



Indian Council for Cultural Relations
presents

A Century of Indian Dance: 1901-2000

*The Mohan Khokar
Dance Collection*



Foreword



Mohan Khokar's Legacy

Mohan Khokar in his lifetime collected a huge corpus of literature on the history and heritage of Indian dance, probably the largest single collection in the country. His son Ashish Khokar is himself a dance critic and dance historian of repute, and has for many years been seeking a suitable institution where this unique collection could be permanently housed. It is indeed strange that no institution has so far come forth.

The Mohan Khokar Dance Collection contains a variety of materials including books, posters, artefacts, music and gramophone records. It also has over two lakh photographs taken by Mohan Khokar in his lifetime, some tape-recordings of iconic dancers such as Ram Gopal, Uday Shankar and so on. This represents a magnificent Collection which needs to be carefully preserved and promoted.

A small part of this Collection is being presented in an exhibition entitled "A Century of Indian Dance: 1901-2000". A catalogue has been carefully prepared for this, which itself is a valuable document. I sincerely hope that this exhibition will not only bring this remarkable Collection to the notice of the artistic and academic community in the capital and in the country, but will also expedite locating a suitable home for this Collection.

Ashish Khokar has for 25 years maintained and safeguarded this Collection and also regularly brings out an annual journal *AttenDance* which chronicles some of the younger generation rising dancers. I warmly commend Ashish Khokar for the valuable work that he is doing and I am sure that this catalogue and the exhibition will be widely appreciated, internationally.

– Dr. Karan Singh, M.P.

President-ICCR

Chancellor, Benares Hindu University;

Former Tourism and Culture Minister

and Ambassador to USA; President-Auroville.

Chairman, Parliamentary Committee on Ethics.



Mohan Khokar, about whom much has been said and written, was a son of the soil, with the heart of an artist. The dances of India were so obvious a passion that he chose to learn dance at a time when few from the North and almost no male would consider it a profession. He adapted to the South, married M.K. Saroja, a jewel among the young dancers of the time, one who had learnt the ancient dance art of the South from a traditional nattuvanar, in a way he had not. This alliance brought together multi dimensional impulses and Mohanji flourished as a rasika, a writer, an administrator, a husband and father, a friend of dancers across the sub-continent and abroad and most of all, as a collector of paraphernalia attached to the dance and its performance.

He was a pioneer in the writing about India's dance forms. In the books he wrote his love for the dance was obvious, as was the enquiring mind of an outsider that sought details that seemed obvious to the traditional practitioner. He therefore unravelled some of the mysteries of the forms to a world in India and abroad that wished to know more.

Mohanji's collection on matters related to dance and its performance is one man's pride and joy in the world of dance about him. He relished its fragrance, tried to capture its dates in pamphlets and posters, in the various moods of artists he saw, in their moments of glory and in their engagement with what challenged them. He was also proud to be amongst them, to be photographed with the gurus he loved, those that held in their hands the torches of our tradition.

His son, Ashish holds the collection zealously. He understands its worth and wishes for it to be housed with dignity in a world that has no patience for the past. He is motivated to see this done in his lifetime. Perhaps the best thing for the collection is that people see it and claim it! We must care to own what legitimately are the treasures of our nation. Part of these tangible and non-tangible treasures are the histories that they made. The Mohan Khokar Collection is one such that upholds the history and needs our collective voice, collective ownership to see it established in a place of pride where future generations will know what the past did and how they did it.

– Km. Leela Samson (*Dancer and Chair-person Sangeet Natak Akademi*)



Vision

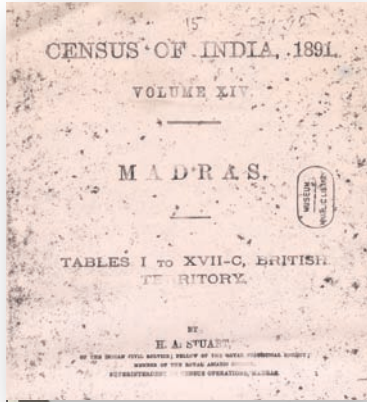
Mohan Khokar (1924–1999) pioneered dance documentation in India. He learnt Kathak and the Uday Shankar style in Lahore and Bharatanatyam at Kalakshetra in Madras. He was the earliest Indian authority on Indian dance, writing nationally on dance for magazines, journals and newspapers. As he was his own photographer too, he illustrated articles and books with appropriate pictures. In his lifetime, he took over 200,000 photos, collected 50,000 brochures and 25,000 press-clips and also saved priceless manuscripts and books. He wrote five definitive books plus thousands of articles on dance and set syllabi for universities, which are still in use. He mentored many dancers, researchers and scholars, and he saved certain dance-forms from extinction. Some of his taped recordings with masters-no-more are the only records of their life and times, in their own voices. He helped organise special events, festivals and dance seminars that remain a reference point. He contributed significantly to our understanding of Indian dance in its totality.

Mission

The Mohan Khokar Dance Collection (MKDC) is hailed as India's single largest dance holding by the Lincoln Centre, New York; The Dance Museum, Stockholm; and UNESCO's Dance Council, Paris. Painstakingly built from the 1930s – much before India became independent or any national institutions were born – the Collection is amazing in its content and scope. It has rare material beyond imagination and compare: the first prospectuses of leading dance institutions, brochures, handbills, posters, press-clips dating from the 1900s onwards, letters, memorabilia, books, Ph.D. theses sourced from their writers. There are paintings, sketches, Chola bronzes, along with representations of dance in everyday life (textiles, fire-crackers, stamps, matchboxes), making it a living festival and celebration of Indian dance. Add costumes, art works, gramophone records, dolls, masks and India's first and only dance museum is all but assembled. It now only needs a permanent home so future generations can learn and benefit.

Devadasis

Devadasis were complete artistes, knowledgeable about music, dance, literature, costumes and make-up. For centuries, the temples were their base and also their patron.



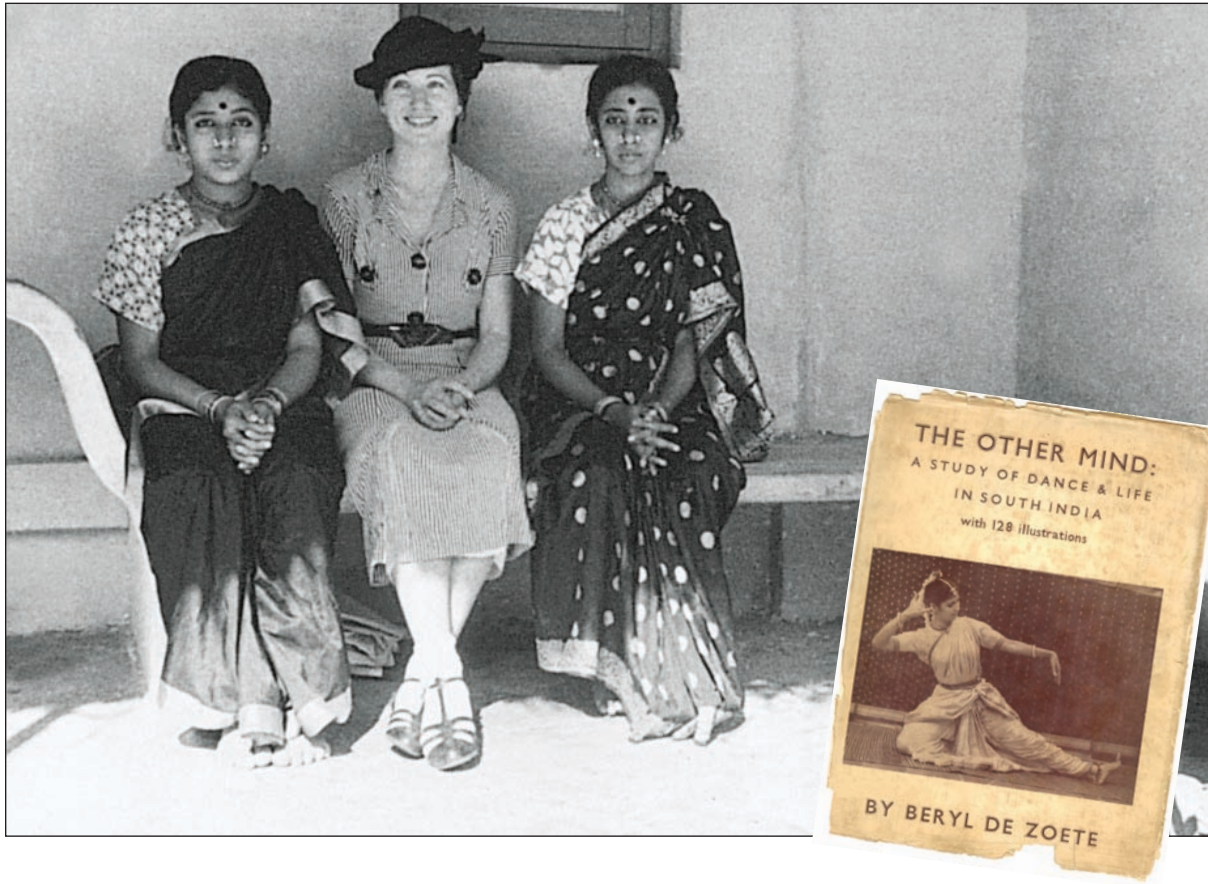
CLOCKWISE:

Young devadasi wards learn Ribbon Natyam! A form of kollatam, popular for young girls to learn and play act with. Circa 1910.

A set of talented devadasis were part of the dowry of Chimnabai, a Tanjore princess who was married to the Maharaja of Baroda, Sayajirao Gaekwad III, in 1883. The devadasis stayed back and entertained the Court and thus Bharatanatyam came to north and west India. Devadasis dancing and singing. Circa 1889.

The Census of India, 1891, Vol. XIV, Madras, found in the Egmore Library, Madras, reflects the status of dancers then, through a detailed listing. The MKDC contains all these materials and more.





CLOCKWISE:

Lakshmanma of Pichchaya Pillai school welcomes her audiences.

Tanjore Balasaraswati (1918-84), hailing from the Devadasi community, regalled audiences in dance and music, such was her impeccable lineage. A true artiste, she had no qualms in undertaking various roles, even the gypsy (kurathi) in dance dramas.

Swarna Saraswati, a leading light of her times, later shifted to Delhi.

Bhanumathi and Varalakshmi pose with the Dutch traveller Beryl de Zoete, who wrote about them in her book that was later widely read and quoted.



Pioneers

LEFT AND BELOW LEFT:

It was in 1922, on a visit to India that Victor Dandre and Anna Pavlova lamented: There is no evidence of India's famed dances... all we could see, were snippets of nautch. The temple dances were all but history. Anna Pavlova, however, went back to her base in Paris and London and created lasting impressions of Indian dances, partnering an unknown Indian painter, Uday Shankar. Thus, Anna Pavlova accidentally discovered India's superstar-to-be of dance.

Ted Shawn, pioneer of American modern dance, remained a close friend and collaborator of Mohan Khokar.



RIGHT AND BELOW RIGHT:

La Meri came to India and discovered Ram Gopal. She took him with her on her world tour. Thus these foreigners were Pioneers in helping and establish Indian dancers who became iconic names.

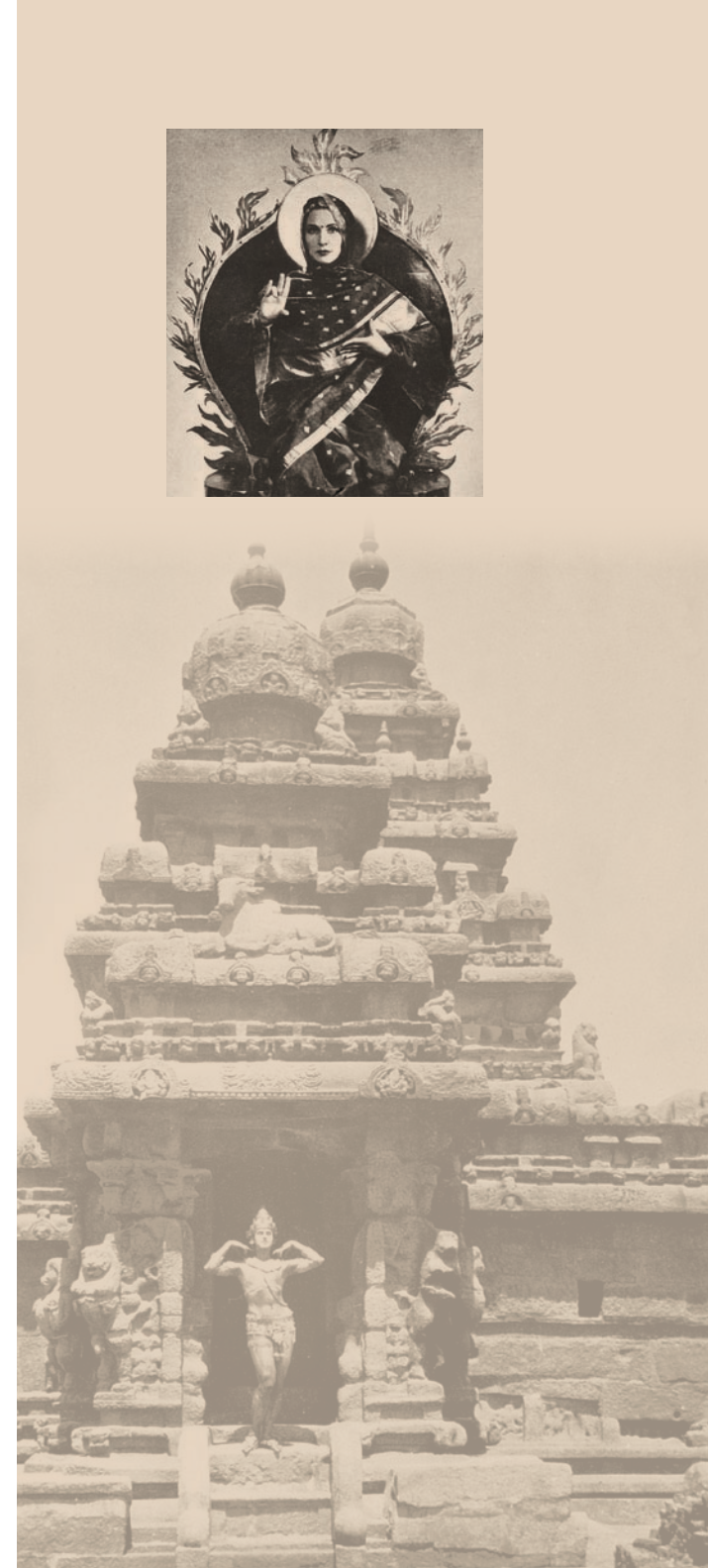
Soon, other foreigners, from America and Australia, were inspired by Indian dance and slowly wove short pieces into their "Oriental" repertoires.

It was thanks again to Anna Pavlova that Rukmini Devi first learnt some Western Ballet. On a ship sailing to Australia Cleo Nordi, Pavlova's principal soloist, gave Rukmini Devi lessons in basic ballet, much before she danced Bharatanatyam at her debut on 30th December 1935.

FACING PAGE:

Dancers like the American pioneers Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn travelled to India in 1926. They stayed long to sample its arts and then created lasting works like, "Marwari Dance", "Radha", "Krishna" and "Shiva Nataraja". Ted Shawn had a huge metal circle of fire cast in Mahabalipuram and shipped it back to the USA, where he stood within it to perform "Shiva Nataraja".

Ted Shawn exchanged many letters and memorabilia with Mohan Khokar over a 40-year period. They shared views on dance and respected each other's works.



JOHN CHRISTIAN, Personal Representative

FOUNDER • DIRECTOR OF THE JACOB'S PILLOW DANCE FESTIVAL
DANCER • TEACHER • CHOREOGRAPHER • LECTURER • AUTHOR

Winter Studio:

Box 877

Eustis, Florida

Tel. ELgin 7-3029

April 11th, 1961.

TED

Shawn

Dear Mohan Khokar:

I have just received your airletter of April 3rd, and it is perfectly all right to send back the photostat copy of RUTH ST DENIS--PIONEER & PROPHET when you are finished with it.

By an unusual bit of good luck I have acquitted a copy of my book GODS WHO DANCE, published in 1929, and long out of print. This I am glad to LEND you but will ask that you return it to me when you have read it and copied any parts you wish to copy. This is my only "lending copy" and so I will need it back. I am also sending you as a GIFT a copy of my newest book ONE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHT STANDS, which are tales of my touring years, and include brief episodes of our five months in India in 1926.

At that time, due to the long "anti-Nautch" campaign of the British and those Indians who were currying favor with the British, there was little dance to be seen, as you will see by reading these books. We had read everything available in English before going to India on The Dance of India, and during those five months in India talked to everyone and anyone to get as much information on the subject as possible. But here again, you will see that it was pitifully scarce, and so I need not apologise for the book, since it was all the information available at that time. The contrast between the state of dance in India in 1926 and in 1961 is indeed dramatic!

I have booked Nala Najan & Company for Jacob's Pillow this summer. He had a U.S. Debut in New York in February and had a very warm response from a sold out house and most favorable critical reviews in the press. I have been in correspondence with Balasaraswati, and IF she can get enough other dates in the U.S. following an engagement in Japan, I may be able to present her at Jacob's Pillow this summer also.

I will be most eager to see a copy of your finished work, and feel that it will be a valuable contribution to dance literature--filling a vacancy, and thus a need for more information on contemporary dance in India.

Cordially yours

J. C. Shawn

P.S. I am now at the end of my stay in my Florida winter studio, and am returning to Jacob's Pillow next week.

back note today.





Legends

ABOVE AND RIGHT:

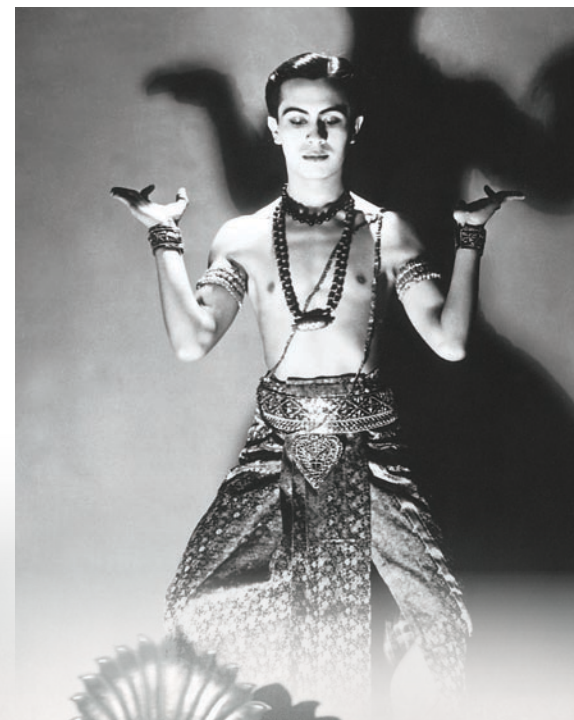
Uday Shankar (1900-1977) in his Paris days often performed as an Indian bride or Nautch girl, as that was the common perception of Indian dance. Although trained to be a painter, dance engulfed him and he revitalized Indian dance and made it fashionable through mammoth productions and Indian mythological dance dramas. He did much to popularize a new movement in dance and was hailed a pioneer. Simkie, Zohra Segal, Sachin Shankar and Narendra Sharma remain his best continuity. He made "Kalpana" a landmark film based on dance and he interacted with all the greats in Indian arts, like Rabindranath Tagore. He handed a sizeable amount of personal letters, posters and recordings to Mohan Khokar, who was also his biographer.

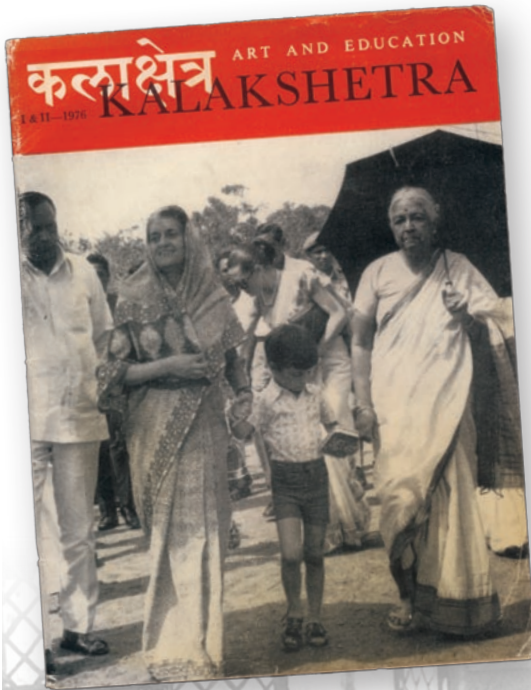
Shankar with Italian "sisters", Adelaide and Sokie.



EXTREME RIGHT AND BELOW:

Ram Gopal (1914-2001) rode large on the classical dance scene in the 1940s. Trained in Bharatanatyam and Kathak, he made grand productions with handsome costumes that remained etched in public memory for long, both in India and abroad, especially in Europe where he settled in his end years. He was very close to Mohan Khokar, whose wife M.K. Saroja was also a principal dancer in Ram Gopal's troupe after Mrinalini Sarabhai, Tara Chaudhury and Shevanti. Ram Gopal donated several articles and photos to Mohan Khokar and his recordings on tape remain the last authentic source of this legend of dance.





Gurus

Gurus in Indian arts are very central and crucial guides. Indian traditions have mastered oral transmission of the arts. Real gurus were not in the market or interested in money. They taught selflessly. Guru M. K. Saroja, Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra and Guru Vedantam Satyanarayan (*right*).

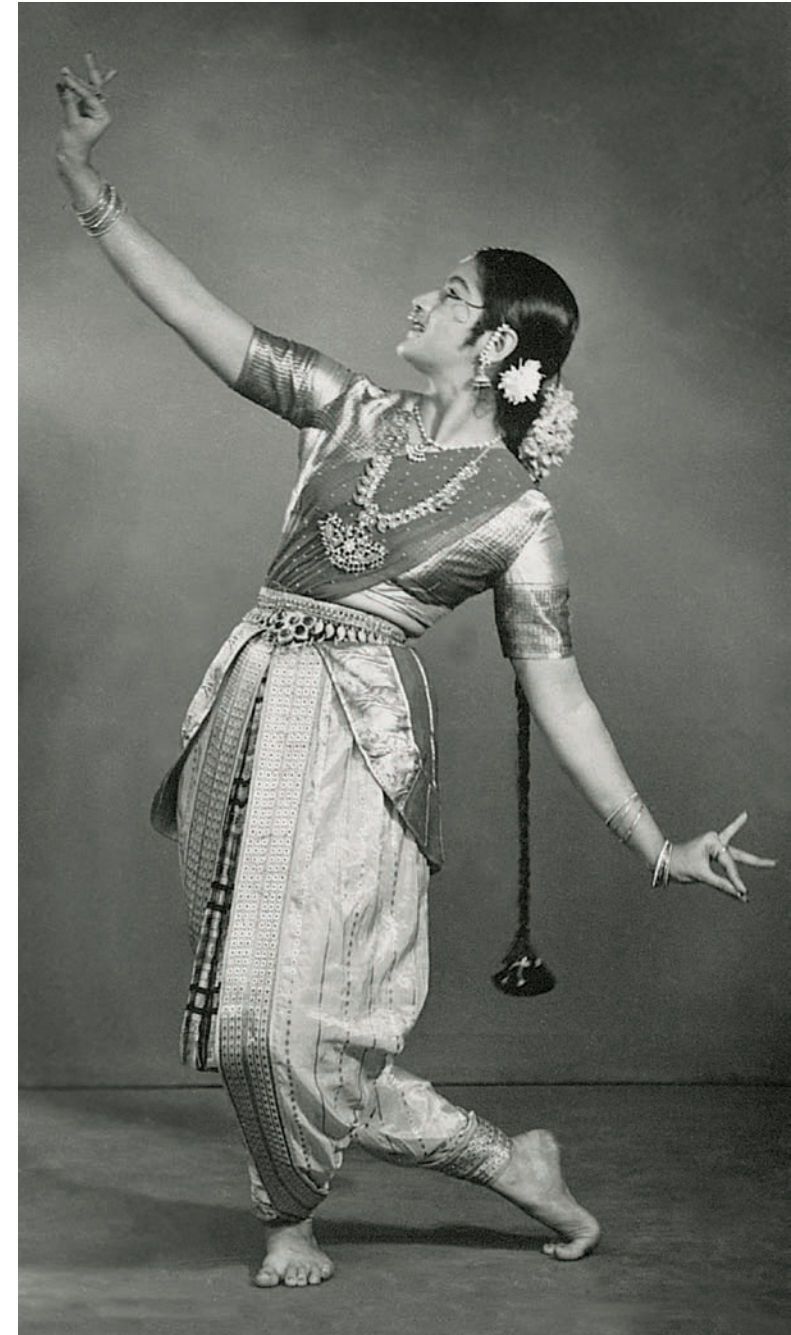
Rukmini Devi Arundale (*below*) created Kalakshetra in 1936 and Mohan Khokar was her first male student from north India. He arrived at her door after ten days and five train changes from Lahore. Their bond lasted a lifetime, through thick and thin. Mohan Khokar documented Kalakshetra over a 50-year span and many teachers like Peria Sarada, Sarada Hoffman and Rajamani shared materials with him. Rukmini Devi was nationally respected and the journal (*left*) shows the Gandhi family at Kalakshetra.



Dancing Stars

The Travancore Sisters (*right*) were Director Subhramanyam's and Guru Gopinath's gift to the dance world and Uday Shankar also sequenced them in "Kalpana". The three sisters – Lalitha, Padmini, Ragini – were all equally proficient in dance and contributed much to its enhancement and popularity. The size of "Filmfare" (*below right*) in 1953 was half of what it is today as newsprint was imported, expensive, licensed and in short supply. Vyjayanthimala succeeded them in dance and stardom

The real influence of dance on films or films on dance started in the mid 1950s, although earlier films like "Mughal-e-Azam" told the tale of dancers. Many mainstream dancers became film starlets and vice-versa. Three south Indian dancers contributed significantly: Kamala (*extreme right*), Vyjayanthimala (*below*) and Hema Malini.



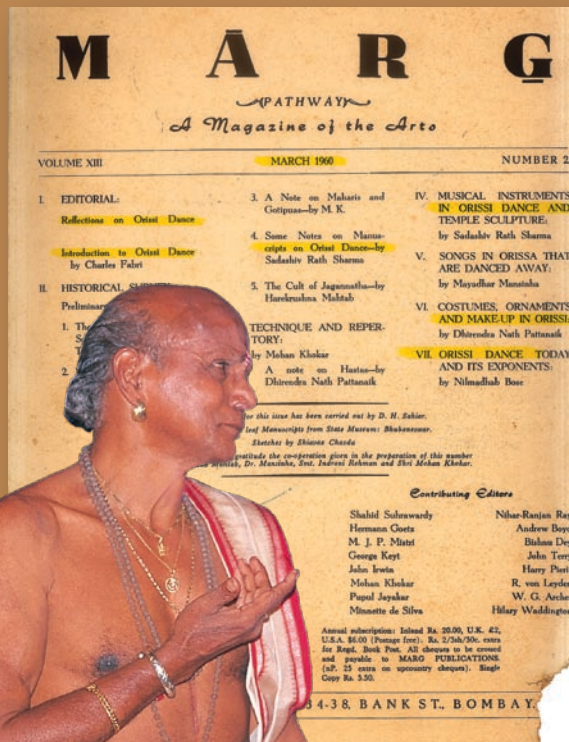
Orissi Odyssey

Orissi was revived and established in the 1950s. Several gurus were instrumental in making its structure and style: Adiguru Pankaj Charan Das, Kelucharan Mohapatra, Debaprasad Das and Mayadhar Raut. Each came from different stream like Mahari, Raas, Jatra and theatre and enriched the form. Their principal students became iconic names later in the field like Indrani Rahman, Sanjukta Panigrahi, Kumkum Mohanty, Yamini Krishnamurthi.. Orissi today is the third most-learned style after Bharatanatyam and Kathak. It is thanks to Mohan Khokar and Charles Fabri's early writings that Orissi got a boost and also accepted nationally. The March 1960 issue of *Marg* brought Orissi in the mainstream.



Mohini's dance

Guru Gopinath (*above*) was discovered by Ragini Devi, an American pioneer, who came to India in 1930s and found him in Kalamandalam and partnered him and took him to USA. Ragini Devi's daughter Indrani Rahman distinguished herself in Orissi and Bharatanatyam later and was also the first Miss India! Mohinattam was revived by poet Vallathol N. Menon who set up the Kerala Kalamandalam by selling lottery tickets door to door! Thankamanni Kutty, Kalyanikutty and Kanak Rele (*below*) were the pioneers who did a lot to help establish this form.



M A R G			
A PATHWAY			
A Magazine of the Arts			
VOLUME XIII	MARCH 1960	NUMBER 2	
I. EDITORIAL: Reflections on Orissi Dance Introduction to Orissi Dance by Charles Fabri	3. A Note on Mahari and Gopipura-by M. K. 4. Some Notes on Manuscripts on Orissi Dance-by Sankar Nath Sharma 5. The Cult of Jagannath-by Hardevendra Malhotra	IV. MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN ORISSI DANCE AND TEMPLE SCULPTURE, by Sankar Nath Sharma V. SONGS IN ORISSA THAT ARE DANCED AWAY, by Mayadhar Raut VI. COSTUMES, ORNAMENTS AND MAKEUP IN ORISSI, by Dhoresha Nath Pattanah VII. ORISSI DANCE TODAY AND ITS EXPONENTS, by Nilamallab Bose	
II. HISTORICAL SKETCHES Preliminary: 1. The Orissi Dance by Mohan Khokar 2. A note on Hara-by Dhoresha Nath Pattanah	TECHNIQUE AND REPERTORY: by Mohan Khokar A note on Hara-by Dhoresha Nath Pattanah		
For this issue has been carried out by D. H. Sahasrabudhe. Chief Manuscripts from State Museum: Bhadracharya. Sketches by Khimra Chouda The illustrations are prepared in the preparation of the number by Dr. Manabendra, Dr. Indrani Rahman and Dr. Mohan Khokar			
Contributing Editors			
Shakti Sankar Das Hermann Goetz M. J. P. Mistri George Key John Irwin Mohan Khokar Papaji Jayakar Minnette de Silva	Nihar-Ranjana Ray Andrew Boyd Bikash Dey John Terry Harry Piers R. von Leyden W. G. Archer Henry Waddington		
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4-38, BANK ST. BOMBAY.			

Kathakaars

The story-tellers who danced and sang stories in north and central India were called Kathakaars. From this, arose the style of Kathak classical dance and various gurus were patronised by royalty of Lucknow and Jaipur, thus these two became important Schools of Kathak. Benares and Khairagarh were other branches. Today lot of group choreography is being done in this form which is very popular in North and Central India. Films also partake of this style.



Sitara Devi (*above*), Roshan Kumari (*above right*) and Sadhana Bose, all regaled audiences on stage and screen.

Gopi Krishan, Shambhu Maharaj, the Gangani brothers, Birju Maharaj (*left*) – all danced for Mohan Khokar's camera for decades, knowing full well that his serious documentation would help spread their art through his writings, books and discourse. Mohan Khokar saw the changes taking place in costumes, in styles and in substance. As a leading critic of his times, he spared no one, often leaving the dancers often wondering if it were the same person who was otherwise so accessible, friendly and approachable. A young Birju Maharaj in motion.

RIGHT: Kathak of yore, circa 1950, before serious codification and gharanas began.



Seraikella Maharaja Aditya and Surendra Singh Deo are on record stating that but for Mohan Khokar's intervention, timely support and patronage through the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the Chhau form may have vanished as the royalty, whose preserve it was, did not have the means to support it once privy purses were abolished in 1972.



Raas

Manipuri as a form also was seriously studied and documented by Mohan Khokar. He made several trips to Manipur and the North-east when no camera had been there to document dance. He interacted with pioneering gurus like Amobi Singh and Binodini Devi and recorded the Manipuri tradition through extensive documentation.



Ritual Dances

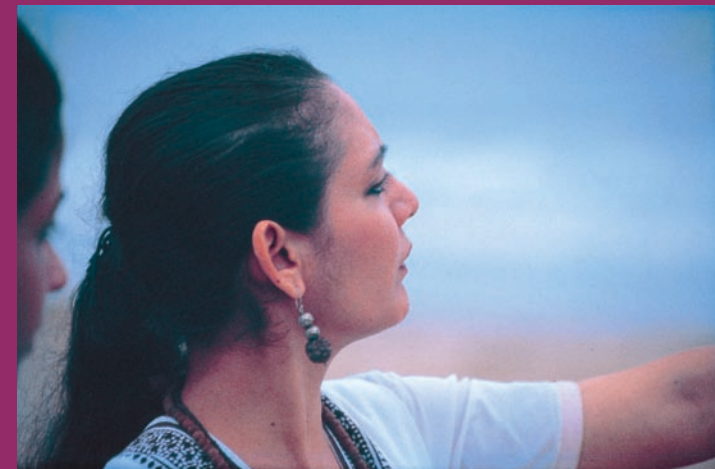
Rituals like Teyyam attracted the occultist in Mohan Khokar, who was interested in occult sciences and magic. He travelled to interiors, to document such rare, seasonal forms and was amongst the first to bring them to the notice of larger audiences, through his writings and outreach.



Folk Dances

Dancing for themselves in an agrarian setting, connected to seasons of harvest and sowing are commonly called "folk" dances. Onam performed in the open by young girls in Kerala.





New Directions

ABOVE AND ABOVE RIGHT:

After the phase of mythological productions, a few path-breaking dancers like Kumudini Lakhia (*above*) Chandralekha (*above right*) and created new works in contemporary dance. Chandralekha trained in Bharatanatyam and Kumudini Lakhia trained in Kathak for long and performed as soloists, before starting group work and set the tone for new directions in Indian dance. Both used traditional forms in a new manner and thus extended scope and appeal.



ABOVE AND RIGHT:

Uttara Asha Coorlawala (*above*) took centre stage in the late 1960s and inspired many by her vision of modern dance. She settled in the USA and Astad Deboo (*right*) then continued the trend. Mohan Khokar's all-encompassing interest in dance made both stay in touch with him and also share materials.

TOP EXTREME RIGHT:

Daksha Sheth has evolved a unique dance language and today represents new directions in Indian Dance.





Prima Donnas

The 1970s saw the birth of prima donnas who were truly unique, like Sitara Devi (*above*), Yamini Krishnamurthi (*above right*), Padma Subrahmanyam (*right*). Each one an individual and special dancer who left an indelible mark. The Mohan Khokar Dance Collection contains the journey of these divas from young age to mature years. Alarmel Valli (*below*) is this generation's prima donna.



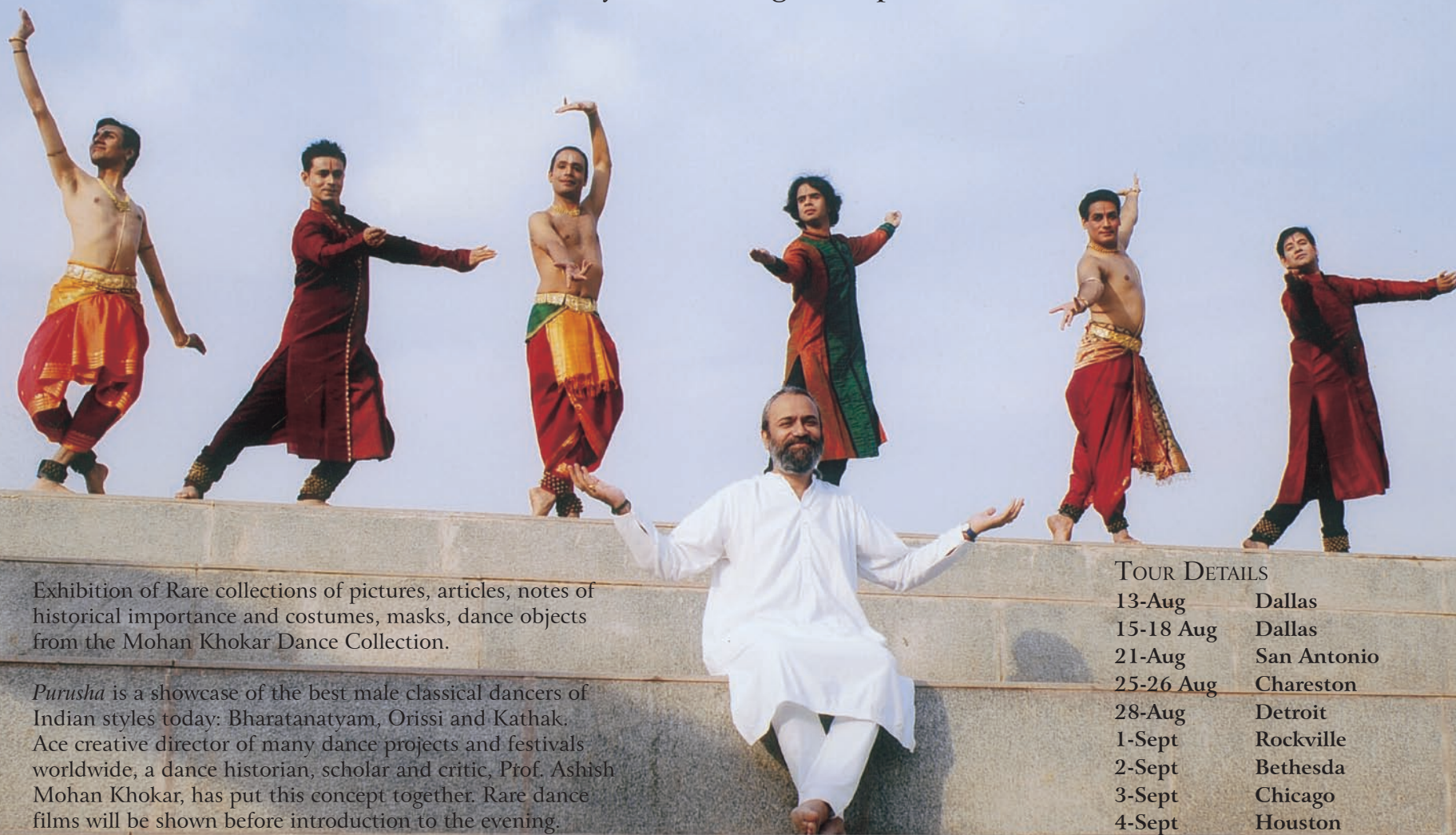
ABOVE:

Leela Samson represents aesthetics and academics in dance. Today she heads prestigious national agencies.

TOP:

Sonal Mansingh, a fine Bharatanatyam dancer, took to Orissi and has embellished it with her individual stamp.

ICCR presents A Century Of Indian Dance through the Mohan Khokar Dance Collection
USA-Italy Tour – August-September 2011



Exhibition of Rare collections of pictures, articles, notes of historical importance and costumes, masks, dance objects from the Mohan Khokar Dance Collection.

Purusha is a showcase of the best male classical dancers of Indian styles today: Bharatanatyam, Orissi and Kathak. Ace creative director of many dance projects and festivals worldwide, a dance historian, scholar and critic, Prof. Ashish Mohan Khokar, has put this concept together. Rare dance films will be shown before introduction to the evening.

Participating Dancers:

Sathyanarayan Raju, Murali Mohan Kalvakalva,
Lingaraj Pradhan, Seshadri Iyengar and Tushar Bhatt.

Contact Details: khokar1960@gmail.com

TOUR DETAILS

13-Aug	Dallas
15-18 Aug	Dallas
21-Aug	San Antonio
25-26 Aug	Chareston
28-Aug	Detroit
1-Sept	Rockville
2-Sept	Bethesda
3-Sept	Chicago
4-Sept	Houston
5-8 Sept	Phoenix
9-Sept	Houston
10-Sept	Phoenix
12 Sept	Paris
13 Sept	Milan
20 Sept	Bergamo