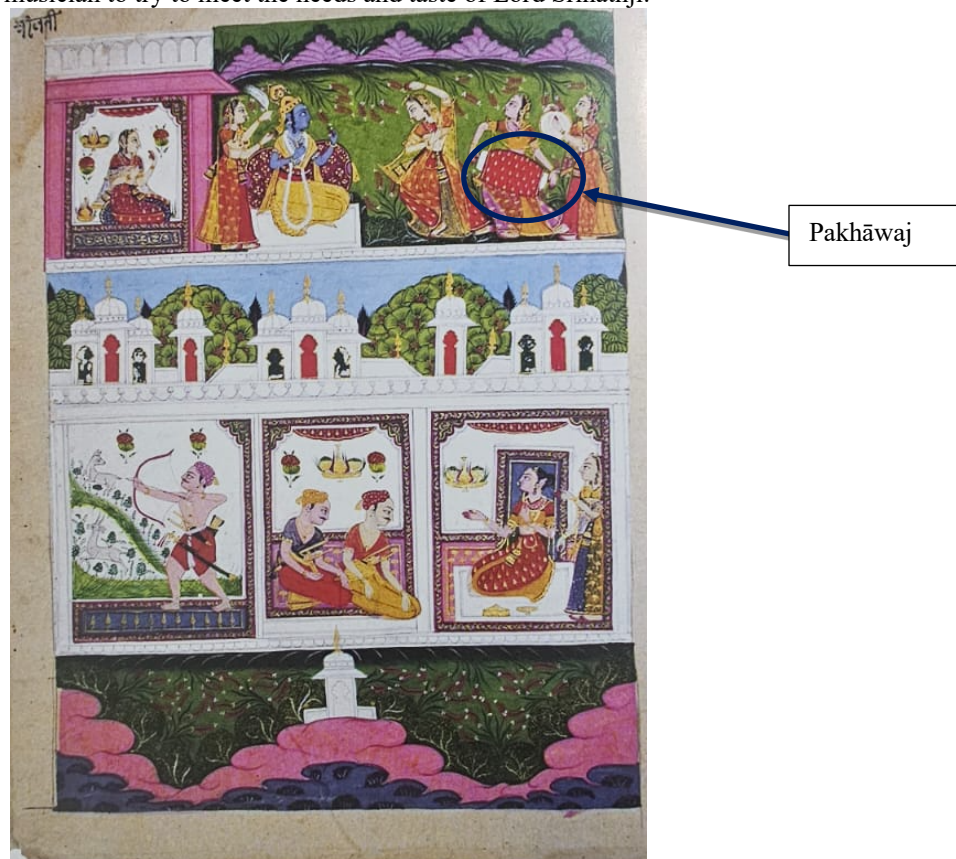
Unique Features of the Nathdwara Tradition:-

There are no major differences in repertoire between Pakhāwaj schools and anyway these differences pertain to the approach to the sound of the drum rather than to the grammar or the main classes of composition, which are usually called "Paran", "Relā" and "Jhālā". One of the most common stylistic differences between the schools are the Kudao

Singh tradition adopts a vigorous and powerful approach, while the Nana Panse tradition is delicate and the Nathdwara Tradition balances both.

1. **Dhenanaka Bols:** It is very distinctive feature of the Nathdwara Tradition. Another one is kiṭetaka dhadigana or gadikana as this gharana players play only one “ga” at a time.
2. **Tonal Clarity and Melody:** Influenced by the melodic nature of Haveli Sangeet, the Nathdwara style prioritizes the resonance and pitch of the drum. Pandit Dalchand Sharma, a contemporary master of this school, emphasizes that a student must master the basic thaap (flat palm stroke) to achieve tonal clarity before attempting complex speed.
3. **Unique Hand Positioning:** The difference from other traditions, the Nathdwara Tradition often plays the syllable “ta” on the left hand and “ka” on the right hand, creating a distinct rhythmic texture.
4. **Parans as Structured Narrative:** The repertoire includes parans that are visualized as geometric figures (yatis – Gaupuccha, Strotovaha, Damaru, Mrdaṅga, Pipilika) or prayers. These compositions are often long and challenging, designed to test the player’s stamina and rhythmic “calculation”.
5. **Rasa Siddhānta working as pivotal push:** The talas of Nathdwara Pakhāwaj Tradition have been designed to project a specific rasa or a blend of rasas, it has its own character and associated emotions. This tradition is entirely based on rasa siddhānta. There are various rasas and each rasa may take several forms. To showcase Vīra rasa, the heroic mood, this tradition associates it with Krishna and Rama, their characters showcase energy, strength and power, but of course beauty as well. In a similar way śṛṅgāra rasa which represents conjugal love with romantic mood, this tradition refers to the love of Radha and Krishna, which includes bhakti rasa as well.

In a same manner bhakti rasa – the main rasa of Haveli Sangeet and Nathdwara Pakhāwaj Tradition does not dramatically exhibit it but conveys pure devotion through the poems of Aṣṭachāp Kavis and Mīrābāī. This careful attention to the rasas is a typical character of this Nathdwara Tradition resulted from the strong aesthetic approach to seva and the necessity for a musician to try to meet the needs and taste of Lord Srinathji.



(Krishna's Forgotten Poets, Page 76)



Pakhāwaj

(Krishna's Forgotten Poets, Page 140)



Pakhāwaj

(Krishna's Forgotten Poets, Page 280)

Impact on Contemporary Kathak Repertoire: A Technical and Aesthetic Synergy:-

The relationship between the Pakhawaj and Kathak is one of mutual enhancement. While the tabla became more popular for accompanying the lighter Khyal and Thumri segments of Kathak, the Pakhawaj remains the essential accompaniment for the dance's most vigorous and structured components.

The Integration of Dhrupad and Dhamar Aesthetics:-

The revival of Dhrupad music—one of the oldest forms of Hindustani classical music—has led to the rejuvenation of "Dhrupadangi Kathak," a style pioneered by scholar-dancers. This approach uses the Pakhāwaj to guide the dancer's movements through the Uthan, Paran Aamad, Jod, Bandish, and Upaj – basically Vilambit Laya presentation of a performance. In the Jaipur Gharana, which emphasizes the Tandava aspect and more emphasis on Tatkaar, the influence of the Pakhāwaj is very evident. The Kathak dancers of contemporary era are performing complex taals like Lakshmi, Ganesh, Ashtamangal, and Brahma, often taking compositions directly from the Mrdaṅga Sagar like this,

Brahma Taal Peshkar:-

धा आ ध्या आ दी अ धा आ ध्ये ता किटि तक धदी गन धा किट तक
१ २ ३ ४ ५ ६ ८ १० १२ १४ १५ १६ १७ १८ १९ २० २१
धदी गन धा. किटि तक धदी. गन. धा । (१)
२२ २३ २४ २५ २६ २७ २८ सम

धा आ दिन दिन ता आ तिटि कत गदी गन धी. किटि. तागे दगिन
१ २ ३ ४ ५ ६ ७ ८ ९ १० ११ १२ १३ १४
नागे नागे त्रकड. तकता. कतीटी धा. दिन्त कत किड. धान धाआ किडि तक
१५ १६ १७ १८ १९ २० २१ २२ २३ २४ २५ २६ २७
दीगड धा ॥ (२)
२८ सम

(Mrdaṅga Sagar, Page 156, 157)

Specific Compositional Impact:-

The Nathdwara Pakhāwaj Tradition and Mrdaṅga Sagar have provided Kathak with a rich library of parans.

- **Ganesh and Shiva Parans:** These rhythmic parans uses the names and attributes of the Gods. For instance, a Ganesh Paran have the syllables like gan-gan ganpati into the rhythmic structure, requiring the dancer to depict the Elephant-Headed God through both Angika and Vachika abhinaya.

गणपति सुर मुनि वंदे कलत विविध भा: दु म दु ग
झीं झीन कीट कुकू थरी कीन जग विघन विनासन
ना कीटर तक नंगे थुं गे था: चारु तेजपर भाव
तागड दीगड दामू अच्छ: जगतंझे ढग नग दाम काम
केल तरंग: तक तक झीम् दुग दुग झीम् तक धीग गुन
वोहो विकास: झीन कीट झीझी कीटि थु गु दामू:
दीपं धूपं फल पत्रं फल राज्य विनंग् नई वेदं तो तक
दामू वस्तर समर्पयंझे: काम तरंग विलासं शिष्य उ
करणं गंडमू तिलकमू पुष्पं चंदन सर्व विघ्नो प्रशान्ते
दीगड दीगड दीगड दामू मधुकर शाय तरंग तराब
नरंगतत् थरि किटि तक थरि किटि तक सुन्दर तनू
देशातंत वोहो श्री वोहो गणेश । टे हे कुकु: ताको
थरी थरी किन जग प्रनोज् श्याम जनंग: नटुआ वल्लभ
वल्लभ दास कहावत परणभेद वोहो विधिसों बनावत
श्री गणपति को ध्यान लगावत, थरींग झें थरीगझें
थु किटिता किटितक थरी खीर्रा खीर्रा जे तगनांग्
दे त्यात थुंगता किट किट तक था ॥

(Mrdaṅga Sagar, Page 7)

- **Stuti Parans:** Invocatory pieces that set a devotional tone at the start of a performance.
Panchdev Stuti Paran

तअक धागेतिटि धागेन धागेदिन् दित दिदिन धात धा धिट ध्दिटा
 धी धी तिटि धात्रक घटगन कत्त कत्तीटी कतिटिता कृता कतिटि किटि
 फनः कतिटि किटिकत कतिटि किटितकः कत्तीटीता कतकअत्त द्रगनन थुन्तधा
 धिन धिनक धा धिनधिनक धागेत्रकथुंग धागेत्रकथुंग धाः धिट पञ्च गणपति
 पञ्च पांडव नटनारायण नटनरेहर पुष्प चंदन मुकुट झकझक धनित धगनग
 धनितधा किटतक तंत्रमन्तर जपति गणपति फणित धडकड फणित धा गति
 नादं अपरम्पार गतिनीत देखनिन् नित ध्ध धडाधड धडक जम धडजगन
 धडधड तंग तडधड नगनतगतिटि धगनधगकिटि धाः दुर्गदुर्गति नाशनी दल
 असुर दलदलदल मालित दल सुंभ सुंभन काट मार पछार डारत तनकमे
 रहे भुवन त्रभुवन जयत जयजय जयत जयजय जयतजय सुर सकल निर्भय
 जान गावत ताल दै दै मृदंगन तंअक झिंगन दिडत नगदिन दिडत नगदिन दिन्त धा ॥

(Mrdaṅga Sagar, Page 102)

- **Chakradaar Parans:** Compositions that repeat three times and end precisely on the Sam, demonstrating the dancer's mastery over laya and taal.
- **Vishesh Parans:** Haathi ko Nachane ki Paran, Rail Dhwani ki paran, Top Dhwani ki paran etc.

धल धल ४ धलांग धलः धलांग २ थुंगाथुंगा ४ थुमाक थुंगा
 थुमाक २ धल धल ३ धलांगः थुंगा थुंगा ३ थुमाकः धल २ धलांग थुंगा थुंगा २
 थुमाक २२ धल धलांग थुंगाथुमाक २ धलांग थुमाक २ तकतक थुंगाथुंगा २ तक
 तक थुंगा २ थाः तकतक थुंगाथुंगा थुमाक धदीगन थौ ॥

(Mrdaṅga Sagar, Page 101)

By performing these compositions, the modern Kathak dancer can reflect the traditional devotional roots of the form, moving beyond mere visual display to achieve an emotional depth that resonates with the audience's spiritual consciousness.

Influence on Societal Perception: From Taboo to Spiritual Respectability:-

Perhaps the most significant impact of the Nathdwara tradition is its role in changing the societal perception of Kathak. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the art form suffered from a profound social stigma. During British colonial rule, Indian classical dance was judged according to Victorian moral standards. Classical dancers, who were educated female courtesans and rightful propagators of classical song and dance, were labeled by the British as "nautch girls." The Anti-Nautch Movement, supported by Christian missionaries tried to abolish these practices. As a result, these performing arts went through a decline and came to be viewed as immoral. The revival of Kathak in the mid-20th century relied heavily upon the art form – reconnecting itself with its ancient temple origins and the Kathakar tradition. The Nathdwara Pakhāwaj tradition was central to this effort. By integrating numerous devotional compositions such as Krishna Kavits, Ganesh Parans, and Shiva Parans, which gave the art needed upliftment.

Pedagogical Evolution: The Shift from Guru-Shishya Parampara to Institutionalization and University Integration:-

The transmission of Indian classical music and dance has undergone a fundamental transformation in the modern era, moving from the intimate, oral tradition of the Gharana Paddhati to a standardized institutional model.

The Guru-Shishya Parampara was the basis of Indian music education for long times. In this system, the disciple lived with the Guru in a Gurukul, learning through total engagement with personalized mentorship and gaining ethical and spiritual development. The 20th century saw the emergence of formal institutions and university degree programs in the performing arts. Today, the University Grants Commission (UGC) in India recognizes degrees like the Bachelor of Performing Arts (BPA) and Master of Performing Arts (MPA), which are offered by universities.

The Impact of Standardization:-

Standardization has "developed confidence in society" by providing a structured career path in the arts. Students can get government/private scholarships and find employment in primary and secondary education. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has introduced a transformative vision for arts education in India, aiming to overcome

the disconnect between arts and sciences. By integrating music and dance at all levels of the curriculum, the policy says that the art forms help develop creativity and increase understanding of others' feelings.

Digital Pedagogy and Global Reach:-

The "digital age" has brought both opportunities and challenges. While online pedagogy through platforms like Zoom/WebEx/Teams and social media like YouTube/Instagram/Facebook has expanded the reach of these traditions to a global audience. Nevertheless, digital platforms have become essential for "heritage preservation," allowing archival recordings of renowned gurus accessible to students all over the world.

Synthesis and Conclusion:-

The Nathdwara tradition of Pakhāwaj playing which began in the 15th century in Vaishnav temples of Rajasthan and later became an important part of Kathak dance showcases how Indian arts have survived and evolved over time. This tradition connects spirituality with performing arts. The use of Pakhāwaj parans and the style of Dhrupad music enhanced Kathak presentation. It added a powerful Tandava energy and a calm spiritual depth with rasa to the dance. By focusing on the devotional aspect of music and dance, the Nathdwara tradition helped Kathak to overcome the old colonial stigma of the "nautch girl." Today, from the traditional Gharana system to formal institutions, with NEP 2020 and digital technology, made the arts more accessible and open to many people, creating professional opportunities which help these arts continue to grow. The Nathdwara tradition remains an important connection between historic devotional music and modern Kathak, preserving ancient knowledge and guiding people toward inner peace and happiness.

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