



## 'GAT-BHAV': A POWERFUL ACTING COMPONENT OF KATHAK DANCE: NEEDED TO PRESERVE AND PROMOTE.

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### ABSTRACT

'Gat-Bhav', a prominent form of the expressive aspect (Bhava Paksha) of Kathak dance, primarily features the display of emotional acting (Bhava Abhinaya) based on literature such as the stories of the gods and goddesses described in Hindu religious scriptures and Puranas, texts like the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Bhagavat Purana. 'Gat-Bhav' is also a solo act and medium of emotional expression of all the characters, their nature, and their special qualities from the chosen mythological stories. The acting performed through 'Gat-Bhav' is what becomes the cause for the creation of aesthetic pleasure (Rasotpatti) in the appreciative audience. It has been observed over the last two decades that the presentation of 'Gat-Bhav' in top-tier and other solo stage performances has been extremely low. It has therefore become necessary to reinstate it by giving it a prominent place in the Abhinaya (expressive aspect) section of the repertoire of Kathak's stage presentation.

### KEYWORDS : Gat-Bhav, Abhinaya, Kathak Dance, Rasotpatti

According to the Hindi dictionary and *Bhat Hind Ko a* (Comprehensive Hindi Treasury), the meaning of the word 'Gat' described as 'movement/speed', 'condition/state', 'bad condition', manner/style, form/appearance, the sargam (solfège) of a r ga played on the sit r, and a specific body movement/gesture in dance. Another parallel word 'Gatak' which is analogous to the word 'Gat', is given the meaning of 'going/movement' and 'speed/motion'. The word 'Bh v' is described as having various meanings besides birth, origin, and love, including 'state/phase', 'condition', 'nature/disposition', emotion/feeling arising in the mind, mental reactions like joy and sorrow, feeling/ sentiment, whatever is thought in the mind/idea, body movements/gestures indicating emotion, state/ phase, condition, and body movements/gestures that convey the meaning of a song.

Dr. Bharti Gupta, in her book 'Kathak Sgar', also quotes another definition parallel to *Gat-Bh v* - 'Gatibhav': It is a narration of a story which can be composed in a Thumri." Padma Shri Dr. Puru Dadheech, in his book 'Kathak Ntya Shiksh - Part 2', while explaining the seven main methods of *Bh v* (expression) in Kathak dance, quotes *Gat-Bh v* and *Gat-Nik s* under the category number six—'Gat Arth Bh v'. Kathak dance artist and writer, Rachna Ramya, in her book 'Kathak The Dance of Storytellers,' defines *Gat-Bhav* as a mimetic presentation and categorizes it under the term 'Gatkari,' stating: "Gatkari is the presentation of *Gat*'s through *Gatnikas*, *Gat-bhav*, *Gat-Prasang* and, *Gat-Leela*. *Gat*'s are mimetic presentation of the stories and events without the support of words."

#### The Emergence: Origin and Development of *Gat-Bhav*:

The historical period in which *Gat-Bhav* actually emerged in the *Abhinaya* (expressional) performance of Kathak dance cannot be stated definitively due to the lack of solid evidence. However, it can be speculated that its usage began during the 'Bhakti Kal' (Bhakti Period) (Samvat 1375 to 1700 Vikrami, approximately 1318-1643 AD). The tradition of performing *abhinaya* based on storylines, or dancing compositions based on the praise of Hindu deities, such as *Stuti Paran*, *Chhand*, *Kavitt*, *Savaiye*, etc., must have existed even before the arrival of the Mughal civilization in India after the tenth century. The core source of Kathak dance is found in the presentation of narratives within the ambit of '*Gat-Bhav*'. The tradition of storytelling was also essential within the temple tradition. Regarding the antiquity of the *abhinaya* element '*Gat-Bhav*', Pandit Harish Gangani, Professor at Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda and a dance guru of the Jaipur Gharana, offers the following view: "Gat-Bhav is such an

impressive element of expression in Kathak dance that a similar element of expression is not visible in all other classical dance styles of India. In ancient temples, according to the saying 'Katha Kahe So Kathak Kahave' (one who tells a story is called a Kathak), Kathak dancer's used to adopt the method of telling, narrating, and demonstrating stories based on deities through *abhinaya* in front of the devotees/audience. At that time, the practice of performing the technical elements of Kathak-Tode, Tukde, etc. was also not prevalent." Referring to the references given by Dr. Maya Tak, Dr. Bhavana Grover writes in her book, 'Sangeet evam Nritya Kalayen: Kal Aaj aur Kal', how the framework of Kathak's antecedent acting changed with the advent of the Mughal civilization, and instead of *bhajan*'s and mythological tales, the performance in the dance started being based on Thumri, Dadra, etc. Subsequently, she further designates the reign of Emperor Jahangir and Shah Jahan (1605 to 1658) at the beginning of the seventeenth century as the 'Golden Age of the North Medieval Period' and writes that—"During this period, the influence of poets' writing was evident on dance. Many poets of the Bhakti movement described the character of Lord Krishna, and Kathak also absorbed this influence. During this period, *bhava* (expression) on Krishna's stories, *Krishna ki leelain* (Krishna's divine plays), etc., were adapted and presented in Kathak."

In his book 'Nritya Nibandh' Dr. Puru Dadheech, after mentioning the two main *gharanas* (schools) of Kathak dance (Jaipur and Lucknow) in the public sphere, further quotes about the development of '*Gat-Bhav*' (literally, gait-expression) that – "The tradition of presenting a storyline solely through acting, based on pure *natya* (drama), i.e., without song, developed only in the Jaipur *gharana* in the form of '*Gat-Bhav*'." Kathak dancer from Mumbai, Mrs. Vrushali Dabke, and the currently renowned young dancer 'Vishal Krishna' (Varanasi) of the Banaras *Gharana* also bear witness to the fact that the practice of dancing and enacting '*Gat-Bhav*' also existed in the Banaras *Gharana* after the Jaipur *Gharana*. In the history of Kathak, Pandit Gopi Krishna Ji can be considered the first pioneer to present '*Gat-Bhav*' acting for a long and extended period. According to Vrushali Ji, followers of the Pt. Gopi Krishna style, some Kathak guru's and artist's in Maharashtra even today, such as Vidushi Dr. Manjiri Deo Ji (Thane), Vidushi Manisha Sathe Ji (Pune) and their disciples, and other current young dancer's of the same style, also perform '*Gat-Bhava*' in their stage performances.

#### The Classification And Acting Of '*Gat-Bhav*'

The three main classifications of *Nartan* (Dance) are

considered to be: 1) *Nritta* (Pure Dance), 2) *Nritya* (Expressional Dance), and 3) *Natya* (Drama). Among these three main categories, 'Gat-Bhav' falls under the category of 'Nritya' and 'Natya'. 'Gat-Bhav' comes under the two main categories of *Abhinaya* (Acting): *Angika Abhinaya* (Body Movements/Physical Expression) and *Sattvika Abhinaya* (Psychic/True Emotional Expression).

The definition of 'Natya' and 'Nritya' in Acharya Nandikeshwara's *Abhinayadarpana* is quoted as follows:

**Natya:** "नाट्यं तत्त्वाटकं चैवा पूज्यं पूर्वकथायुतम्"

Meaning: *Natya* and *Nataka* (Drama) are that in which the traditional preliminary narrative (subject matter) is praiseworthy and venerable.

**Nritya:** "रसभावव्यञ्जनादियुक्तं नृत्यमितीर्यते"

Meaning: That which is coupled with *Rasa* (Aesthetic Emotion) and *Bhava* (The Aesthetic Transitory Emotion) is called *Nritya*. In this way, in the context of the above definitions, if we look towards *Gat-Bhav*, it is understood that: *Gat-Bhav* also involves acting based on narratives derived from traditional mythological stories. The presentation of *Gat-Bhav* also reveals a blend of *Rasa*, *Bhava*, and *Vyanjana* (the act of expressing, manifesting, or being revealed—in this sense). Acharya Dhananjaya in *Dasharupaka* describes the mutually dependent importance of 'Nritya and Bhava' in a *Shloka* (verse) as: 'भावाश्रयं नृत्य' (1/9) Based on the above context, it can be said that *Nritya* is inherent in the refuge of *Bhavas* (emotions). Similarly, *Bhava* (emotion) has a mutually dependent importance in the dance of *Gat-Bhav*. The soul of *Gat-Bhav* is its narrative (Kathanak). Before performing *Gat-Bhav*, a deep study of the entire characters of those narratives and their characteristic features is necessary and compulsory for the artist. According to the *Shloka*, 'रस भाव व्यञ्जनादियुक्तं नृत्यमितीर्यते' (That which is coupled with *Rasa* and *Bhava* is called *Nritya*), a deep, subtle, detailed, and special expertise in *Abhinaya* (acting) is essential for the presentation of *Rasa*, *Bhava*, and *Vyanjana* during the performance of *Gat-Bhav*. The first principle for a Kathak artist is to have mastery over the *Bhava Paksha* (expressional aspect) just as they do over the *Nritta Paksha* (pure dance aspect).

### The Applicability Of *Gat-Bhav*:

In *Gat-Bhav*, a single dancer takes up a mythological story and enacts the emotional states (*bhav-avasthaas*) and activities (*kriyaakalaaps*) of all its characters through character portrayal (*charitra-chitran*). Before the characters of the narrative change in *Gat-Bhav*, a 'Gat-Palta' (a specific type of body movement/turn/maneuver) is taken. The dance for this is performed to the accompaniment of a melodic theme (*nagma*) in *Teen-Taal* at a fast tempo (*drut gati*), maintaining rhythm and meter (*lay-taal*). The basic rhythmic cycle (*theka*) of *Teen-Taal* is played on the *Tabla*. The *Tabla* player, as required by the scene of the story and the dancer's movement needs, plays *laggi*, *rail*, or other special sounds on the *Tabla*. The *Tabla* accompaniment in this is quite enchanting. However, in the accompaniment of a 'Nagma' or 'Lehra', the melodic pattern is played on a tune based on rhythmic syllables composed within a specific *Raga*. In stage performances, Kathak artists are free to use melodic and string instruments like Harmonium, Sarangi, Sitar, Sarod, Flute, etc., as per the scenes of the narrative, to enhance the artistic appeal of the *Gat-Bhav* plots. The truthfulness and purity of emotional expression is dense and concentrated in *Gat-Bhav*. Like in *Nritya* (expressive dance), the primary mediums for a *Gat-Bhav* performance are the dancer-artist's body, intellect, and mind. The aiding steps for the performance can primarily be divided into three parts:

a. **Facial Expression (*Mukhaabhinay*):** Expression conveyed through the principal parts of the face, such as the eyes, eyebrows, nose, cheeks, lips, chin (*hanu*), and ears.

b. **Hand Expression (*Hastaabhinay*):** Expression conveyed through the fingers, palm (single and combined hand gestures -*asamyukta* and *samyukta hastamudras*), wrist, forearms, elbows, and upper arms.

c. **Footwork or Foot Movement (*Padgati* or *Padsanchaalan*):** Various walks (*chaaris*), circular movements (*mandals*), spins (*bhramaris*), gaits (*padgatis*), etc.

In the dance of *Gat-Bhav*, the interdependently important role of *Bhav* (emotion/expression) is evident. The creation of drama (*Natya*), formed by the combined movement of the body's various limbs, sub-limbs (*pratyang*), minor-limbs (*upacang*), along with various emotions of the intellect and mind, manifests in the form of *Gat-Bhav*.

### The Specialty of *Gat-Bhav*:

The primary specialty of *Gat-Bhav* acting is a single dancer portraying all the characters of the narrative - that is, performing 'multi-character acting' (*bahupaatri abhinay*). This feature is not commonly seen in other classical dance styles. In *Thumri*, *Ghazal*, praises of deities (*Devi-Deva stuti*), and *Vandana* (invocatory hymns), only the greatness, attributes, or praise of a single character is typically enacted. In the expression of *Thumri*, *Ghazal*, *Dadra*, *Chaiti*, *Kajri*, *Hori*, etc., only two or three characters, such as the hero and heroine (*nayak-nayika*) or the heroine's friend, are enacted. However, in *Gat-Bhav*, more than one character is portrayed. For instance, if the story of 'Draupadi Cheerharan' (The Disrobing of Draupadi) is being expressed in *Gat-Bhav*, it involves acting out various roles such as the five Pandavas—Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, Sahadeva—the main Kauravas—Duryodhana, Duhshasana, and Shakuni Mama—the principal character Draupadi, and Krishna. In this situation, one can imagine the sheer range of emotions (*bhav*), consequential expressions (*anubhav*), transitory feelings (*sanchari bhav*), body postures (*deh bhangimaen*), gestures (*mudraen*), and body movements (*deh gatiyan*) that a single dancer must express. Dr. Vidhi Nagar, quotes in her book *Kathak Nartan Part 2*: 'Acting is not merely done for the sake of imitation or mimicry, but also serves to entertain and convey a message for public welfare.' This quote indicates that the objective of *Gat-Bhav* is indeed to entertain the common audience, but it also proves its significant role as an inspirational messenger for the welfare of society (*lokkalyan*). This can be understood through another example. According to the famous Kathak dancer and guru, Dr. Shambhavi Shukla from Sagar, Madhya Pradesh, she presented the traditional story of 'Kaliya Daman' (The Subduing of the Kaliya Serpent) on a Delhi stage using a modern approach within the framework of *Gat-Bhav*. The current serious problem of 'Yamuna river water pollution' in the nation's capital, Delhi, was depicted through 'Gat-Bhav', showing how the river water was once poisoned by the venom of the Kaliya serpent in the Krishna story, and how today, the Yamuna river water in Delhi has reached a low quality due to the discharge of chemical-laden, filthy water and sewage from various industries and companies located on its banks. By presenting this situation through 'Gat-Bhav', an effort was made to spread awareness among the general public. Through this example, one can gauge the unlimited scope and power of the *bhav* (expressional) element of 'Gat-Bhav', demonstrating how this powerful component can be used for the good deed of both public entertainment and public welfare, and how it can bring about a change of heart in the populace.

### Narrative Themes of *Gat-Bhav*:

According to Dr. Shambhavi Shukla, when a dancer, during

the presentation of *Bhav* (expression) in dance, depicts a story through the medium of dance, it is called a *Kathanak* (narrative/story). A *Kathanak* presentation involves the intricacy and subtlety of expressive acting (*Bhava-Abhinay*) along with rhythm (*Laya*) and meter (*Taal*).

Currently, the narrative themes of *Gat-Bhav* acted out in *Kathak* can be broadly divided into five categories:

**1) Narratives Based on Krishna Leelas (Krishna's divine acts):**

Panaghat Leela , Makhan Chori , Krishna Gopika Vastrahara , Pootana Vadh , Kaliya Daman , Kansa Vadh , Draupadi Vastrahara , Sudama Leela , Govardhan Leela , Maharas etc.

**2) Narratives Based on Ram Leelas (Rama's divine acts):**

Panchvati ,Sita Swayamvar , Lakshman Rekha and Sita Haran , Ahilya Uddhar ,Lakshman Murchha - Sanjeevani Booti , Lanka Dahan ,Ravana Vadh ,Marich Vadh ,Bhilni Shabari Bhakti ,etc.

**3) Narratives Based on Shiva Leelas(Shiva's divine acts):**

Daksha Yagya Bhasmasur Vadh , Tripurasura Vadh, Madan Dahan, Shiva Tandav , Parvati Mangal , Sagar Manthan , Gangavatara etc.

**4) Narratives Based on Other mythological Stories:**

*Usha-Aniruddha,Urvashi ,Vishwamitra - Menaka , Gaj and Grah* etc.

**5) *Gat-Bhav* Presented on Modern and Contemporary Social Themes/Narratives:**

In her research thesis, 'An Analytical Study of *Gat-Nikas* and *Gat-Bhav* in *Kathak* Dance Presentation', Dr. Sangeeta Thakur writes that "Regarding modern stories, often social issues like women's education, child education, the importance of education in society, and many other topics can also be included, which can be categorized as a novel experiment in the field of *Kathak* dance." This type of modern and contemporary social theme/narrative *Gat-Bhav* presentation is seen in the practical examinations and stage performances of colleges and universities. However, it is rarely staged in the performances of top-ranking professional artists.

**CONCLUSION:**

Institutional Preservation and Promotion : From the last 20 years an observation noted is that the examiners for the higher Degree, Diploma examinations of various universities, colleges, and departments of Music, Dance, and Performing Arts-which run Degree and Diploma courses to preserve and promote classical music and dance traditions-as well as institutions like Akhil Bharatiya Gandharva Mahamandal, Miraj (Maharashtra), Bhatkhande Sangeet Kendra, Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh), Pracheen Kala Kendra, Chandigarh (Punjab), Prayag Sangeet Samiti, Allahabad (Uttar Pradesh), and Bongiya Sangeet Parishad, Kolkata (West Bengal), often ask examines to spontaneously enact modern story lines/themes in addition to the traditional *Gat-Bhav* stories and narratives. In the current context, it is observed that while *Gat-Bhav* is tending towards obsolescence in the solo stage performances of current top and most other artists, the prestigious dance institutions and centers of the country mentioned above (like universities and colleges) have fostered the legacy of *Gat-Bhav* through education within their curricula. The late great *Kathak* Guru, the revered Mohanrao Kalyanpurkar, deserves credit for this, as he included the *Gat-Bhav Abhinay* (acting/expression) style in the *Kathak* curricula. The presence of traditional expressive elements is evident in the institutional training system, but on the other hand, the presentation of these expressive elements by current leading and other *Kathak* artists is gradually moving from being uncommon to becoming extinct. This is a very worrying situation. If the *Kathak* artists do not preserve and reintroduce these 'Gat-

*Bhav*'elements into stage performances, they will completely disappear in a few years.

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