The Courtesan - An Enigma

Dance relived... stories retold...

(Conceived & Conceptualized by Manjari Chaturvedi)

Wednesday, 31st, August 2016 India Habitat Centre, New Delhi

Project Report

Prepared by



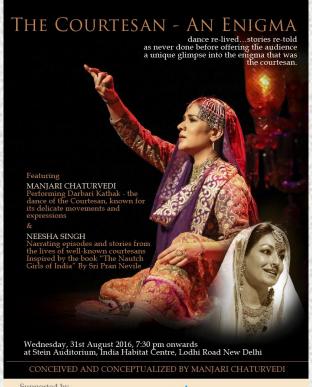
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The Courtesan- An Enigma

Wednesday, August 31st, 2016

Chief Guest

Honab'le Minister of Art Culture and Language Mr. Kapil Mishra

Guest of Honour

Honab'le Member of Parliament & Former Minister for Law and Justice Dr. Ashwani Kumar

Introductory Note

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

Performers

Ms. Manjari Chaturvedi, Kathak Danseuse Ms. Neesha Singh, Actor

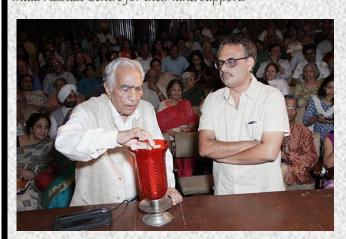
Venue

India Habitat Centre, New Delhi

Attendance

Over 400 guests

The one day concert held on 31st August 2016 at India Habitat Centre, New Delhi, in association with KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, 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 Chief Guest, Shri Kapil Mishra, Honab'le Minister of Art Culture, Language and Tourism. 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 Habitat Centre for their kind support.



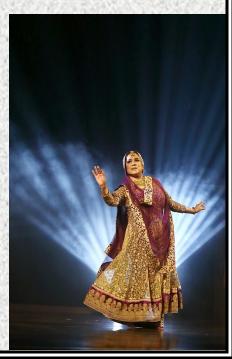


About the Concert: "The Courtesan-An Enigma, dance relived ... and stories retold..."

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 e 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.



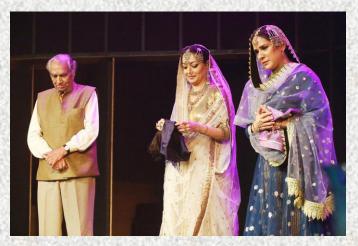


Amidst the bursts of classical choreography, actress Neesha Singh provided commentary on the courtesan, lives that burned cometbright, and occasionally rumbled with storms but were never dull.

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 deeewana 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 our sponsors KLM Royal Dutch Airlines and venue partnerShri Pran Nevile for their valuable support. She also mention special thanks to our Chief Guest Shri Kapil Mishra and Guest of Honor Dr. Ashwani Kumar 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 opulant 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

अभी सूफी कत्थक का बेहतरीन मंचन देखा, IHC के Stein Auditorium में प्रसिद्ध सूफी नृत्यांगना मंजूरी चतुर्वेदी ने दर्शकों को अभिभृत कर दिया। कत्थक में नृतन प्रयोग हैं मंजरी की विधा, वेशभूषा राजसी दरबारों की और बेहद कीमती किन्तु सामायिक है। मंच पर धुंधलके और प्रकाश का नृतन प्रयोग "निश्बद" करता है। अलंकृत गीत, गज़ल मधुर हैं। मंजरी की भाव प्रधान भंगिमाएं बारीक और नज़ाकत से भरपूर हैं। शमा और परवाने की अदायगी पानी पर तैरती प्रतीत होती है। मंजरी का लय को पैरों पर ठीक पकड़ना कत्थक की जान है, लाइट्स इफैक्ट्श पूरे शो की आत्मा हैं, जिसमें मंजरी अद्वितिय हैं। आपको नृत्य में नृतन परीक्षणों की लम्बी यात्रा तय करने की शुभकामनाएँ। Raj Kamal



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

Watching you was a visual treat. You are an epitome of grace and a performer par excellence. Looking forward to your next show.

Vandana Thapar Bhalla

What a spectacular show... Everything great... Dancing music singing and delightful recitation by Nisha! Wishing you all the success always! Indu Shrikent



क्राल्य

Wonderful performance...just mesmerized Ankita







I was truly mesmerized by your dance.Who says ANGELS don't live on earth .God bless – Swadesh Mishra

Loved every moment of the mesmerising show! Jayant Krishna

What grace. And elegance! A sublime bliss. Suraiya Hussain

It was an excellent programme. Superb. R.K. Jain

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.



'Give courtesans the respect they deserve'

ua 30, 2016, DHNS Performing arts

Disappointed by the representation of courtesans in popular discourse, especially Hindi films, eight years ago, Chaturvedi decided to take up a project to accord them a status of respect. Named 'The Courtesan – An Enigma', she gave her first performance, two years ago, on the theme.

"As a Kathak dancer, I had come across the intricacies of the courtesan's dance "As a Kathak dancer, I had come across the intricacies of the courtesan's dance, 20 years ago, when I met the octopenarian Zarina Begum, one of the last surviving courtesans, at an event in Lucknow. But I could never dedicate myself to their cause. It was only eight years ago that I realised that no other Kathak dancer had taken up the cause of the courtesan," she tells Metrolife, adding, "When I suggested Begum that we perform together on stage, she was overwhelmed, and all she said was Banarasi saree pehenkar stage pe gaane ka mann hai, and she sang for one of my dance performances."

Adding elements and stories from the lives of five courtesans to her dance form of darbar Kathak. Chaturvedi is all set to perform in the city, alongside actor Neeshas Singh who will arratte the anecdotes and stories of courtesans including Cheshas Bibi, Rasoolan Bia, Jaddan Bai and Zarina Begum. "She will shed light upon pre-conceived notions about courtesans, to fice misconstructs such as there." es and disposition. And I hope to relive the deep know dance and music of the courtesans of the royal Indian courts," says Chaturvedi

When she set out to research, she couldn't get much material except select extracts from the book. Nautch Girls of India' by Pran Nevile. "There was hardly any literature or videos available. So I had to recreate a lot of moves like tukra and salaami from Kathak that was part of the ancient style of the dance," says the 40-year-old.

"I don't think they were mere dancing girls or entertaining women. We need to give them the respect that they deserve. I am striving to change the perception," adds Chaturvedi, who has performed in over 300 concerts.

Catch 'The Courtesan - An Enigma' at Stein Auditorium, India Habitat Centre, on August 31 at 7.30 pm.



In the company of the tawaif: Recreating the magic with darbari kathak



, when she met the octogenarian Zarina Begum, one of the last survivil at an event in Lucknow. Manjari says she was struck by the Lucknow resar's humility. "When I suggested that we perform together on stage, elmed, and felt that I was according "too much respect" to someone lit





THOSE LOST ANKLETS



☆☆☆☆☆ ♣o A A A ₩ Manjari Chaturvedi's dance recital called The Courtesan-An Enigma relived the era of darbari kathak. She speaks to Ila Sankrityayan about the social stigmas attached to courtesans that led to the destruction of this artform

Despite high aptitude, women artistes were toned down as mere nautch girls in the pages of performing arts' history, while their male counterparts continue to earn recognition as Ustads. Manjari through her heart-warming performance questions the stigma attached to

Enigmo by Manjari at Stein Auditorium with graceful performance of arban kinks wood the audience. It was well complimented by the narration of anecdotes and stories by actress Neesha Singh. She messmerised the audience with her stumning voice and her elegant style. She shed light upon preconceived notions about courtesans, often misconstrued, such as their sensibilities and disposition.

On the notes of Neesha Singh, Manjari performed darbari kathak' which is a more embellished form of Kathak. Her expressive and graceful dance performance made the ancient texts alive on stage. The performance relive the music and dance of royal courts, the deep knowledge in poetry, dance and music, the exorbitant apparel of the courtes ans studded with expensive gems.

This concert was conceptualized and created by Maniari. "This is an unusual subject, a subject that has This concert was conceptualized and created by Manjari. "This is an unusual subject, a subject that has always been brushed away as it has many social stigmas attached to it"; the danseuse said. This concert is part of a research project of Manjari, on the 'The Lost Songs of the Courtesans'. 'Under this series we archive and document the artform. Our efforts are to remove the social stigmas associated with the courtesan, and give them due respect as artists par excellences, 'she added. Alt his was done and talked about while the audiences were entertained by beautifully choreographed dance sequences, and stories told, which would prompt them to think why history shortchanged these women who were great

The life and times of Gauhar Jaan, who was born of Armenian parents, Chanda Bibl, Rasooian Bal, Jaddan Bal and Zarina Begum was retold by Neesha. And the poetry by Behzad Lakhnavi, Wajid Ali Shah, Arzoo Lakhnavi and others were also used in the performance. "Neesha is playing a part in my production as a story teller and encating the larger than life character of Gauhar Jaan. the famous courtesan from Calcutta", Manjari said.

"Courtesans were woman artistes, classically trained, who danced and sang with panache. The y were the style icons of their times and they even customised the clothes and the jewellery for them", she said.

They entertained at a time when there were no films, no television and no multimedia. These women, hence, had the same status of the film stars of the current time", she asserted

For Manjari among her various documentation projects, this project is most difficult. This is an archival documentation project. At the same time a performing art should be shared with the audiences to keep it alive. Its difficult because it involves a social stigms of fallen women discarded by society, simply because of a mindset that hasn't been thought of, questioned, discussed, debated as an artform. Till date we do not have any videos of the mujra performances by the erstwhile courtesans, everything is available only, as a bollywood version, or as hearsay, and we all know how far moved that would be from the original. More so because our image of a courtesan is largely that of what has been depicted in our films", she said.

While talking about the era of darbari kathak and its negligence, she said, "The performing art of the courtesan, darbari kathak' is one that has been destroyed by public neglect. As a remnant from the British Raj, an anglicised class of Indians frowned upon the ways of these women whose art was dominated by the thought of shringar and romance; she said.

Darbari Kathak has also been brought alive, by Manjari 's endeavour, "Darbari kathak relies heavily and Usi dan redutan was and Oeer for Oegon and E. Or hadjain 's endeavoor.' Led to resultak Neiser leveny' by vividify on the hands and the face for expression and also the dancer must be exquisitely costumed. The costumes have been designed with references from the erstwhile rare paintings and very few pictures available of the courtesans from the 18th-20th century', said Manjari.

The repertoire used poetry of the 19th and 20th century poets keeping in tune with the era that was of the courtesns. The compositions have been specially selected and arranged by me to represent the era. They are beautifully sung by Radhika Chopra', the dancer said. The courtesan, the poetry, with the interlacing of Persian and Awadhi language influence that touched the soul, the music - sphasal, addra and thumri gayaki, where each note resonated the singer's emotions, never failed to captivate the audience.

thumi gayaki, where each note resonated the singer's emotions, never failed to captivate the audience.

On the scenario of darbari kathak, Manjari commented strongly that, "The current generations of the erstwhile male court dancers talk about the family lineage with a sense of pride extolling the greatness of their forefathers as dancers in the royal courts. At the same time the generations of the women court dancers live with a sense of shame never disclosing their lineage or any connection with the erstwhile courts. Somewhere the gender discrimination in the field of arts had existed and had never been addressed, consequently this sect of women were always ostracised from the society and considered lesser than their contemporary men. The disdain and apathy of a callous society had subjected them to a life of obscurity. Not having given them an opportunity to showcase their art, it had also dissuaded them to train their succeeding generations in these forms. As a result, these rare treasures, gradually lost forever. It is high time for us to question this. Today most people would invite a film actress to their forum with pride and at the same time an erstwhile courtesan will be considered inappropriate, why this inequality for performing artists; she asked. inequality for performing artists", she asked.

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:

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Event organized & managed by:



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