**Lakhia, Kumudini (17 May 1930, Bombay, India —)**

**Summary**

Kumudini Lakhia’s career as a dancer, choreographer, and teacher spans over sixty years. During this time, she brought kathak, a traditional art dance indigenous to northern India, and into the world of Euro-American modernism. The aesthetic differences between twentieth-century Euro-American cultural aesthetics, and kathak inhibited the acceptance of Kumudini Lakhia’s work in India.

**Early Training and Career**

Lakhia’s early training was with Jaipur gharana exponent Radhelal Misra, and later with the renowned Shambhu Maharaj of the Lucknow gharana. In between her training with Radhelal Misra and Shambhu Maharaj, she danced bharatanatyam, kathak, and other Indian forms with Ram Gopal in his tours to the UK and the USA. Critics often noticed the clarity of her lines, her strong presence, virtuosic spins, and subtle expressiveness. This experience of adapting to styles and stages on the European theatre circuit would feed into her later work as a choreographer.

When Lakhia initially presented her own choreography, it caused sensational backlash from conservative critics in Delhi. In time, and especially after Birju Maharaj publicly endorsed her creative contributions to his own choreographies, her innovations were appropriated into the general kathak repertory. However, her choreography remains distinctive, and her students have gone on to excel in their own explorations of new directions in dance.

**Kathak**

Kathak evolved as a solo tradition meant to be interactively performed in intimate spaces for elite dance-lovers who knew the poetic and visual images being evoked. Lakhia built on her ability to analyse kathak rules and figure out how to extend the same rules for multiple dancers without indulging in multiplication for mindless spectacle. She taught her dancers to draw attention to spaces between and around themselves, using spirals, asymmetry, and levels to increase a sense of depth and sculptural elegance.

**Legacy**

Discarding Krishna themes and coy ploys, Lakhia used structural devices within kathak to set up dialogues between characters, and varied the dynamics of rhythms to express emotional changes rather than literal mime. She chose her texts carefully so that her dances would enrich meanings rather than lose the layers so typical of abhinaya.

By focusing on the materials of the traditional form, but utilizing them in new and startling ways, by transferring narrative focus from religion and mythology to the concerns of every day middle class women, and by her use of costumes carefully designed to move fluidly with the dancers, Lakhia modernized kathak, translating its parameters into accessible but nuanced contemporaneity.

Lakhia has been awarded the civilian honour of the [Padma Shri](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Padma_Shri) in 1987; the [Sangeet Natak Akademi Award](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sangeet_Natak_Akademi_Award), India’s highest award for performers, in 1982; the [Kalidas Samman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalidas_Samman) for the year 2002-03; and the [Padma Bhushan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Padma_Bhushan) in 2010. Her company performed in major festivals from Toronto to the Kremlin and of course in India. Her services as guest-speaker, master-teacher, and choreographer are very much in demand as she continues to travel world-wide from her home in Ahmedabad and the dance school Kadamb.

**Uttara Asha Coorlawala**

List of Works

2009 two dances for Akram Khan Co. UK for the Svpanagatha festival at Sadler’s Wells, UK

2009 ‘*Punarnava’* for Kathak Kendra Repertory , New Delhi

2007 *‘ Arpan*‘performed by Kadamb at KIOI Hall in Japan

2006 Co choreographer *‘Rasa’* for Natya Dance Theatre, Chicago

2006 *‘Hagoromo’* – Feathered cloth for Yuko Inoue, from Japan.

2006 *‘Anuma‘* (to collect) for Kalpana Festival in Kolkatta

2005 *‘Mushti’* choreographed for Nirupama and Rajendra, Bangalore

2005 *Chakravuha, the story of Abhimanyu’* for Akram Khan & Co. U.K.

2004 *Ruins’* for Anurekha Dance Co. U.K. , Funded by the Midland Arts Council , UK

2003 *Samanvay*

# 2002 *Sambhawami*

2002 *Radha –Raman*

##### 2001 *Kathak Through Ages*

1999 *Fulwari* (children’s production )

1999*Panchtatva* (children’s production )

#### 1999 *Bhav Krida*

1999 *Chaturang*

1998 *Drums of Freedom* (To commemorate 50 years of India’s Independence- Gujarat State**)**

1998 *Suvarna* (For Fifty years of India’s Independence - Brazil)

1997 *Nav Rasa*

1996 *Pratibimb*

1995 *Udhav Shatak*

1995 *Venu Geet*

1993 *Sam Samvedan*

1993 *Gat Gati*

1993 *Adhar Madhur*

1993 *Golden Chains* (for Neena Gupta , London , U.K .)

1993 *Indra Dhanu* (for Nilmani Dance Centre, Leicester , U.K.)

1993  *Hun - Nari*

1992 *Shravan*

1992 *Kamayani* (Bharatiya Kala Kendra - New Delhi)

1991 *Agni*  (for Padatik , Calcutta )

1991 *Time Cycle* (for Nahid Siddiqi, Birmingham, U.K. )

1991 *Ritu Samhar* (International Dance Festival in New Delhi)

1991 *Chayan* (Festival of India in Germany)

1990 *Okha Haran* (based on Maan Bhatt tradition of Gujarat)

1989 *Bharati*

1987 *Setu*

1986 *Kathak and The Child*

1986 *Hastak*

1986 *Haveli Sangeet*

1986 *Jantar Mantar* (Apana Utsav Festival in New Delhi )

1985 *Tarana*

1985 *Bhajan*

1985 *Rachyo Raas*

1985 *The Peg*

1984 *Chharika*

1983 *Kaleidoscope* (Children’s production )

1982 *Kathak Kahe So*

1981 *Atah Kim* (restaged in 2007in Singapore, Indonesia, New Delhi)

1979 *Govind Vande* Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar

1979  *Dashavatar* (Children’s production )

1978 *Chaturang*

1978 *Yugal*

1977 *Aaradhana*

1976 *Prarambh* (For Ahmedabad Doordarshan )

1975 *Ek Thaa Gaon* (Children’s production )

1975  *Alak Malak* (for Ahmedabad Doordarshan )

1975 *Stuti*

1975 *Vriksha*  (Children’s production )

1974 *Drashtikon*

1974 *Chhaya Nat*

1974 *Baadashah Salamat*

1973 *Shakti*

##### 1973 *Dhabkar*

1972 *Prem Chakshu*

1971 *Sargam*

1971 *Panch Paaras*

1971 *Kolaahal*

1971 *Duvidha*

1970 *Venu Nad*

##### 1970 *Hori*

1969 *Variation In Thumri*

**References and further reading**

Chakravorty, Pallabi, *Bells of Change* pp.152-160 (Some of Lakhia’s innovative works are described within a book on contemporary kathak and women practitioners in Kolkatta.)

Kothari, Sunil. 1989. *Kathak. Indian Classical Dance Art*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications. (With beautiful illustrations of kathak sequences, by prominent performers, and descriptions of the form, this book also includes a history of kathak as a dance genre and of its proponents.)

Kothari, Sunil. 2001. Kathak Kim? Asks Kumudini Lakhia in *atten****dance****, 2001* *Uday Shankar and Choreography Special* Ed. Ashish Khokar, New Delhi: Ekah Printways, pp 84-87 (an interview by Sunil Kothari)

Lakhia, Kumudini. 2003. Innovations in Kathak in Kothari, Sunil, Ed. *New Directions in Indian Dance* Bombay: Marg Publications/National Centre for Performing Arts, 60-69 (Lakhia describes her choreographic intentions and motives. Illustrated with photographs.)

Shah, Reena. 2005. *Movement in Stills: The Dance and Life of Kumudini Lakhia* Ahmedabad: MapinLit. (This biography of the dancer and her dances is fluid reading and includes descriptions of her works.)