

Priya Pawar

Priya Pawar, Indian classical dancer and founder of the Pushpalata Dance Company, began studying dance at the age of four. She is versed in two schools of Indian classical dance, Kathak and Odissi. Kathak, derived from the word 'Katha' or story, originated as a form of story-telling in Northern India and later flourished as two separate schools under the patronage of Mughal and Rajput kings. Odissi, the traditional dance of the state of Orissa, is mainly a form of devotional dance.

Throughout her career, Priya has studied under India's leading teachers and exponents of Kathak and Odissi. Born and raised in Lucknow, India, Priya Pawar began training in Kathak at the age of four at the Bhatkande Maris Music College. She gained her degree or 'Nritya Vishard' in 1957 and continued studying Kathak individually from the renowned dancer Shombu Maharaj. When she was seventeen, she received a Government of India scholarship to continue training in Kathak for three years at the Bharatiya Kala Kendra in New Delhi where she obtained her 'Nritya Varidhi', or Master's Degree in 1967. During this period, she studied under Guru Sundar Prasad and Kundanlal Gangani in the 'Jaipur Gharana' style of Kathak, which grew out of the courts of the Rajput Kings. When already fluent in Kathak in her early twenties, Pawar became interested in Odissi, a dance of graceful and sculptural postures. She began intensive training for a year and a half with Guru Hare Krishna Behara and later with Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, one of Orissa's foremost Odissi teachers and dancers.

In 1969 Priya Pawar travelled and performed with her former husband, Kathak dancer Pratap Pawar, throughout the USA, South America, Europe, and Asia. She went on a solo tour of East and West Africa a year later.

Priya Pawar moved to England in 1980 and became co-director of the dance company 'Triveni' along with Pratap Pawar. Based in the UK, the company was known for its pioneering exploration of the relationship between classical Indian dance and other dance forms, in particular Kathak and Flamenco and Afro-Caribbean dance.

Priya Pawar launched her solo career in 1992 by forming the Pushpalata Dance Company in London. The company is the first of its kind to provide a platform for dancers who have trained in Britain and most of her students specialise in Kathak, Odissi and various folk idioms. Their performances have ranged from adaptations of Indian epics such as the 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata' to other poems and collaborative projects. Their inaugural performance, 'Chandalika - the Outcaste', was a dance drama written by the Indian Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore in 1938. The company has performed extensively in England at venues such as the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Watermans Arts Centre, The Place in London and The Bull in Barnet.

As a solo performer, Pawar's expression of Indian classical dance has taken shape in many innovative ways. She has worked on collaborative projects with western contemporary dance companies such as Axis and explored modern art forms such as Eurhythmy, which emphasises movement, speech and song. Some of her own works are experimental such as the performance 'Life Cycle'. The piece,

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choreographed to Bach's 'Jesu, Joy of Man', focuses on a woman reflecting on her marriage and youth. Her particular strength lies in showcasing Kathak alongside Flamenco artists such as Rosindra Doling and, more recently, Joaquin Ruiz in musical exchanges which highlight the similarities between the two dance forms. She has toured widely in India, the UK, USA, Germany, Norway, Spain, Italy, Thailand, Indonesia and South America and performs in India annually during December and January.

In addition to performing, Priya Pawar is also an established teacher of Indian dance and is the first teacher in the UK to arrange a 'Manch Pravesh' or debut performance as a showcase of her students' work. She also opened two dance schools, the Pushpalata Dance Academy in Faridabad, India, in 1992 and the Pushpalata Asociacion para la Difusion del Arte de India in Madrid in 1998. Pawar currently resides in London.