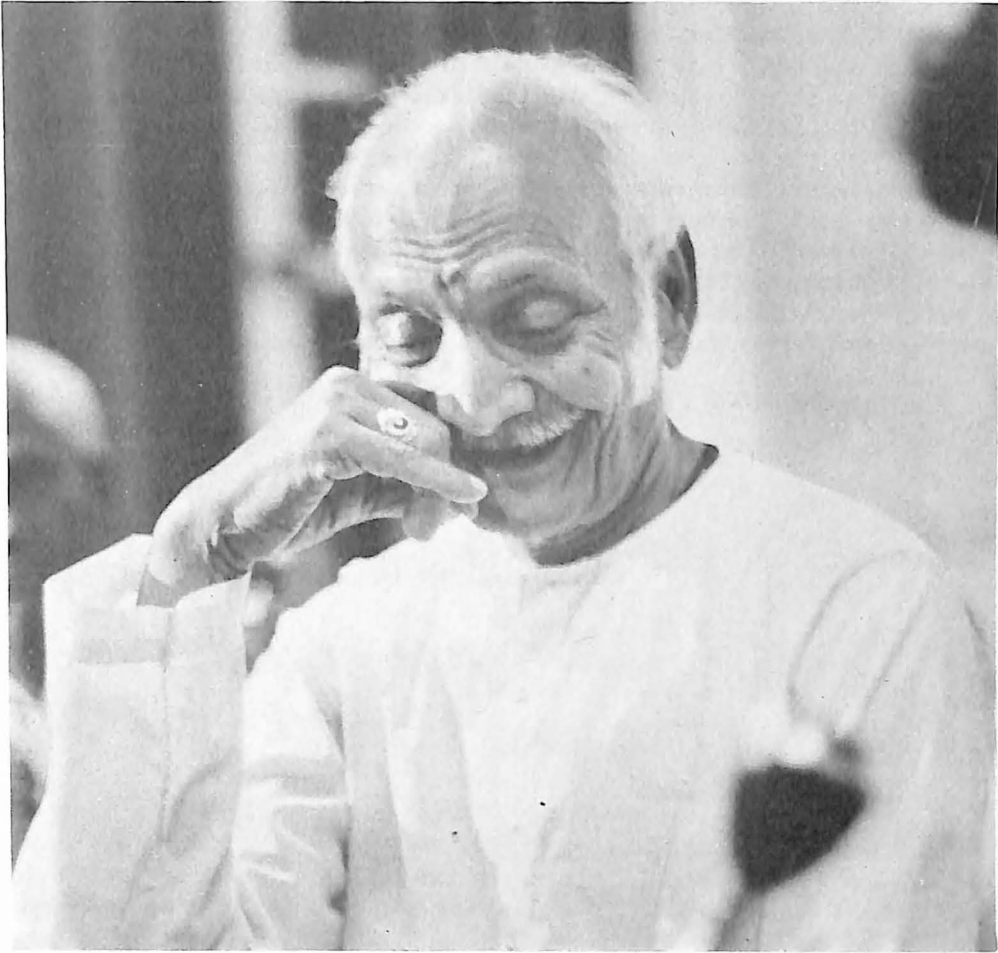


*Kathak Workshop, Delhi, March 24 to 26, 1976.*

Kathak artists are known to be great individualists. When the mystic poet Kabir said: "There are no bags of gems, no flocks of swans; lions do not move about in herds, nor do saints in groups", he might as well have included the Kathaks. Each one of them is an island unto himself. They would rather sit back-to-back than face-to-face. There are many things that divide them, the most important being the almost fanatic commitment to their *gharana*-s.

But in the month of March this year something happened which bodes well for the future of this very attractive classical dance form. Leading Kathak artists and scholars gathered together in Delhi for three days in a spirit of friendliness. The initiative for this was taken by the Kathak Kendra, Delhi, which organised a Workshop on Kathak from March 24 to 26.

It was a distinguished gathering. It included Lachchhu Maharaj from Lucknow, Gauri Shankar, Mohanrao Kallianpurkar and Roshan Kumari from Bombay, Rohini Bhate and Prabha Marathe from Poona, Kumudini Lakhia from Ahmedabad, Sunderlal Gangani from the Sayajirao University, Baroda, P. D. Ashirwatham from the Indira Kala Sangeet Vidyalaya, Khairagarh, and Birju Maharaj, Kundanlal Gangani, Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, Uma Sharma, Rani Karna, S. K. Saxena, Munna Shukla and Reba Vidyarthi from Delhi. There were a number of observers. The doyen of Kathaks, Lachchhu Maharaj was the Chairman, and Mohanrao Kallianpurkar acted as the Director.



*Lachchhu Maharaj demonstrating bhava*

On all the three days, the Workshop met in two sessions, from 10.30 A.M. to 1.00 P.M. and from 3.00 P.M. to 5.00 P.M., and there were demonstration programmes from 7.00 P.M. to 9.00 P.M. Every day two groups demonstrated their art and method of training. On March 24, it was Rohini Bhate and the group from Poona and Sunderlal Gangani from Baroda; on March 25, Prabha Marathe and the group from Poona and S. K. Saxena and Rani Karna from Delhi; on March 26, Lachchhu Maharaj and the group from Lucknow and Birju Maharaj from the host organisation. The 75-year old Lachchhu Maharaj was brilliant with his *bhava* and *chher-chhar*; Birju Maharaj, dancing before a group of artists, scholars and connoisseurs, excelled himself.

The agenda for the Workshop was rather general. What is the present state of Kathak, what ails it, and what can be done to improve matters? Can one plan a standardisation of training courses? Publish authentic literature on the subject? Should there be an exchange of artists? Ought one to plan a journal? The discussions were free and frank. The debate was often enlivened

by the participants getting up to give practical demonstrations to drive a point home. On the second day, to the delight of the artists, and the students of Kathak who filled the hall to capacity, and in response to a request from Kapila Vatsyayan, the two senior dancers, Lachchhu Maharaj and Gauri Shankar, demonstrated their specific styles of Kathak.

The participants were keen to arrive at decisions on many of the points which had aroused controversy in the past: the definition of terms, the order of presentation. The sponsors avoided controversies and concentrated on the limited objective of exposing the artists and scholars to each other. The Workshop indicated the directions that such meetings would take in future. To carry forward what this beginning had accomplished, it was decided

*Birju Maharaj*



that all the participants, on returning home, would write out their definition of four terms—*amad*, *that*, *vandana* and *prastutikaran* (order of presentation)—and send them to the Kathak Kendra which would then take suitable steps to evolve definitions acceptable to all.

The Kathak Kendra felt rewarded when all those present said they expected it to take the lead and continue from where the Workshop had ended.

The Director of the Kendra also announced that from next year onwards it would observe the anniversary of Maharaj Bindadin on the day of his birth—Vasant Panchami. The decision was greeted with acclaim and offers of co-operation.

—GOPAL DAS