



Movement in Stills

The Dance and Life of Kumudini Lakhia

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"I can never say I was born to dance," she says with a subtle hint of pride. Yet for this very reason, Kumudini Lakhia went on to become one of the great modern innovators of North Indian classical dance. Such paradoxes compose the fabric of Kumudini's life and personality—an upbringing in the waning days of the Raj characterized by a love for Indian art as well as British sensibilities, a temperament both warm and austere, and an ambitious energy as overwhelming as it is focused. Like her life, her art itself came to embody an element of paradox—contemporary choreography within one of the most ancient dance forms in the world. Her work, criticized thirty years ago as sacrilege, is now considered classic, and continues to inspire novel approaches to the dance form. Unlike many Kathak exponents in the 1940s and 50s, Kumudini did not inherit the narrowly focused life of a traditional dancer. Instead, she was exposed to the modern world—attending an elite boarding school, developing curiosities ranging from agriculture to architecture, and touring Europe by the age of 18. Though she studied Kathak throughout her life, her path to professional dance was shaped more by circumstance than tradition. Told through the refracted lens of writer and dance student, *Movement in Stills* offers a unique blend of biography and personal impression to depict the life and dance of one of India's great performing artists.