Crossroads
Priya Srinivasan, Pallabi Chakravorty, and Urmimala Sarkar

South Asian Dance Studies has emerged as an international site for critical debates about various intersections of identity, power, media, and globalization. This multidisciplinary academic space is also a site for the intersections of theory and praxis/practice, critically, and creatively. Yet, this arrival of South Asian Dance Studies is happening in a world daunted by political polarization and authoritarianism, inequalities deepened due to the pandemic, wars, refugee and environmental crises, a severe economic and political breakdown in Sri Lanka, and the changing political atmosphere in India—filled with instability, violence and divisive identity politics.

Writing about dance and its history, or even its relevance, needs new methodological frameworks that, at once, give us the ability to speak from within as well as outside. This changing scenario requires the placing of dance within the framework of intersectionality as a survival strategy against the totalitarian reframing of culture and dance are lived now and what implications research and analysis must take into consideration how culture and dance are lived now and what implications they have for the future.

The Unruly Third Space
Priya Srinivasan

Unluckiness, when I first wrote about it over a decade ago, was a call to action to become aware and then to act on blind spots, invisibilizations of labour, and marginalizations of history that hid appropriation, hybridity, rising totalitarianism, and intercultural connections. South Asian dance wasn’t just viewed as spectating/watching dance, but also about reading bodies, reading dancing bodies as texts, reading her stories instead of his-story, reading our own bodily practices and textual practices as artists and scholars, to be in respectful dialogue, to debate, and, when necessary, call ourselves out through self-reflexive and dialogic processes. I was fundamentally interested in bringing out intersectional thinking on complex historical engagements that led to contemporary problems. I started at the place of the moving body to ask these questions.

The rising power of social media and the “disinformation” emerging from it that preceded the Trump and Modi years—and other governments which also then aided and abetted fascism to rise on the far right and the equal violent rhetoric of the so-called progressive left—deeply troubles me. Ultimately what I have realized is that academics are speaking in a language not accessible to those on the far right or left, let alone the lay person/artist/dancer. There was/is a chasm between these worlds; between those who theorize, research, and write slowly and those who write daily, quickly, and instantly. I believe there needs to be a bridge between rigorous academic thought—ideas that have been slow coming out the oven—and instant microwave thinking on social media. While I understand the power of social media to democratize representation, I also think when the body is reduced to texts, memes, digitized images, bits, and bites of video clips, Insta pics, likes, dislikes, comments, and critique, the body can disappear. Particularly vulnerable are female dancing bodies, just as they are when writing about them. As Sarkar argues in this publication, all kinds of dancing bodies have been legislated against, stopped, silenced, and made invisible. We are now seeing a remapping of this policing from the far right to far left. Unruliness, when I first wrote about it over a decade ago, was a call to action to become aware and then to act on blind spots, invisibilizations of labour, and marginalizations of history that hid appropriation, hybridity, rising totalitarianism, and intercultural connections. South Asian dance wasn’t just viewed as spectating/watching dance, but also about reading bodies, reading dancing bodies as texts, reading her stories instead of his-story, reading our own bodily practices and textual practices as artists and scholars, to be in respectful dialogue, to debate, and, when necessary, call ourselves out through self-reflexive and dialogic processes. I was fundamentally interested in bringing out intersectional thinking on complex historical engagements that led to contemporary problems. I started at the place of the moving body to ask these questions.

The binaries of the dancer versus academic, body versus mind, performing versus writing, classical versus contemporary, practice versus theory, purity versus pollution, to be ruly versus unruly transformed into a bricolage of many things layered one on top of the other, weaving strands between these many ways of being. At times, this jostling of being between thinking—because thinking has always been a way of being with some practices silencing others. These concerns helped me understand the problems inherent in and the simultaneous power of practice as research and paved the pathway for me to live a dual existence as a dancer and researcher. This both/and approach has helped me navigate myself either/or to the third space. To move away from singular/ binary to multiplicity. The privilege of living outside institutional structures has also made me simultaneously vulnerable symbolically and economically.

This is in line with the many women of color and women from the global South who have been writing the “back” to power by putting their bodies on the line. While these voices were emerging to speak back to power, the post structuralist turn in anthropology and in dance studies turned the body into a sign—a text that could be read for meaning—separating the practices of the body to legitimize dance studies in the academy. Similarly, the sexualization that was prevalent in many fields, particularly male academics were something that deeply disturbed me. “South Asia” as a category emerged during the cold war, although it had its inception in colonial and Oriental encounters earlier. The study of philology was something the CIA valued deeply as the US created its own various imperial others. I found that I was againbetween and between until I felt caught between and between. Particularly vulnerable are female dancing bodies, just as they are when writing about them. As Sarkar argues in this publication, all kinds of dancing bodies have been legislated against, stopped, silenced, and made invisible. We are now seeing a remapping of this policing from the far right to far left.

In my 2012 book, Sweating Saris, which was published before the 2014 takeover of the Modi right wing BJP Hindutva government, I had discussed the danger of the hegemony of Hindutva discourse already embedded in Indian arts practices and particularly in the classical dance. I had positioned myself as an upper caste migrant woman from India who grew up in a deeply racialized environment in Australia as a minority. I made myself vulnerable in a way that many of my counterparts (particularly male academics) were not doing, and demonstrating the idea that in one space, subjects can hold social, economic, and symbolic power and, in others, a marginal position. I also noted that, at times, the simultaneity that both possibilities can co-exist in the same space. I discussed how migration, race, and the White Australia policy in Australia was quite different to the US and its waves of migration and immigration policies had created quite different demographics. I was demonstrating how power shifts and is contingent and why we need intersectional thinking to understand privilege as loss and to invoke and evoke empathy to better ally with marginal subjects and marginal locations.

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The museum curator, Annemarie De Wildt, was aware around the Hermitage Museum area. Ironically, until we Holland. However, after migrating many were unable were enslaved there. The British then sold the colony were speaking Bhojpuri as indentured laborers to Surinam, which was a British colony. The Dutch, was taken down and replaced with a photo of the Moving Matters and Surinamese Choir/Dancer group and ourselves. Audience were quite surprised, as they were not expecting to see an artist of color perform their reimagined take on the museum and its practice. It is why, despite the experimental nature of the work, the performance was received with great enthusiasm. The dancers’ footwork and music inspired the dancers’ footwork and music inspired the dancers’ footwork and music inspired the.
and reviews and discussed repertoire such as the Rajah’s Salute (known as the Salaam Daruva, which is still present in Yashoda’s dance repertoire) that Mangatayaro Amma casually mentioned that Amma was the sister of her direct ancestor. She could even recall the names of the many women that went before her, from her mother to grandmother, Bull Venkatappa’s coterie of women who went before her to lead us to Amma. She insisted that this story was told to her by her Ammama (grandmother) who reminded her not to lose hope in the woman ancestors—that they were powerful women who travelled internationally. Yashoda and I were stunned. It was truly miraculous for us all to find this connection. Who would even believe this? How do we account for what was unfolding? What came first, the archival or the embodied research? We cannot explain this easily but only to say that what emerged was a result of the encounter between bodies of knowledge! The fact is that the archival research does not work without the embodied research, and vice versa. We realized we are truly interdependent.

Yashoda described the project as “a huge step toward exposing the layers of oppression that my Kalavantulu community lives under. Encounters is a celebration of our strong women ancestors as they became international personalities. This ethical exchange gives me hope that dance and music projects like these will bring much-needed empowerment.”

The project was not without its controversies. While audiences in Melbourne and the diaspora celebrated this monumental performance for the historical audiences in Melbourne and the diaspora celebrated this ethical exchange, the feudal culture that was centralized.

During his life, Birju Maharaj was celebrated as the living icon of Kathak dance tradition of north India, passed away recently. In his extraordinary career, he was instrumental in positioning the tradition of Kathak—which covers a vast geographical expanse of India’s ancient heritage. Djebar, Assia. Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade. Heinemann, 1993.


Who Owns Culture? Heritage Politics in a Fractured Nation Pallabi Chakravorty

Sacred Silences Birju Maharaj, the samrat of the Kathak dance tradition of north India, passed away recently. In his extraordinary career, he was instrumental in positioning the tradition of Kathak—which covers a vast geographical expanse of India’s ancient heritage. Djebar, Assia. Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade. Heinemann, 1993.


festivals and prestigious concerts. The stories of these women belonging to middle and lower-middle class/caste backgrounds and their dissenting voices, their negotiations of patriarchy and Brahminical tradition in their everyday life, are narrated in my ethnography. But a critical and analytical narrative of Kathak dance as it is lived in contemporary India by women practitioners who are neither celebrities nor hereditary practitioners was not a subject that had much cachet then or now; as a result, Belis of Change did not create the much-needed intervention—or change—in the discourse of heritage politics. The larger issues the book tried to raise regarding questions of dance history, ethnography, lineage, and voice in relation to tradition and heritage, and how they are transmitted as “traditional/oral knowledge” in the context of modern institutions of knowledge production, remained incidental.

Now, with the demise of the Kathak samrat, the issue of abuse of power through the hierarchical relationship of guru-shishya parampara and tradition has resurfaced. Moving forward we are once again left with questions of ownership, legitimacy, and construction of authority. Are we going to continue to look for authority, authenticity, and legitimacy in familial lineages that construct dance history from a particular original source through male blood/caste lines? We know that these kinds of claims of historical continuities of tradition (“invented traditions”) create the ideal conditions for gatekeeping, insularity, and dominance. Can the future of the past (“tradition”) be sustained by discourses of authenticity and ownership through select hereditary lineages and familial claims that reduce the complex and complicated history of cultural inheritance? Such discourses invariably elevate the idea of authenticity through the purity of belonging—and not belonging—to a homogenous and bounded community. A particular identity and subjectivity of an artist are not about where she/he belongs in some essential way, whether it be a caste, religion, or community, but how that individual or community identity is constituted from a particular original source through male blood/caste lines? We know that these narratives embedded in South Indian caste and regional politics are couched in the powerful language of caste/ethnic and dance authorization. Attempts to recuperate and preserve narratives to statist patriarchal history are not new in the scholarship on Bharatanatyam that came out almost two decades ago (Srinivasan 1985, Kersenboom 1987, Meduri 1988), what is new today is the empowered voices of a handful of hereditary practitioners who are taking back to the Brahmin hegemony and asserting their identity. In the end, the Brahminical dominance of the classical arts gets further fueled by this majoritarian politics. Unfortunately, the negotiations of these complex conversations on the ground, where dance is a practice, are often deeply divisive and polarizing. These totalitarian ideological narratives fed into identity politics from both ends of the caste spectrum whereas class privilege is rendered invisible. In an insightful essay, Vashoda Thakore, a Kuchipudi exponent and scholar, who is from the Kalavantulu (devadasi) community, powerfully argues that the simplistic vision of caste, class, caste lines, and inheritance politics, the elite Brahmin strongholds of tradition become polarizing. These totalitarian ideological narratives feed into identity politics from both ends of the caste spectrum whereas class privilege is rendered invisible. In an insightful essay, Vashoda Thakore, a Kuchipudi exponent and scholar, who is from the Kalavantulu (devadasi) community, powerfully argues that the simplistic vision of caste, class, caste lines, and inheritance politics, the male line of heritage through a singular bloodline/caste identity is how males in the hereditary communities became complicit in patriarchal nationalism in the first place. The nationalist narrative successfully erased or marginalized many communities of women practitioners (devadasi, tawaif, baiji, etc.) who could not claim their biological inheritance through a singular bloodline/caste identity as they did not create the much-needed intervention—or change—in the discourse of heritage politics.

Voices

The hereditary claims and narratives of disenfranchisement we see in Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi today are important interventions in the narratives of classicism by artists who come from the hereditary community who is a group of practicing women belonging to the innumerable students of classical dance and music in contemporary India, while, at the same time, the upper caste/class continue to consolidate their power through Hindu propaganda and its communal and casteist rhetoric. The Brahminical dominance of the classical arts gets further fueled by this majoritarian politics. Unfortunately, the negotiations of these complex conversations on the ground, where dance is a practice, are often deeply divisive and polarizing. These totalitarian ideological narratives feed into identity politics from both ends of the caste spectrum whereas class privilege is rendered invisible. In an insightful essay, Vashoda Thakore, a Kuchipudi exponent and scholar, who is from the Kalavantulu (devadasi) community, powerfully argues that the simplistic vision of caste, class, caste lines, and inheritance politics, the male line of heritage through a singular bloodline/caste identity is how males in the hereditary communities became complicit in patriarchal nationalism in the first place. The nationalist narrative successfully erased or marginalized many communities of women practitioners (devadasi, tawaif, baiji, etc.) who could not claim their biological inheritance through a singular bloodline/caste identity as they did not create the much-needed intervention—or change—in the discourse of heritage politics.

We were never a caste! My father said to me ‘We are a guild of like-minded people. Adoption from within the families and from other communities was a way of life. My Kalavantulu teacher, Annabattula Lakshadweep Mangatayaru herself was adopted by her mother. I am a combination of so many bloodlines! This complexity of caste lineage is part of my life, dance, and quest. Today, I bring your attention to a set of practices, people, and lineages that make me who I am to question the simplistic understanding of caste-defined bloodlines. (Thakore 2021)

Inheritance of Loss

Returning to the question of heritage, caste, and lineages, we see they now form a fertile ground for regressive state policies and educational curricula in colleges and schools in India. We also know that there is not a singular narrative of the past or a caste identity. Therefore, we must ask the difficult question about heritage/class/compatibilities. Can a classical dance be owned by a person, and can that person’s right to it as familial or community property be established by claims of an unbroken link to the ancient past that is inherited through bloodlineages? I bring this up here as Birju Maharaj and his gharaana created a system of virtuous gatekeeping and ownership through his claims of biological inheritance through several generations. Heritage, in this process, is not a culturally shared object but is personally owned. Since heritage is an inherently political object that has the power to legitimize or delegitimize a tradition/culture/practice and its modern practitioners, it is time we decentre the patriarchal statist discourses of the classical arts from the language of hereditary lineages through bloodlines. The male line of inheritance through a singular bloodline/caste identity is how males in the hereditary communities became complicit in patriarchal nationalism in the first place. The nationalist narrative successfully erased or marginalized many communities of women practitioners (devadasi, tawaif, baiji, etc.) who could not claim their biological inheritance through a singular bloodline/caste identity as they did not create the much-needed intervention—or change—in the discourse of heritage politics.

The Permanent Outsiders

The good news is that the guru-shiyya system and its hereditary lineage politics, the elite Brahmin strengthens of dances, and the saffron forces celebrating them do not constitute the singular narrative of concert dances in contemporary India. There are other trajectories and initiatives. One such compelling trajectory of dancers who do not claim an hereditary politics, pedigrees, or whose elite status is found in dance reality shows. A new generation of dancers claiming the stage has turned the narrative of guru, parampara, and tradition on its head (Chakravorty 2017). One could argue that they represent the category of “permanent outsiders” to the classical/traditional arts I previously mentioned. These dancers have come forward from outside the religion, class, gender, and sexuality—to participate in India’s cosmopolitan contemporary dance culture. They have swept away some of these questions of neatness and inheritance by their participation in reality shows without any connections to important classical gurus (parampara kinship networks) or hereditary links to tradition. Although they have their own stories of hierarchies and stardom, they are negotiating them without the social capital of tradition/heritage and, in many instances, without much
economic capital. These secular dance spaces have shown that we need democracy and more democracy to rebuild Indian dance teaching and practice. I hope that we can seize this moment to usher in a different discourse of tradition and heritage that will not make us prisoners of the past. In the globalized world we live in today, there should be an acknowledgment that there are multiple communities of any dance practice, including the classical arts—both Brahmin and non-Brahmin—hereditary and non-hereditary—and that we all operate in an interdependent and dynamic ecosystem. Ultimately, the issues we select to highlight show our preferences, interests, and who we are and who we are addressing—that is, who comprises our audience and what is at stake for the researcher/researched in creating new knowledge.

Works Cited


Imagining Possibilities for Setting Dance Free: Right to Dance in Contemporary India

Urmimala Sarkar

Referring to the context of dance studies as a multidisciplinary subject that spreads across and enables a range of engagements within the larger purview of dance research in India, I refer to Janet O’Shea’s “Introduction” in which she suggests:

> [four] strands of intellectual activity, each of which predate the emergence of dance studies as a separate arena, laid the ground for the present. I refer to work on folklore; anthropological, ethno-musicological, and dance anthropology; the writings of expert viewers and dance analysis; philosophy, especially aesthetics and phenomenology; historical studies including biography and dance reconstruction. (*Introduction*, 2010: 2)

In addition to what she has included in the section of “historical” and “theoretical” strands, I would also mention historiography, which specifically enables engagement with the changing interpretations of the past events in the works of individual historians.

In India, the overarching importance put on the last strand by virtually every Indian, Western, and diaspora scholar, has overshadowed, underplayed, and silenced the other three strands almost completely, while also delegitimating and rendering irrelevant most discourses on dance as a part of the contemporary reality in India. This melange spills over into the theoretical dancer/who receive patronage, who get jobs in academic spaces, and whose endeavors are seen as “valuable” or survival/discussion/writing-worthy only in continuation or in reference to the history of dance(s) in India. This is unfortunate, as the white academic space then retains the rights to write about dance and dancers worldwide. They also would write about the contemporary issues in dance and the avant garde, while Indians relegate and debate dance history.

In more ways than one, this agenda creates a ghettoized space for Indian dance studies—specifically within Indian cultural studies and South Asian studies—enabling voices from the non-dance world to gain agency. This situation delegitimizes the rights of dance practice-theory interface/analysis/phenomenological-ethnographic discourses. This agenda also steps into dance worlds from different politics, similar to the conservative discourses around rights to dance, that have already harmed dance and dancers in many Indian communities in immeasurable ways. The current narratives around dance are thus placed on a double-edged sword. The first and the most dangerous circumstance is related to direct or indirect restrictions imposed on the freedom to practice art by artists who do not adhere to or stay away from the fundamentalist myth-building agenda. The second is that which is centered around rights to dance, as evidenced by the violent delegitimization of dancers from hereditary communities in parts of India. As a dancer who does not adhere to or stay away from the hereditary communities, and has not practiced any of those forms, I see myself somewhat safe from the second discourse, though I have directly faced the blunt of the first one, along with many others in the field: anthropological critiques on my work as an Indian academics, artists, writers, and performers since 2014. This is when, with the formation of the far-right government, the intellectual and artistic freedom was restricted. These schemes of restrictions are imposed on dancing and thinking and are formulated without contextualizing the contemporary rights of the dancers and dance historians. I wonder who would want to spread knowledge beyond specific historical or geographical focus.

It seems that, whether it comes from conservative assertions of social or religious norms and values of one person or one group, the infringement of the right to dance always was and still remains a common practice. This infringement makes dance practice a space for completely undemocratic assertions. That there is a history behind the current fissures and frictions in dance as well as “a history in the way we perceived issues” (Geetha, xi) is very clear. Resistance has gotten complicated as we realize that all of us who identify as dancers are not speaking of the same specific cases, similar kinds of oppression, or even identical modes of resistance. V. Geetha asks in her book *Patriarchy*: “How do we reconcile them? Are we stranded in theory?” (Geetha, xii). I ask here: “Do we stop dancing? Do many dancers resign to the fact that they have to give up their right to dance, what they have learned, again and again, as different oppressors continue to stomp their rights to curb rights of the dancers in different times and spaces again and again?”

Dancers have always been stopped from dancing. The conservative patriarchal rhetoric has stopped women from dancing in the past in a variety of ways. Families have asserted their norms and values to stop male and female children from dancing for different gender-specific reasons. Colonizers have stopped colonized people from dancing. Upper-caste reforms have stopped the ones who were designated as lower in caste and class status from dancing. Patriarchal society has been known to forcibly stigmatize any person who dances for a living. Automatic assumptions of sexual promiscuity and availability have scared many women away from taking to dance. Artistic practitioners of all genders were and are still seen to be threatening the male dominance of society has kept men away from dancing. Last, but not least, lack of economic support for this form of art has often led to delegitimization of the art as a viable career option. Many laws were forced upon women dancers to restrict their lives, and society constantly regulates references to the “fallen” dancing woman, often referred to in different derogatory manners in past writings. There probably are many more assertions of different kinds that stop men and women from taking up or continuing dance practices. Heteronormative understandings and expectations have made any non-conformity vulnerable and, therefore, restricted by self-policing by dancers who do not want to conform to strictures imposed by heteronormativity.

On the other hand, generation after generation of young minds and bodies have invested in learning these forms and have grown to love them and perform with clone-like precision. They have learned the grammar and aesthetics of these specialized artistic practices without knowing the history of the creators or practitioners. Because the practice was shaped with the assumption that dancers are bodies without minds, these new members of the dance community were never given any extra information. These bodies were equipped with skills, somewhat programmed to become mechanical dancing dolls. We, as dancers, have found ourselves within those structures of control which have become our cage, our limitations to creativity. We imagine our failure and success only within the parameters taught to us. Caught within the structures of a particular named and framed skill defined as a style of dance, we fear venturing out. The structures themselves are asserted often as parapara, which in a patriarchal/patriological/patriotopal system, automatically decode themselves as non-negotiable structures and norms attached to a specific value system by which we are now bound.

As V. Geetha says, “This power is not merely coercive. Rather it seeks our consent, beguiles us with its social and cultural myths and rituals and implicates us in its workings” (Geetha 2).

I reflect on the intersectional space many like us occupy. As an example, I state my subjective position to expose my vulnerabilities of not knowing or being a part of any of the narratives that are told in the classical dances. As a student who joined a modern non-hereditary dance institution in an urban center, I grew up loving dance and performing on stage from the age of thirteen. I learned four classical styles as per the requirements of my institution, alongside choreography and movement generation in creative style, and eventually became a member of the performing troupe of Uday Shankar India Dance Center. I have danced with love, with excitement, and with respect for the styles, the histories—or whatever I knew of
Dancers consistently assert aesthetic quality and inner gains, while claiming caste-like rights through their birth into a family of practitioners. Since been used as the jewels on the nation's cultural presentation, patronage, and audience expectation— the basic demarcations in dance history, with a deeply hierarchical power structures of classical dances

Dancers as a Contribution to National Culture

One needs to stop and reflect before becoming judgmental as a tool for identity control. The post-classicization generation and its complete lack of understanding of the complexities of appropriation that continue to plague dance history. For these understandings are not merely a by-product of the post-modern and embodied practice of the classical dances are the Indian nation-state and the Gurus. Again, one must stop and understand the role of patriarchal, caste-controlled dissemination of history—that the Gurus of today have learned from the Gurus of yesteryears. One way to stifle this dissemination process is to think of an individual 'Guru' as a retailer or seller—and the learners as consumers, with both mistaking their roles as nation-builders.

Dance and music practitioners have unending stories about how their rights to perform independently were restricted by their Gurus. Assertion of ownership still takes various forms in dance on the issues concerning rights to dance. The unwritten laws of being the dedicated Shishya weigh heavy on young dancers. Many leave dance disillusioned after they are exposed to the exploitation of economies of the dance world, where the moving space is never enough to accommodate all and there is no retirement age for Gurus growing older as they continue to perform and control the dancers' micro-ecologies. The emerging/new dancing bodies do not replace older ones, they hover on the fringes hoping to be allowed into the restricted space, all the while terrified of disappearing without a trace. These exist forever in the threat of rushing and failing in the race of making the most of the restricted time they have to perform, or else….What might be the understanding of the teachers' responsibilities? Here, it is important to understand how the Guru and Shishya often start competing to inhabit the same proscenium and to hold stances. It offers shelter and security of the Guru's name and fame to the Shishya automatically, but also takes away or, at least, restricts, one's agency as a dancer. Stereotypes do not allow changes nor debates and are not accommodative of acceptance of differences.

Dance history in India is all about creating stereotypes through propagating Natyashastra, enforcing a certain aesthetic, by ensuring propagation of myths and mytho-histories as real history of the origins of dances. This is done by creating demi-gods of Gurus, and even through telling stories of aesthetically empowered patrons who endorsed it through patronage. One way is to understand how the Guru and Shishya often start competing to inhabit the same proscenium and to hold stances. It offers shelter and security of the Guru's name and fame to the Shishya automatically, but also takes away or, at least, restricts, one's agency as a dancer. Stereotypes do not allow changes nor debates and are not accommodative of acceptance of differences.

In that case, there are two ways to see dance: (1) as a tool for identity control, or (2) as a language for the body to learn and use. While one way ideally should not be totally delimited from the other, the freedom that we all crave today, which is the freedom of the dancers, is the freedom of the two ways of both. And thus, dance could become a way of asserting identity, of belonging to a particular tradition, and even representing a history. Or, dance could be a tool or skill that the dancer uses for creating and choreographing. In an ideal world, the choice would be a prerogative of the young and emerging dance artists. In the twenty-first century, that choice must remain with these individuals as a part of their right to dance.

Stereotypes and Control

In dance, decontextualized learning of grammar as a skill set is not encouraged because that would render the traditional practitioners powerless and without long-term economic support. The overemphasis on stereotypes of history, caste-based control, gendering, and performance ecology are all tools of control for retaining the safe cocoon of economic autonomy. The overemphasis on stereotypes of ideal dedication, discipline, form, norms and values in dance practice and teaching relates to automatic and assured validation of past practices. And, of course, that argument has good and bad sides. It offers shelter and security of the Guru's name and fame to the Shishya automatically, but also takes away or, at least, restricts, one's agency as a dancer. Stereotypes do not allow changes nor debates and are not accommodative of acceptance of differences.

While on the topic of stereotypes, one must historically contextualize the process by which the stereotypical structure of dance might as possible for forms across India. As the classical dances are “neo-classical” (Vatsyayan, 20 - 32), at best, with reformed grammar, new names, and ruthless changes in the practice and the rights of the performers from whose rights dance was being diminished. Classicization also involved newly imposed and traditional aesthetic. This project involved creation of eight classical dances, one after the other, and followed a template that has become chiseled through years of experience.

In retrospect, the template of classicization appears to have been put in operation under the free will of a team of cultural engineers, seeming adhering to the principles of the prescribed classicization process in each specific case. For example, the classical dance form Manipuri's roots maybe found in Sankirtan/Raasleela of Baisnawite ritual practice and religious performances of the Meitei community. This amalgam now carries the name of the state Manipur and is known as Manipuri— referring to an authentic capsule of the past—rendering invisible the practices of several Adavasi communities of the same space. Contestations plague the practice and the theory of the dance because of the new aesthetics imposed on its movement and vocabularies and ornaments that selectively highlight orтurbate its past connections. In Manipuri, like in other classical forms, imposition Guru-Shishya Parampara is held in place through institutionalized and controlled process of learning. The hierarchy is complex with the Meitei being the numerical and economic majority and the most visible. Socio-political dispossession as well as cultural appropriation has led to the destruction of certain practices of the geopolitical space, named Manipur, replicate hierarchical power structures of classical dances.
of other states. The Gurus in dance and music exert different forms of control to regulate cultural ownership of knowledge transmission, managing to control modern university systems within dance and music academies and also in state patronage and scholarships in the arts. Guru-Shishya Parampara has resisted death even after being removed and replaced by formal systems of education at least from obvious power-wielding positions in urban spaces, it still tries to keep its controlling grip on the performing arts, through production, perpetuation, and affirmations of various stereotypes. This form is stripped of almost all of its utility in the current times of claims of a selfless perpetuation of knowledge, in which the master teacher—or Guru—is responsible for the safe delivery of knowledge and nurturing of the new dancers in a continuous shaping of the inner and the outer world of the learner or Shishya. Now, this form of teaching can only claim mythical affirmations through historical references and establish them by using words that refer to the power of the Guru as the assessor, appreciator, and rewarder, who becomes the oppressive agent of control, reaffirming his control through stereotypical references of “appropriate dedication,” discipline, endless practice, ideal aesthetics, and immeasurable rewards awaiting the Shishya if s/he complies with the “requirements” associated with the ideal form of submission to the Guru.

By privileging history as a mode of control, dance discourse in India largely continues to be the privilege of higher castes and classes. The classical dances continue creating the ideal reference to a patriarchally transmitted aesthetic that uses the notion of the feminine body as the carrier and transmitter—but NOT interlocuter—of cultural expressions. The stereotyping of the national culture is, of course, representational of Brahminic privileges. Sanskritic texts and contexts and concocted aesthetics projected through dresses, ornaments, and accompaniments depend on privileges available to persons of highest economic positions. But in recent times the nationalist fervour of post-independence years has been replaced by oppression through the “manufacturing of consent by controlling of patronage”—especially for performing arts. In the process, we witness delegitimizing of all solidarities and closing off democratic spaces, furthering far-right processes, we witness delegitimizing of all solidarities and closing off democratic spaces, furthering far-right and rewarding citizenship issues, and economy. We also need to understand that all stereotyping discourses from above, below, in the stratified hierarchical ladders, or from left, right, and center need to have their spaces, but we [and here I dare to include myself] as dancers can consciously work on acknowledging and spreading the stories of all of those dancers, in India and all over the world, whose rights to dance were violated by experiencing their choice to dance (or not) being taken from them. One of the ways to continue the process of dismantling power sources is to be together with those who have been trying to relearn, unlearn, and break stereotypes, and question history through historiography and critical ethnography. In the academic space, the right to continue as a critical dance studies scholar can only be registered through the reclaiming of dance studies as a space for multi-disciplinary and practice-theory discourse on the yesterday, today, and tomorrow of dance. The ultimate claiming of the right to dance can be done only by continuing to dance.

**Works Cited**


