

The Courtesan - An Enigma

Dance relived... stories retold...

(Conceived & Conceptualized by Manjari Chaturvedi)

Tuesday, 19th May, 2015
Epicentre Auditorium, Gurgaon

Wednesday, 20th May, 2015
India International Centre, New Delhi

Project Report

Prepared by



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 SUFI KATHAK
FOUNDATION PRESENT

THE COURTESAN - AN ENIGMA

...dance re-lived...stories re-told
As never done before offering the audience
a unique glimpse into the enigma that was
the courtesan.

Featuring

MANJARI CHATURVEDI
Performing Darbari Kathak, the dance
of the Courtesan, known for its
delicate movements and expressions

&
NEESHA SINGH
Narrating episodes and stories from
the lives of well-known courtesans

Tuesday, 19th May 2015, 7:30 pm onwards
at Epicentre, Apparel House, Sector-44, Gurgaon

Wednesday, 20th May 2015, 6:30 pm onwards
at India International Centre, 40 Max Mueller Marg,
Lodhi Road, New Delhi

CONCEIVED AND CONCEPTUALIZED BY MANJARI CHATURVEDI

An initiative by
 SUFI KATHAK
FOUNDATION

In collaboration with
India International Centre, New Delhi
Epicentre, Gurgaon
K.L. Saigal Memorial Circle
Stories sourced from the book
"The Nautch Girls of India"
by Sri Pran Nevile

Admit two. Seating is on first come first serve basis, except the
first two rows. Children below 8 will not be allowed. Audio /
video recording and flash photography is strictly prohibited.
Please ensure your mobile phones are switched off.

Photo: Anam Mehra

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The Courtesan- An Enigma

Tuesday, May 19th, 2015

Guest of Honour

Shri Muzaffar Ali, Indian Filmmaker

Introductory Note

Shri Pran Nevile, Author and founder of K.L. Saigal Memorial Circle

Performers

Ms. Manjari Chaturvedi, Kathak Danseuse

Ms. Neesha Singh, Actor

Venue

Epicentre Auditorium, Gurgaon

Attendance

Over 200 guests

The Courtesan- An Enigma

Wednesday, May 20th, 2015

Guest of Honour

Honab'le Minister of Art Culture and Language Mr. Jitender Singh Tomar

Introductory Note

Shri Pran Nevile, Author and founder of K.L. Saigal Memorial Circle

Performers

Ms. Manjari Chaturvedi, Kathak Danseuse

Ms. Neesha Singh, Actor

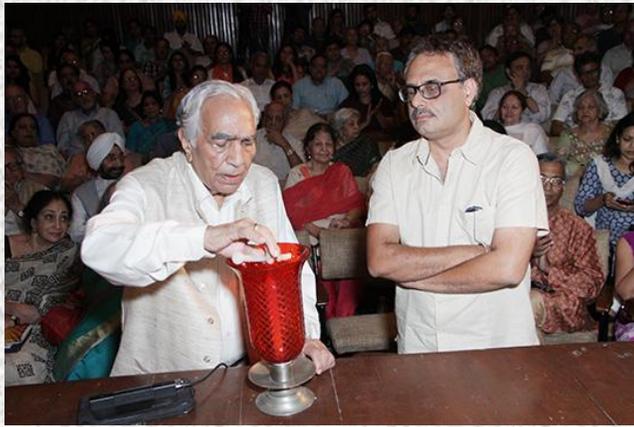
Venue

India International Centre, New Delhi

Attendance

Over 300 guests

The two day concert held on 19th & 20th May 2015 at Epicentre Auditorium, Gurgaon and India International Centre, New Delhi , began with the introductory note by Shri Pran Nevile, Author and Founder of K.L. Saigal Memorial Trust. This was followed by the lighting of the Shama by Guest of Honor, Shri Muzaffar Ali, Filmmaker and Guest of Honor, Shri Jitender Singh Tomar, Honab'le Minister of Art Culture and Language. The compere for evening introduced Sufi Kathak Foundation. She welcomed all guests for their presence and our Venue Partner K.L. Saigal Memorial Trust and India International Centre for their kind support.



About the Concert: "The Courtesan-An Enigma, dance relived ... and stories retold..."

This concert is a unique initiative by Sufi Kathak Foundation for recreating history and an era of the courtesan wherein the dance was relived by kathak danseuse Maestro Manjari Chaturvedi and the stories of the the courtesan were told by Actor Ms. Neesha Singh.

Through this concert Sufi Kathak Foundation has revived the magic of the Courtesan...the muse for poets, painters, sculptors, artists, musicians, writers, filmmakers and the creative thought at large... The concert is part of the research project on the "The Lost Songs of Courtesans" - Under this is the archival and documentation project and our efforts to remove the social stigmas associated with the courtesan and respect them for their art and as artists par excellence.

Concert featured **Manjari Chaturvedi**, who lit up the evening with an incandescent and faultless performance. It more than a dance relived; it is a story that retold. Manjari through her dance nuances recreated the Awadhi darbar. The poetic words of love explored through darbari kathak dance.

The evening started with Darbari Kathak by Manjari on the Ghazal "*Awal shab wo bazm ki raunak, shamma bhi thi parwana bhi tha'*" which left the audience awestruck, as she relived the sheer beauty of remembrances of love of a courtesan. The performance was further enhanced when Manjari Chaturvedi performed on *Firdaus -e-husn o ishq hai daaman e lucknow, Aakhon mein bas rahi hai ghazal khwar lucknow*. Darbari Kathak



relies heavily and vividly on the hands and the face for expression, her body language such as those courtesans would have used to entice commoner and royal. Manjari took one's breath away. She not only commanded the stage with a fluidity of motion, she owned it with a confidence of method.

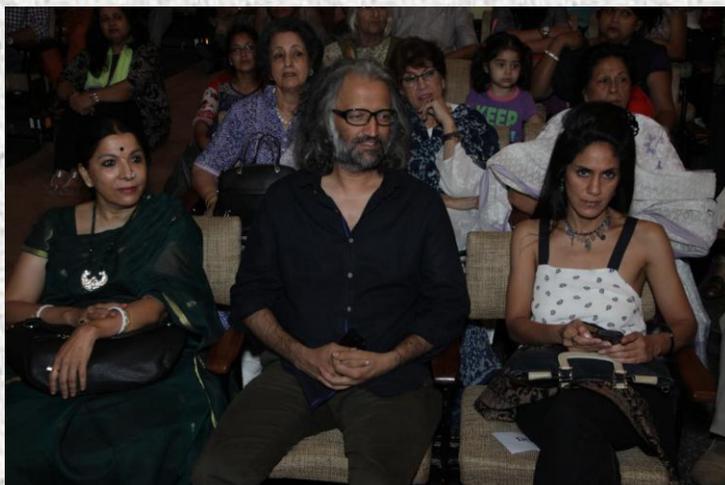
This was followed by Actor Neesha Singh, who narrated anecdotes and stories from the lives of the courtesans. She mesmerized the audience with her stunning voice and her elegant style. Neesha Singh shed light upon pre-conceived notions about courtesans, often misconstrued, such as their sensibilities, disposition and ethos including the life and times of Gauhar Jaan who was born of Armenian parents, Chanda Bibi, Rasoolan Bai and Zarina Begum.



Amidst the bursts of classical choreography, actress Neesha Singh provided commentary on the courtesan, lives that burned comet-bright, and occasionally rumbled with storms but were never dull.

The stories by Ms. Neesha Singh was followed by Darbari Kathak on *Sajan lagi tori lagan*, and *tarana in raag lalit*, and this led to uninterrupted applause from the audience in each and every sequence performed afterwards. In the last sequence of *deewana banana hai to deewana bana de*, the audience was humming along with the dance sequence and the audience rose for a standing ovation for the performance.

At the end of the concert, President of Sufi Kathak Foundation Ms. Manjari Chaturvedi thanked thanked our venue partner India International Centre and Shri Pran Nevile for their valuable support. She also mention special thanks to our Chief Guest Shri Muzaffar Ali in Epicentre and Shri Jitender Singh Tomar in IIC for their kind presence at the concert.



About Artists:

Manjari Chaturvedi:

Manjari Chaturvedi the founder President of Sufi Kathak Foundation is a leading exponent of the Indian classical dance and is acclaimed for being the creator and only performing artist of Sufi Kathak. She has combined the mysticism of Sufi traditions with classical Indian dance to create a stunning new school of performance called Sufi Kathak. Manjari has performed in more than 200 concerts all over the world including Europe (France, Germany, Portugal, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, U.K. & Ireland), the Middle East (Dubai, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, Qatar, Kuwait), South East Asia (Singapore, Malaysia, Sri Lanka) and



Central Asia (Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan) along with Australia and America. An outstanding exponent of Kathak, Manjari's expertise is in Darbari Kathak also known as Kathak of Lucknow Gharana, and is characterized by lovely costumes, and is famous for its delicate nuances of expressiveness, alluring grace in movements, eloquent *gat bhav* and its unique *abhinaya* to the accompaniment of lilting *thumri's*, *ghazals* and *holis*, which was patronized in the opulent *darbars* of Nawabs of Awadh.

Neesha Singh:

Neesha Singh is an actress, who started her career as a successful model. She did a few acclaimed Hindi films, notably M.S Sathyu's 'Kahan Kahan Se Guzar Gaye', Sagar Sarhadi's 'Bazaar' & N. Chandra's 'Ankush', before making a decision to move to television, where she had a long, successful acting career. On television she has worked with well-known names like Shyam Benegal, Balwant Gargi, Amit Khanna and Vinay Dhumale, among others. She has had starring roles in popular television serials like 'Bharat Ek Khoj', 'Choli Daman', 'Upanyaas', 'Kathasagar', 'Kashmakash', 'Bua Fatima', & in the 1st Indian made English television serial on Star Plus in India, 'A Mouthful of Sky'. She has also hosted long running, successful shows like 'Mansi' & Rangoli. Neesha Singh had the leading role of Rani Jindan Kaur, widow of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, in Gursharan Das's play 'Larins Sahib'. Directed by Rahul D'cunha, it was the 1st Indian play in English that was invited to be showcased at the Edinburgh Fringe festival. Neesha has a long, keen interest in yoga, & holistic health & beauty. She has a published book on teaching yoga to children through storytelling & drama, 'Good Morning Sun'. She now acts in select projects, the most recent being a part in noted danseuse Manjari Chaturvedi's concert 'The Courtesan - an Enigma'

Sufi Kathak Foundation:

The Sufi Kathak Foundation is a non-profit registered society (Regd. 61883, exempt from tax under section 80g and 12A), founded by Manjari Chaturvedi, to create awareness about India's intangible heritage in music and dance and preserve the gradually fading 700 year Sufi Traditions in Music. SKF has organized more than 12 concerts in last 5 years and is been associated with 219 artists from all over India. SKF aims to create a world of cultural unity, by spreading the secular message of the Sufis and also help in initiating children and orienting the youth to become self-employed through arts - dance and music. It provides assistance and support to needy artists and students by giving scholarships, pensions and medical support, in order to enable them to pursue classical music and dance. In last 5 years SKF has supported around 14 musicians and keen learners under the various Schemes offered by it. SKF seeks to evolve a humanist outlook and create centers, organize training classes, workshops and musical concerts to promote Sufi music, *Qawwali*, Sufi Kathak, and folk & classical dance across the world.

The Courtesan – An Enigma, dance relived... stories retold...

Audience Response

Proud to have watched you perform and Manjari Chaturvedi you are awesome and took us all back to that era . The entire program was so beautifully choreographedthanks for bring this to the forefront .All the very best for your future performances and God bless you.
Anandhi Dasraj



As always you are an enigma Manjari You captured in soul n beauty the quintessence of a courtesan with your expressions n fluid movements
Preeti Kaur

...I was at the concert and I would say what a performance, you gave insight into lives of these very talented ladies of bygone era and revived their art, the sets created were mesmerising and more than that was your performance, left everyone spellbound

A graceful dancer with stunning beauty, excellent footwork, precise timing and intelligent lighting choice.

Rajkamal

What a spellbound performance it was yesterday...

Ashok

ଝରଝର
Wonderful performance...just mesmerized
Ankita



An evening of darbari katha, a glimpse of that beautiful soul travelling through the history, telling us stories from the lives of courtesans. She left us mesmerized with her charm and humility. A dancer par excellence. An artist that reminds us, a work of art is not entertainment. When an artist intends to take it beyond the senses, you feel peace, love and divine. I feel so fortunate to witness this evening, watch you dance before my eyes. I was so not into my senses to tell you how much I adore you and love you.
Pratiksha Kumar



Media Response:

The concert generated wonderful media response with the leading newspapers giving their stories. This reaffirmed our faith in doing these unusual projects which appeal to both the audiences and media.

Deccan Herald- 28th May 2015

Business Standard – 18th May 2015

The Asian Age



DECCAN HERALD
Thursday 28 May 2015
News updated at 10:55 AM IST

Dance relives the stories of courtesans

Rishi Lakra, New Delhi, May 26, 2015, DKNIS
The word 'courtesan' was redefined by Manjari Chaturvedi with her elegant gestures and spellbinding moves of Darbari form of Kathak, at the India International Centre, recently. Her ghungroos brought alive the tales of the courtesans, their life and style and their cultural pursuits.

The diffused light of the lamp created a romantic ambience, the green illumination – at times cascading on the green angakha, symbolising the ornate royal court. Chaturvedi lit up the evening with an incandescent performance of love, admiration, infatuation and separation. Her shringara rasa, the elaborate act of dressing up was stupely

Chaturvedi, 40, claims to be the sole practitioner of 'Sufi kathak', a form of dance she created that blends the gestural storytelling of Indian kathak dance with the spinning meditation of Sufism. The event, 'The Courtesan-An Enigma', was based on the book Nautch Girls of India: Dancers, Singers, Playmates by Fran Nevile, one of the few documented evidences of the courtesan culture of medieval India.

"It is an initiative that combines the two extremes of traditional art and modern technology in a unique amalgamation to make the youth and the masses aware of this dying art form," Chaturvedi tells Metrofile.

Actor Neesha Singh narrated the anecdotes and stories from the life of the courtesan. She mesmerised the audience with her stunning voice and her style. Singh shed light upon pre-conceived notions about courtesans, often misconstrued, such as their sensibilities, lifestyles, emotions, disposition and ethos including the life and times of Gauhar Jaan who was born of Armenian parents, Chanda Bibi, Rasoolan Bai and Zarina Begum.

Caught in the mood of the moment, the audience started humming the song when

Business Standard

Courtesans through a dance concert

Press Trust of India | New Delhi | May 18, 2015 Last Updated at 12:42 IST

The enticing dance form of Kathak witnessed in the royal courtrooms of a bygone era is set to come alive in a two day concert that begins here tomorrow.

Conceived and conceptualised by popular Kathak dancer Manjari Chaturvedi,

"The Courtesan-An Enigma" seeks to revive the waning art by offering a glimpse into the lives of the hitherto courtesans through the medium of Darbari Kathak, who would also be performing at the event said.

Darbari Kathak, an alluring and abstract form of Kathak, is known for its delicate movements and expressions, and characterised by exquisite costumes.

"Now it is rarely performed by classical dancers. The concert seeks to re-capture that grandeur, some rare and original compositions that reverberated through the performing arts realm in yesteryears," she said.

Along with the dance, the event will also feature actress Neesha Singh narrating anecdotes from the life and times of a few famous courtesans.

"Many preconceived notions about courtesans, often misconstrued, such as their sensibilities, lifestyles, emotions, disposition and ethos would be challenged as light is shed upon numerous aspect of their lives," the danceuse said.

The event is scheduled to be held at the Epicentre in Gurgaon on May 19 followed by a repeat performance at the India International Centre on the following day here.

THE ASIAN AGE

8:52 AM, Thursday May 28, 2015

Event to bring alive courtesans' kathak

May 19, 2015 | PTI | New Delhi



The concert is conceived and conceptualised by Kathak dancer Manjari Chaturvedi. The enticing dance form of Kathak witnessed in the royal courtrooms of a bygone era is set to come alive in a two day concert that begins on Tuesday.

Conceived and conceptualised by popular Kathak dancer Manjari Chaturvedi, "The Courtesan-An Enigma" seeks to revive the waning art by offering a glimpse into the lives of the hitherto courtesans through the medium of Darbari Kathak.

"It is an initiative to not only make the youth aware of this dying art form but also develop the interest of generation X, that will find ways of preservation of the same," Chaturvedi, who would also be performing at the event said.

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DNA -18th May 2015

Hindustan Times: 25th May 2015

The Statesman



Courtesans through a dance concert

Monday, 18 May 2015 - 9:37am IST | Place Delhi | Agency: PTI

The event is scheduled to be held at the Epicentre in Gurgaon on May 19 followed by a repeat performance at the India International Centre on the following day in Delhi.

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Along with the dance, the event will also feature actress Neesha Singh narrating anecdotes from the life and times of a few famous courtesans. "Many preconceived notions about courtesans, often misconstrued, such as their sensibilities, lifestyles, emotions, disposition and ethos would be challenged as light is shed upon numerous aspect of their lives," the danceuse said.

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Grace personified

Manjari Chaturvedi on May 20, 2015



Courtesan-An Enigma: Dance, Stories, Songs... Neesha Singh, Chaturvedi performing Darbari Kathak, the dance of the Courtesan, seeks to revive the waning art by offering a glimpse into the lives of the hitherto courtesans through the medium of Darbari Kathak. The event, supported by Vogue Fashionista Circle, will first convene at the Epicentre and the India International Centre on the consecutive evenings.

Conceived and conceptualised by Manjari Chaturvedi, the curatorial theme was based on the book Nautch Girls of India: Dancers, Singers, Playmates, written by Fran Nevile, who has helped there to revitalize the preservation with a setting prior to the dance of the courtesan known for its delicate movements and expressions, characterised by exquisite costumes and how it originated in royal courtrooms of a bygone era. Nevile mentioned that the beauty and grandeur of the court could not be captured by those who would bring to life some rare and original compositions of Ghazal, Thumri and Dadra that reverberated through the art and performance realm in yesteryears, which include the anecdotes and stories from the life and times of a few famous courtesans.

Both Neesha and Manjari started dancing in the author's courtrooms and Manjari began the evening with the dance "Nautch Nautch" by Lakshmi Narayan, as a tribute to her grand aunt, Neesha Singh, representing Gauhar Jaan, came next and ended her narration with "My name is Gauhar Jaan", being the audience about the beautiful Gauhar Jaan, Chanda Bibi and Zarina Begum, who were remarkable stories in their own rights. Neesha narrated a story that offered the audience a unique glimpse into the lives of the courtesans, who "interacted" with "Nautch" Kathak, adorned with "Kathak" say, "Chandabai" (Chandabai) (Chandabai)...

There was a Tarana in rag Lata, a Thumri depicting Khawata Nazkiya "Your steps are mere dust..." and a Dardana "Nautch" "Nautch Nautch" by Lakshmi Narayan. "I beautifully by Manjari Chaturvedi An Enigma set to Kathak 'The Enigma', as opened by Neesha, who was the epitome of grace and style. The event seemed but a touch of appreciation that connected many preconceived derogatory notions about courtesans.

The Statesman

PEOPLE'S FRAGMENT, AMBIE'S SESSION

Thursday, 28 May 2015
Updated 11:41 AM IST

Manjari Chaturvedi on May 20, 2015



Courtesan-An Enigma: Dance, Stories, Songs... Neesha Singh, Chaturvedi performing Darbari Kathak, the dance of the Courtesan, seeks to revive the waning art by offering a glimpse into the lives of the hitherto courtesans through the medium of Darbari Kathak. The event, supported by Vogue Fashionista Circle, will first convene at the Epicentre and the India International Centre on the consecutive evenings.

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The Hindu

Millennium Post

THE HINDU

The untold stories of darbari kathak

STAFF REPORTER

PRINT | T

Sufi-Kathak dancer Manjari Chaturvedi will perform the dance of the courtesan, Darbari Kathak, which seeks to re-capture the beauty and grandeur of the royal courts and bring to life some rare and original compositions that reverberated through the realm of art and performance in yesteryears. The performance will also have stories being re-told by actress Neesha Singh about the lives of well-known courtesans.

The concert titled "The Courtesan - An Enigma" Dance re-lived, Stories re-told, is part of a series of the archival and documentation project "The Lost Songs of Courtesans". It is an initiative that combines the two extremes of traditional art and modern technology in a unique amalgamation to make the youth and the masses aware of this dying art form.

By narrating anecdotes and stories from the life and times of a few famous courtesans, Ms Singh seeks to end pre-conceived notions about courtesans, often misconstrued, such as their sensibilities, lifestyles, emotions, disposition and ethos, as light is shed upon lesser known aspects of their lives.

There are two shows of the performance. The first at Epicentre, Apparel House, Sector-44, Gurgaon on May 19, and the second at the India International Centre on May 20. Both performances will start at 7 p.m.

Actress Neesha Singh will seek to end pre-conceived notions about courtesans by narrating stories about their lives

millenniumpost

NO HALF TRUTHS

A royal affair

18 May 2015, The Hindu, New Delhi

Get ready for a classical treat as Manjari Chaturvedi will be taking the Capital stage with Darbari style of Kathak that represents the dance of the courtesans in the two-day show titled The Courtesan - An Enigma. The concert that will also feature actress Neesha Singh.

The event will showcase the allure and abstract dance form of Kathak. The dancer will enthrall her description with hand gestures and beautiful expressions to a give lift to her darbari style.

A dance style known for its delicate movements and expressions, and characterised by exquisite costumes, it originated in royal courtrooms of a bygone era. Manjari brings back this enticing dance form to the stage.

The beauty and grandeur of the royal courts will be re-captured as some of the rare and original compositions that reverberated through the arts and performance realm in yesteryear will take over the stage.

Neesha Singh will be narrating anecdotes and stories from the life and times of a few famous courtesans. Many preconceived notions about courtesans, often misconstrued, such as their sensibilities, lifestyles, emotions, disposition and ethos would be challenged as light will be shed upon numerous lesser known aspects of their lives.

The forms of Ghazal, thumri and dadra always have great lyrical value. The poems often are so powerful that they have for centuries led social revolution and broken away the social, communal, religious differences among people and showed them the way to reach salvation. The lyrics are mostly in Urdu, Awadhi Braj Bhasha and Punjabi (or Tappi) lyrics. As the dialects are loosing their shimmer, they may disappear soon.

This concert will feature the dance of the courtesan, Darbari Kathak along with narrative slots inundated with rich stories, offering the audience a unique glimpse into the lives of the courtesans.

Commenting on the concert, Manjari said, "The Lost Songs of the Courtesans is an initiative that collaborate the two extremes of traditional art and modern technology, together in a unique amalgamation to not only make the youth and the masses aware of this dying art form but also develop the interest of generation X, that progresses with technology and find ways of preservation of the same." So mark the dates and make sure you witness this royal treat!



The Sponsors

The concert has been made possible with the kind contribution and support of our sponsors and partners. Our contributors and sponsors are the backbone of any event organized by the Sufi Kathak Foundation. By contributing to Sufi Kathak Foundation, their support is directed towards the preservation of centuries old traditional arts and culture that we at Sufi Kathak Foundation, strive to preserve in their original form and ensure its continuity for the future generations of this country and the world. Our sponsors for this concert include:

Supported by



Ministry of Culture, Government of India

Venue Support by

K.L. Saigal Memorial Trust

Epicentre, Gurgaon

India International Centre, New Delhi

Event organized & managed by:



Sufi Kathak Foundation

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