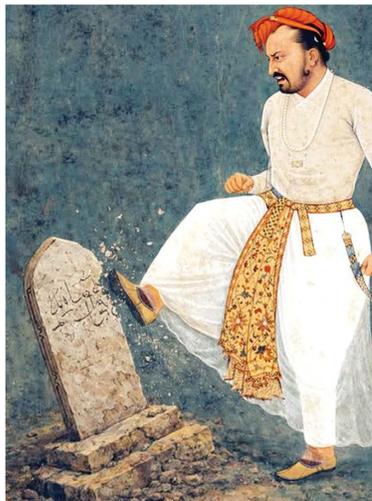


## #PATRICIDE

### A Kick Of Disgust

Jahangir simply exploded. He reached the funerary complex of the Khilji Sultans where, as he himself recorded, "I kicked the grave of Nasir al-Din several times and ordered my servants to do the same."



On March 29, 1501, Sultan Ghiyath al-Din Khilji of the Malwa Sultanate passed away at the age of 80, after a long reign spanning three decades. Although the official chronicles attributed his death to dysentery, worsened by his advanced age, rumours also circulated that his son, and eventual successor, Nasir al-Din, had caused it.

Later, in March of 1616, Jahangir's imperial train reached Mandu, the erstwhile capital of the Malwa Sultanate. As the Mughal emperor settled in, the old rumour somehow reached his ear: of Nasir al-Din having done away with his father

Sultan Chiyath al-Din, committing patricide for the lust of the crown. Jahangir, not unpredictably, simply exploded. He reached the funerary complex of the Khilji Sultans where, as he himself recorded, "I kicked the grave of Nasir al-Din several times and ordered my servants to do the same." "Since this didn't satisfy me, I ordered the grave of Nasir al-Din to be dug open and his uncle's remains to be thrown into the fire."

"But then, I remembered that since fire is a manifestation of the divine light, it would be wrong to sully that subtle essence by burning the patricide's filthy body in it. I therefore ordered Nasir al-Din's crumbling bones to be cast into the river."



# Manjushree Chatterjee's Is Old-Style Kathak

"I remember doing a paran (a small composition made on the notes of a tabla or pakhawaj), and tatkar (a foundational rhythmic framework for kathak)," she said. "He asked for my mother to be summoned there and then, she had to jump into a rickshaw and land up. He asked her to bring me to Delhi to learn under him at the Bharatiya Kala Kendra. We were stunned. How were we going to cope in an unknown city?"

## • Bulbul Joshi

In the years leading up to India's independence, an amusing scene often unfolded in the Banerji family's home at 17, Adwait Mukherjee Lane in north Calcutta. Every time the radio set crackled to life with music, their little daughter, barely past toddler years, would spring up to dance. She moved with ease and abandon, making up the choreography, and yet, perfectly in step with the beat.

There was another art the child reveled in, poetry. She would memorise classic Bengali poems that were as long as the day, usually Tagore, and recite them with all the ardour, thunder and pathos she could muster. She was so good at it that she was coached and presented on Calcutta radio by the legendary broadcaster Bani Kumar, whose musical programme *Mahisasuramardini* has been ritual listening for generations of Bengalis.

That girl with rhythm and grace, a terrific memory and impeccable recitation skills, is now 84. Once in a while, when a name or place from the distant past eludes her, she shakes her head in annoyance. But time and age have not stolen her ability to reel off an interminably long *padanti*, a string of mnemonic syllables in Kathak, with unbelievable clarity and cadence without once stumbling. Even today, she is coached by Tagore's *Nirjharer Swapnabhanga* (shattered dreams of a brook) without missing a beat and with fire in her eyes.

Manjushree Chatterjee, a Kathak dancer of the Lucknow gharana, is the universal 'Didi' to Delhi's dance community. A warm, generous, much-loved presence, she is the epitome of old-style Kathak. Not for her the angst of contemporaneity, the bug to innovate or push boundaries. For her, dance is the gift that her guru gave, the Lucknow gharana icon Shambhu Maharaj and the Jaipur legend Sundar Prasad, and it is one she conserves

as a legacy, untouched. "My gurus kept alive the purity of the form," she said. "The trend now is to do dazzling footwork but the deep inner core of the dance, I find that sadly missing now."

Manjushree was among the early students of Shambhu Maharaj in Delhi of the late 1950s, when Kathak had just moved to the metropolis from its quieter provincial homes. Between government patronage and corporate backing, it was finding more patrons, funds and support in the capital's emergent cultural institutions. Still, this was not an easy time for the first generation of migrant gurus. Another student of Shambhu Maharaj, Maya Rao, recalled in an article for *The Illustrated Weekly*, her guru's utter chagrin at having to leave his ancestral home and the gentle rhythm of Lucknow to conform to Delhi's sarkari ways.

It was into this upheaval that Manjushree walked in from Calcutta. Since then, she has been a witness to the capital's cultural history, her voice remaining important, even though, she retired her heavily strung ghungroos years ago.

Bharatanatyam dancer, Malavika Sarukkai, has known the Kathak stalwart for decades and is fascinated by her, especially by the history of dance that lives on in her body. "There was a certain idealism in that era, the 1960s and 1970s, and she carries it with her," said Sarukkai. "Of course, dance scholarship is important but I also believe that it is important that we document the lived history of our very senior dancers, instead of always seeing it in an interpretative light. How are we where we are today in dance, their perspective and stories can tell us so much."

Sarukkai's trust, Kalavahini, recently made a film on Manjushree titled *Conversations in Dance*. In it, an interview by her student and noted business leader, Vinita Bali, is interwoven with archival footage that also features many names that are long gone from our lives. The film is for Kalavahini, the first in a series, that will document the training, transmission and presentation

## #ART



of dance of veteran dancers across decades. "She is a purist in both the gharanas she imbibed," said Bali. "Her own style was marked by both energy and grace, with an extraordinary and unparalleled clarity and control on laya. She kept the core essence of her dance. It was always pristine and original with that quality of excellence."

### Confluence of creativity

Manjushree is still a presence at Delhi's dance events, where she can be seen in spotlessly starched white saris, hair plaited and pinned back in a bun, drinking it all in eagerly, her eyes fixed on the stage. It is a vastly different space from what the city was when she landed here, all of 18.

Earlier this month, a sudden rainstorm had just washed Delhi clean, splattering leaves and amalats petals on the quiet lanes of Jor Bagh. In a cul de sac stands an old bungalow where Manjushree lives amidst memories of what now seem like vibrant decades for the classical arts. Unlike many dancers, her circle of friendship and solidarity is vast, extending across the arts, from Nikhil Banerjee and Nikhil Ghosh to Girija Devi and Ravi Shankar to Ali Akbar Khan. For many of them, her home was theirs when they were in the city and its courtyard was an intimate space for their performances.

The pride of place on her walls, however, goes to BP Mitra. He is not a name known to most, but in the 1950s, the photographer had worked quietly in a corner of central Delhi's commercial district, Karol Bagh, to take the arts to the city's middle classes. He was also the man who eased Manjushree's passage from Calcutta to Delhi.

She talks about her journey, returning to her childhood home to pick up the pieces.

It was clear to her mother from her early fascination for dance that



## International Day for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Awareness

Observed on March 5, the International Day for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Awareness highlights the urgent need to reduce the spread of weapons and promote global peace. The day underscores how unchecked arms proliferation threatens security, development and humanitarian progress. It encourages nations to strengthen international cooperation, uphold disarmament treaties and invest in dialogue over conflict. By raising public awareness, the observance aims to engage citizens, especially youth, in conversations around peace, trust and collective security. The day serves as a reminder that lasting global stability depends not on military stockpiles, but on mutual understanding and responsible action.

## #HERITAGE

# This Too Was Stolen

Margot Robbie Wears Elizabeth Taylor's Rs. 74 Crore Taj Mahal Necklace, Sparks Controversy on Indian Origins



## Kendra. By all accounts, the maestro did not take well to the demands of structured arts education, yearning for the easy spirit of Lucknow.

Stories of Shambhu Maharaj's incredible artistry are legion but his greatest strength was his infinitesimally delicate abhinaya. Nazakat or elegance is the basic hallmark of the Lucknow style, but in his hands, it became a rare thing of immense beauty, there was just that the soupçon of an idea in his hands and eyes, never the obvious or full force of it. He was deeply imbued in music and had a very distinct aesthetic. Not for him the flamboyant flashes of showmanship so common in Kathak. Modern choreographers, ballets and films, he said, do not all new inroads for Kathak in a changed world, sticking to its essential solo format.

But the integrity of his form was magnificent.

"His eyes," Manjushree recalled, her face softening at the memory. "His eyes spoke. Only he could hold your attention with just a look."

Even as she studied under her guru, she was offered a job as a teacher at Kala Vihar, '16 A/18, Ajmal Khan Road," she said. "I would finish teaching and then head straight to guruji's classes at his home in Karol Bagh at 2 PM. I started in 1959 and I learnt with him till the day he died in 1970."

Yet, another guru had sought her out when she was learning under Shambhu Maharaj, Sunder Prasad, the Jaipur gharana guru. The Lucknow and Jaipur styles vary dynamically, the one all fluid grace, the other more dynamic. In her years as a teacher and then director at Kala Vihar, she created a place for young students that was warm, inviting and vibrant. "It was a fabulous confluence of music, dance, an open house for the arts, a happy place," recalled Bali. "We had Shambhu Maharajji come in to watch us and I remember how exciting it was for us youngsters. Nikhil Banerjee would be around. And if you lived in the neighbourhood, as I did, you could late into the night hear the

sounds of his sitar in riyaz."

**Mastery over rhythm** Manjushree is renowned for her clear and ringing padhant, an element that is entirely unique to Kathak. It requires the dancer to weave together and recite percussive notes for the dance that is then followed by the tabla and finally danced to.

"You don't find this in any other dance form," said Siddhi Goel, a Kathak scholar who has also delved into the forms linked to Hindi cinema. "There are descriptions of the practice going back 300 to 400 years. It needs flamboyance and attitude to pull it off well on stage. How you use cadence, voice modulation, all of it matters. If it is flat, it does nothing for the dancer or the dance. It shows technical competence."

Manjushree's mastery over rhythm is what got her the camaraderie and admiration of many great tabla players. Santa Prasad, Latif Ahmed Khan, Kishen Maharaj, Nikhil Ghosh and Swapan Chaudhuri, among them. Her scrapbook of reviews is full of praise for her footwork and how she equalled the eminent tabla players accompanying her. *The Statesman* critic in 1957 points to her solo with Santa Prasad, where her 'featherly' movements cleared the tabla's 'excesses' with 'dainty grace.'

Like her beloved guru, Manjushree treasured tradition over innovation. And this is particularly striking because her guru behans, especially Maya Rao and Kumudini Lakhia, chose to travel their own highly individual paths in their creative careers. With the exception of a few ballets, notably one featuring Tagore and another for sarod wizard Ali Akbar Khan, she chose the path laid out by her first guru.

"Maya and Kumudini were great choreographers and I enjoyed watching them," she said. "But experiments were not for me. It was enough that I had the privilege of carrying on the legacy of my great gurus."

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Margot Robbie made headlines at the world premiere of her upcoming film *Wuthering Heights* in Los Angeles when she stepped onto the red carpet wearing a striking piece of jewelry, an iconic Cartier Taj Mahal Necklace once owned by legendary actress Elizabeth Taylor. This necklace, valued at an eye-watering Rs. 74 crore (approximately \$8.8 million), left a lasting impression, but it also stirred a significant controversy, especially on Indian social media.

### The Stunning Necklace with a Rich History

The jewel in question is a breathtaking heart-shaped diamond necklace that features a Parsi inscription reading, "Love is Everlasting." Margot paired the necklace with a custom Schiaparelli couture gown for the event. However, while the actress spoke about wearing the historic piece that had been a gift to Elizabeth Taylor from her husband Richard Burton for her 40th birthday in 1972, she left out a crucial detail about the necklace's origins.

### A Royal Connection: The Necklace's True Origins

The Taj Mahal Necklace has a deep and controversial history that traces back to India during the Mughal Empire. According to an Instagram post from The Juggernaut, the necklace was



originally gifted by Emperor Jahangir to his wife Nur Jahan, one of the most influential women in Mughal history. It was later passed down to their son, Shah Jahan, who gave it to his wife Mumtaz Mahal, whose memory is immortalized in the Taj Mahal.

The inscription on the necklace includes Nur Jahan's name, her title 'Lady of the Padshah,' and the regnal year 1037 AH, which corresponds to around 1627-28 AD. After its time in India, the necklace was taken to the United States, where it was bought by Richard Burton for Elizabeth Taylor.

### The Indian Internet Responds

While Margot Robbie's appearance at the premiere certainly dazzled, the omission of the necklace's Indian origins raised a firestorm of reactions on Indian social media. Many users pointed out that the Parsi

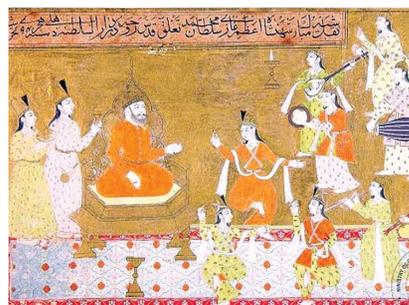
inscription on the necklace clearly identifies it as a Mughal-era piece, one that was once owned by Nur Jahan.

One user remarked, "So, when exactly did Elizabeth Taylor become Nur Jahan? Anyone who reads Urdu or Persian can see the inscription: 'Nur Jahan Begum Padshah 1037 AH (Islamic year)'. This necklace was given by Jahangir, the 4th Mughal Emperor, to his wife Nur Jahan." Others were less diplomatic, with one commenting, "Elizabeth Taylor's necklace? Sweetie, that was STOLEN from India; the inscription is literally in Urdu and says Nur Jahan." A vocal online group demanded the necklace's return to India, with one user commenting, "They really never beat the allegations of being a thief... It's not yours."

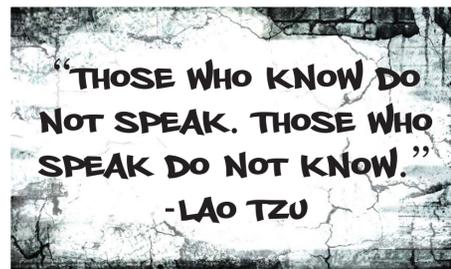
### A Global Conversation

This incident has sparked an ongoing debate about the ownership and historical appropriation of valuable artifacts, particularly those with roots in colonial history. For many, the necklace symbolizes not only royal opulence but also the complex legacy of cultural artifacts taken from India during British colonial rule and other periods of exploitation.

Although Margot Robbie's appearance brought the historical necklace into the global spotlight, it also reignited the conversation around the repatriation of cultural treasures to their countries of origin.



## THE WALL



## BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

## ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman