Debanjali Biswas

Abstract
This essay is an exploration of precarity and sociability within performing arts in India. It analyses dances made digitally for audiences during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-21) and engages with scholarly literatures on COVID-19's resistance to the Bengali polymath Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and forms of dance identified as rabindranritya. Interpretated through interdisciplinary research methods of digital ethnography, questionnaires, content analysis and dance studies, the essay aims to understand why some of us continued to dance throughout the pandemic. I focus on YouTube as a site of research as we realize that technology’s relationship with human and arts have now evolved and ‘liveness’ could be optional. I question various forms of precarity in arts industries through respondents’ answers and observe what notions of sociability are exchanged between the performer and their audience. I bring to light the mundane and vibrant of the quotidian lockdown lives of performers who remained cloistered at home, but with cameras on them, how they seized the pandemic precarity and continued dancing with a sense of immediacy and new kinds of intimacies, communicating their imaginations and emotions and bridging social-temporal distances.

Key Words
dance studies; digital ethnography; YouTube; COVID-19; rabindranritya

Introduction
In April of 2020, dance writer Brian Seibert wrote about Roof/Roof Piece—a performance made remotely by the dancers of Trisha Brown Dance Company. They revisit Trisha Brown’s gritty, urban choreography Roof Piece (1971) that premiered on the roofs and terraces of lower Manhattan buildings and became a part of the company’s repertoire. In Roof Piece, dancers executed a series of movements which the dancer on the next roof tried to imitate. Trisha Brown’s dancers received and transmitted movements making improvisations if they could not follow. A film and photographs by Babette Mangolte captured the assembled movements on rooftops as a codified whole.1 The Roof Piece was a metaphor for communication across distance, and the same metaphor carried over to the virtual staging of choreography in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Company dancers Amanda Knett-Pendry and Jamie Scott conceived the piece anew, and other dancers created movements in the confines of their residences spanning New South Wales to Brooklyn. Dances were performed on the videoconferencing platform Zoom, and subsequently edited for a virtual audience. The dancers piece use to transcend the boundaries of a room, a stage, and the eye of a single viewer, [...] in order to hold the integrity of the original work, dancers in Roof/Roof Piece are limited to seeing one dancer on the screen” using remote technology to transcend distance.2 The dancers repurposed Brown’s ideas on how dance is their medium of communication and included imitation, improvisation, and "decomposition" of the original movements. Although the pandemic kept dancers apart, it allowed them to adapt a site-specific choreography as a round-the-world message. Through dancing in their own rooms, dancers explored ways of communicating across distance. Seibert quotes Scott (“Home Version”) saying, they expressed “a nod of solidarity to people who are also confined.”3 Viewing the recreation of Brown’s avant-garde choreography alerted me to a defining cultural moment in the dance world that has already been taking place in the years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.4 Inspired by Room/Roof Piece, I borrow Brown’s symbolic frames of communication across distance and sites, as well as the ethos of dancing in rooms and on roofs to explore a collective, solidary to people who are also confined.”

1 The growing importance of digital media technologies in contemporary sociocultural, political and economic processes signaling a paradigm shift in the anthropological study of media (Udapa et al. 1-2).
2 YouTube is a Web 2.0 domain owned by Google Inc. where data, i.e., content, is user-generated and dynamic. Besides enabling a wide viewership, YouTube is a Web 2.0 domain where users can archive, annotate, and re-circulate content. In a similar vein, Robertson discusses Project Transmit as a "social (distance) dancing project" (2021) that was originally conceived as a long-distance digital dance improvisation between international collaborators resulting into a multi-screen immersive screendance installation. Mitchell Roasa’s ‘Yin Goo’ Tour (2014) and And So Say All Of Us (2019) too feature multiple performers across several countries imaginatively explore public and domestic spaces through movements.
3 See video and note: https://trishaebrowncompany.org/news/?pg=3 Accessed 22 June 2021
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6 Some channels may limit the communication by ‘switching off’ the feature to be commented upon, hence managing audience response to spread negativity or sensitive content.
7 The number of viewers is recorded; however, the view counts are imprecise measures of knowing one’s audience (Strangelove 21), therefore popular content is archived, annotated, and re-circulated. In a similar vein, Robertson discusses Project Transmit as a "social (distance) dancing project" (2021) that was originally conceived as a long-distance digital dance improvisation between international collaborators resulting into a multi-screen immersive screendance installation. Mitchell Roasa’s ‘Yin Goo’ Tour (2014) and And So Say All Of Us (2019) too feature multiple performers across several countries imaginatively explore public and domestic spaces through movements.
in my discourse of dancing and viewing.

What could have prompted performers to publish their videos through YouTube? An early mo6tive had been "broadcast yourself" (2005–2012); i.e., its primary function was to motivate YouTube users to share their lives on the web. Thereafter, new regulations for online culture and politics through amicision statement—"to give everyone a voice and show them the world"—to inspire diverse users to contribute to the platform and to reflect on the similar strategies of opening roles of agency and identity. This act of creating and broadcasting on video-sharing sites, one Wesch calls "YouTubing" oneself, has become a ubiquitous method of expressing oneself. The transnational growth of social networking sites and video sharing technology, especially recording, digitizing, and uploading of experiences of the self has become practice of everyday life. YouTube can be seen as an "ecosystem of culture"—"by allowing ‘you’ to post a video which might incidentally change the course of history" (Snickars and Vonderau 11).

Burgess and Green note that beyond the technological, commercial, and aesthetic principles behind the meteoric growth of YouTube, is a cultural ecosystem, an "accidents of public well-being" (Taiolakul and Fitzgibbon). While many modes of work transitioned online and video sharing technology, especially recording, digitizing, and uploading of experiences of the self has become practice of everyday life. YouTube can be seen as an "ecosystem of culture"—"by allowing ‘you’ to post a video which might incidentally change the course of history" (Snickars and Vonderau 11).

This study revisits the genre of rabindranritya as performed in video blogs or vlogs, amateur films, home videos, and digital interviews. The volume of dances on YouTube suggest that a significant number of performers can afford to have their dances documented and published. Moreover, the freedom to create and publish at will also has hegemonized the hegemony of elite artists or institutions who control visibility and other platforms of dance, physical, or virtual. Many dancers who belong to rural, peri-urban areas or to lesser-known dance schools, and those who are talented hobbyists or YouTubers, exercise their agency in creating and promoting their dances on multiple platforms.10

The COVID-19 pandemic exerted a major impact on our agency as artists. Dance became a collage of expressions of selves, for crafting affinities and alliances, challenging pandemic-related isolation and rules, and to seek dance as a form of resistance, "staying relevant," and "finding gainful creative employment." At first blush, it may seem the pandemic had leveled the playing field on the account that everyone was at home and filming their dances from within their households. However, the possession of a space to practice, dance, or film; equipment such as camera, tripod, or editing software; the connectivity to participate in uploading content; and even a clutter-free background to record in front of are all resources required to produce shareable dance content. The need for these resources speaks volumes about privilege, access, and precariousness that performers must negotiate.

As mentioned earlier, performers whose videos I analyse are as varied as amateurs, experts, creative workers, and professional dancers. All of my respondents perform rabindranritya and other Indian classical dance. It emerged that they wanted to dance to dissociate the lockdown from mundaneness and inertia, while making a contribution to contemporary culture and life. By publishing themselves, they contributed directly to the confinement of dance and the digital simultaneously to an evolving vernacular practice, during a historic moment of global crisis, while embracing the security of time, personhood, health, and other opportunities, dance delivered a sense of stability, a rhythm. In this manner, the dancers continued to set a discourse of the self that keeps in line with Tagorean thought of sustaining self even against the forces of nature.

What also emerges from the digital ethnography and independent responses is that Tagore’s compositions—poetry, verses, texts—remain significant, familiar, comforting, and contemporary. The access to Rabindranath Tagore’s body of works has been egalitarian; almost all Bengalis in the region of Bengal are acquainted with it. Through the crucial months of pandemic inquietude, Tagore’s words seem to fittingly describe transformative experiences, which echoes in the writings of Robert Desjarlais as "moments of despair and scenes of resiliency; creative making and renewal; exhaustion, weariness, separation, isolation; new arrangements of spaces, forms of communication, and connections of form, virtual or real" (368).

9 The Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 and Disaster Management Act, 2005 was invoked in mid-March 2020 with the first wave and the first nationwide “lockdown” before March ended. The country began a phased lifting of restrictions or “unlock” before mid-September 2020. The second—a more virulent wave of the pandemic—began to rear its head from February 2021; in some ways that wave abated in June, with a drop in infection and mortality observed since July 2021.
10 The second wave is also termed as “private” and “isolated” which did not surface in the first wave.
11 I engage with Harmony Bench who observes, “My IP addresses, my online search histories, my interpersonal connections, my social positions, and my aesthetic involvements have all acted as content filters prior to my current examples for inclusion” (11).
12 The dependence on internet-based services in India during lockdown is one with which we are too familiar (De, Pandey, and Pen 1–5).
13 The artist and dancer couple Chakravorty video as a dialect of popular culture, due to the paucity of scope, this essay discusses the practices of audience, elbow space, and spectatorship, interactive viewing, impact and consumption of popular culture.

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In terms of reflexivity and positonality, I am trained in dance studies and anthropology, and I am a practitioner of Manipuri. My own engagement with religious and cultural history that resonates with the sociocultural and phenomological questions this essay entails: they explore what my dancer's body knows, having trained in Manipuri, a dance form that is fluid and syncopated structurally and temporally, and the bodies are historically and gesturally grounded, and the precarious of well-being and economy that I experienced in the pandemic. I also draw from historical and cultural work on Rabindranath in which I have participated individually and collectively, across West Bengal, India and elsewhere, for corporeality, and diaspora, public spaces.

Rabindranath: History and Practice

While interpreting Rabindranath Tagore's Religion of Man (1931), Martha Nuttbaum recalls, "the significance of creativity is inseparable from the freedom of the individual to discard all traditions, all group norms, in favor of a profoundly personal vision" (88). Tagore emphasized recognizing compassion, individual self-expression, and self-love as qualities towards artistic freedom. He was the religion with "a view of culture and society based upon the capacities in each human being" that in turn could be "sources of poetic creation: passionate experiences of wonder and beauty, love of both nature and other particular people, and the desire to make something whole and meaningful out of the isolated fragments of one person's perceptual experience" (81). In his quest for consciousness, knowledge, and self-realization, to appease his creative impulses, Pallabi Chakravorty notes, he set out to experiment with dance idioms ("Intercultural Synthesis").

Within the geopolitical space of the Indian subcontinent, Tagore remains a pivotal figure in the national, cultural, and creative history. The music and dance genres received with enthusiasm in the Indian dance world. Writing in Bengal and Bengali diaspora, though it was not always for middle-class Bengali identity, youth, and public culture. Although Tagore propelled a dance movement that was, in the words of Pallabi Chakravorty, not "bounded by an unbinding grammar of school (gharan), a hierarchical ideology of tradition (paramparā)" (251), in modern times, practitioners and audience find two primary genres of rabindranritya in practice. One of the genres is the direct bequest of Tagorean institutions, like the Sangit Bhavan (Department of Rabindra Sangeet, Dance and Drama) of Visva Bharati, and the Department of Dance at Rabindra Bharati, Kolkata which adhere to specificity of form and grammar. The other genre of rabindranritya could be all that is danciable to rabindrasangeet; in this genre, each dance challenges the institutional style of rabindranritya, thus making each choreographer a bricoleur, assembling their dances from a sea of familiar yet heterogeneous styles and influences. Such styles demonstrate rabindranritya is not a static genre.

Till 2001, the copyright on Tagore's works was strictly controlled by the institution founded by him, Visva Bharati. Through a ritualized practice of performing Tagore's creations, Visva Bharati had, on the one hand, attempted to create an ideal template for reproducing, recording, and staging them. On the other, it had imposed censorship on performances deviating from that template. This attempt at controlling the expansion, drawing from local-regional, Indian, and foreign practices. In other words, dance was made through processes of cross-fertilization, and the results of these processes emanated out into choreography, dramaturgy, performance, and thereafter, their legacies. Goense's involvement with dance-making was eclectic and formal, individual and collaborative, consciously and unconsciously adopting learnt styles while fashioning new movements. Tagore's envisioning of dance may be "located in a multivalent philosophy of movement that privileged individual and collective gati (rhythm) in tandem with beauty in the everyday" (Bhattacharya 101). In Tagore's approach to the bricolage of dance-making, we see the emergence of a pan-Indian diversity, and with a hidden set of trajectories such as passion, intent, quest.

Following the seminal writings of Pratima Devi and Shanthdev Ghose, numerous authors have produced scholarly work on dance form within which rabindranritya was historically based upon the capacities in each human being, that is relevant to the study at hand (Bhattacharya; Bose; Chakravorty; Chakraborty; Purkayastha). Rabindranritya has always been a popular medium of expressive practice in Bengal and Bengal diaspora, though it was not always received with enthusiasm in the Indian dance world. Writing about rabindrasangeet, auteur Satyajit Ray noted that Tagore's song compositions (and thereby their derivatives) were "overwhelmingly individual musical presentation of a specific class of Bengalierness" in which Tagore's "taastes, his beliefs, his environment, education, artistic appreciation, literary appreciation—that is his whole character is reflected in his songs" (52). The same can be said about rabindrasangeet. From the 1920s, Tagore's pedagogic method of holistic education included learning dance and movements. Through his literature and musical compositions, he contributed to the coming—of-age of modern Bengali identity, inspiring the public to create alternative spaces to nurture arts and education during the tumultuous years of British rule. This left an enormous cultural footprint upon Bengali's intellectual, social, and creative history. The music and dance generations that he engendered later became components of the foundation for middle-class Bengal identity, youth, and public culture.

17 Lévi-Strauss explains the creation of a bricolage is achieved with a "set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous"
18 Pratima Devi had no training in dance, yet she was Tagore's dance collaborator, a dance-maker and a pedagogue (See Purkayastha "Choreographing gender in Colonial Bengal")
19 Sarkar Munsi traces Shankar's evolution in Colonial Bengal")
and changes in tempo of Tagore’s songs amongst other matters. Biswas and the Visva Bharati Music Board were bound in disagreement over his rendition of many songs; he was often rebuked by letters for songs to be “re-recorded after eliminating defects” before they were released by record companies (Biswas 87). In a few of his exchanges Biswas emphasizes the freedom of his, and others’, interpretation of music and emotion (119) while criticizing the self-assured hubris he tolerated from his detractors ultimately writing them: “I have seen persons possessing a creative mind engaged in new experiments in their respective sphere of activity who did not like the idea of repeating the existing art-patterns like birds and insects. Their examples were a source of inspiration [...]” (91). He claimed to be inspired to sing experimentally. While taking on a relatively centralized system that allowed re-production of Tagore’s creations, Biswas paid dearly with interruptions in his singing career. However, he believed in subjective interpretations and nuances experimented which he often found in Tagore’s own assimilation of values, aesthetics, and fluid thinking in creative activities such.

Another experiment towards contemplating Tagore’s idiosyncrasy was the creation of a full-scale professional dancer especially in the classical arts (“A Century of New Dance” 20). In comparison, rabindranritya was and continues to be a fail-safe option to explore by professionals and amateurs alike. It is a genre that was not bound to royal courts, domestic spaces, public culture, temples, or hereditary traditions and yet was indirectly bound to all. But it is important to remember that rabindranritya “remained experimental and ad hoc” in practice, since “it was never codified, an open space” for performance and teachers “never created a rigorous regimen for training dancers” even though it was fully integrated within the educational curriculum at Santiniketan (Chakravorty “Intercultural Synthesis” 267). Perhaps a lacuna in the training system and indeterminate choreographic experiments by etching out the complex interlacing of social and cultural domain—that of rabindranritya as a specialized style. Perhaps the creation of a contemporary feminist aesthetic” (122).

However, Urimala Sarkar Muni, mentions, dance was “a sought-after hobby” till she wanted “to become a full-scale professional dancer” especially in the classical arts (“A Century of New Dance” 20). In comparison, rabindranritya was and continues to be a fail-safe option to explore by professionals and amateurs alike. It is a genre that was not bound to royal courts, domestic spaces, public culture, temples, or hereditary traditions and yet was indirectly bound to all. But it is important to remember that rabindranritya “remained experimental and ad hoc” in practice, since “it was never codified, an open space” for performance and teachers “never created a rigorous regimen for training dancers” even though it was fully integrated within the educational curriculum at Santiniketan (Chakravorty “Intercultural Synthesis” 267). Perhaps a lacuna in the training system and indeterminate choreographic experiments by etching out the complex interlacing of social and cultural domain—that of rabindranritya as a specialized style. Perhaps the creation of a contemporary feminist aesthetic” (122).

Another dancer. Now in a room. The ceiling-fan keeps blowing off the carefully arranged fabric to giving a peek of the neighbor’s building, breezy garments on a washing line festoon the immediate space. Within the frame is the figure of a dancer in a sari draped simply, with colorful fabric tied around waist and shoulders, few flowers tucked in the hair—a common visual trope motif of a performer dancing to rabindranritya.21

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Since the copyright on Tagore’s works expired in 2001, the Bengali music industry began to adapt his songs while experimenting with instruments, harmonies, tempo and time, and creating new interpretations that rely on rhythm and changes in music performance styles and to excite new listening publics. In contemporary times, rabindranritya is used in musicians’ independent albums, in cinema as well as in the field of dance. A phenomenon of dancing for the camera known as “cover dance” or “dance cover” became popular ways of moving to pre-recorded, trending, pre-inscribed, and authentic of Tagore’s compositions. Sengupta, Ipsita. “‘Originality’, ‘Authenticity’ and ‘Experimentation’: Understanding Tagore’s Music on YouTube”.

Since the copyright on Tagore’s works expired in 2001, dance covers of popular rabindrasangeet circulate widely among the audience. Tagore himself classified his song compositions into parjapalya or segments such as songs of piety, patriotic love, seasons, ceremonies, and miscellaneous. Songs describing the beauty of Bengal’s nature and cycle of seasons (prakriti parjay) have always been popular amongst dancers and choreographers. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, dancers attempted to bring harmony and balance to everyday life by interpreting Tagore’s poetry and rhythms of life. Many use rabindrasangeet as classical dance vocabulary for presenting Tagore’s work for a digital audience, to assert that choreography atypical to conventional rabindranritya lend multidimensionality to the musical arrangements and philosophy. Filmed for creation, sites around dancers shape particular resonances, and dance-making to rabindranritya can be unique to the individual’s training.

Note Odissi performer Jhelem Paranejo introduces her video interpreting rabindrasangeet song Jeebon jokhon shukaye jaye karunadhara esho (YouTube.com 2020b). She employs the lyrics des cribing the beauty of Bengal’s nature and cycle of seasons (prakriti parjay) and the movements are fluid and rhythmic, is not only in the dance, or the “authentic” Santiniketani, Natyavani, classical, or hybrid styles, but how the dance speaks to the new media publics. As was seen amongst the first dancers in Tagore’s institution, “the professionalizing of arts brings with it the promise of self-sustenance and the much-desired freedom of the artist” followed with a “continuous search for new patrons” (Bhattacharya 13–14). The same resonates with artists even while leading precarious lives. For Tagore, creativity was an ongoing search for perfection that would create empathy and free the human soul. Bharati and Rabindra Bharati University, are un-Tagorean.28

In the digitally mediated world, filmed and watched through handheld devices, dance covers of popular rabindranritya circulate widely among the audience. Tagore himself classified his song compositions into parjapalya or segments such as songs of piety, patriotic love, seasons, ceremonies, and miscellaneous. Songs describing the beauty of Bengal’s nature and cycle of seasons (prakriti parjay) have always been popular amongst dancers and choreographers. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, dancers attempted to bring harmony and balance to everyday life by interpreting Tagore’s poetry and rhythms of life. Many use rabindrasangeet as classical dance vocabulary for presenting Tagore’s work for a digital audience, to assert that choreography atypical to conventional rabindranritya lend multidimensionality to the musical arrangements and philosophy. Filmed for creation, sites around dancers shape particular resonances, and dance-making to rabindranritya can be unique to the individual’s training.
Ami Chitrangada that Tagore initially ascribed to the characters in the notions of manly masculinity and womanly femininity. The danced by a cross-dressed man Biswajit H. (YouTube. Most songs imagine scenes of union and separation between Krishna and Radha. Bhanusingher Padabali mas. See Purkayastha's "Warrior, Untouchable, Courtesan" for a discussion on marginalised women occupying central positions in Tagore's dance-drama. Chitrangada appears frequently in my search, especially two. One song describes Chitrangada's inner emotions as they employ in the video's creative process camerawork, while working on original choreography. Tagore too veers towards women claiming their identity overcoming a stagnant ideal, nor define it as either Indian or oriental, for such finally only robs it of life's privilege which is freedom".

The ensemble of Subhangik led by Subhajit K. Das employs in the video's creative process camerawork and choreography, thereby striking a balance between the human-nonhuman site elements. In many ways, this has been the next stage of making dance films—combining choreography, site-specificity, camerawork along with music and song text giving rise to vibrant encounters. The creative assemblage to Tagore's compositions here wears a cinematic quality, breaking free from the frontal gaze of the camera. One video narrativizes the devotee seeking the divine to Gahan kunku jama to Manipuri, peninsular and gentler cadence, while simultaneously incorporating traditional and new, abstract expressivity and non-realistic representations. Manipuri movements are preferred for songs with a pronounced percussive rhythm, vigorous Kathakali steps are molded on abstract expressivity and non-realistic representations. Manipuri movements are preferred for songs with a pronounced percussive rhythm, vigorous Kathakali steps are molded on abstract expressivity and non-realistic representations. Manipuri movements are preferred for songs with a pronounced percussive rhythm, vigorous Kathakali steps are molded on abstract expressivity and non-realistic representations. Manipuri movements are preferred for songs with a pronounced percussive rhythm, vigorous Kathakali steps are molded on abstract expressivity and non-realistic representations. Manipuri movements are preferred for songs with a pronounced percussive rhythm, vigorous Kathakali steps are molded on abstract expressivity and non-realistic representations. Manipuri movements are preferred for songs with a pronounced percussive rhythm, vigorous Kathakali steps are molded on abstract expressivity and non-realistic representations. Manipuri movements are preferred for songs with a pronounced percussive rhythm, vigorous Kathakali steps are molded on abstract expressivity and non-realistic representations. Manipuri movements are preferred for songs with a pronounced percussive rhythm, vigorous Kathakali steps are molded on abstract expressivity and non-realistic representations. Manipuri movements are preferred for songs with a pronounced percussive rhythm, vigorous Kathakali steps are molded on abstract expressivity and non-realistic representations. Manipuri movements are preferred for songs with a pronounced percussive rhythm, vigorous Kathakali steps are molded on abstract expressivity and non-realistic representations. Manipuri movements are preferred for songs with a pronounced percussive rhythm, vigorous Kathakali steps are molded on abstract expressivity and non-realistic representations. Manipuri movements are preferred for songs with a pronounced percussive rhythm, vigorous Kathakali steps are molded to suit the text. The range of movement possibilities are from within the "traditional" vocabulary of rabindranitya, they may appear limitless as well as limited. Both Sundar and Bhanusingher Padabali acknowledge receiving a shared, inherited repertoire that is not out of the ordinary for those who make dance videos. In Sundar's dance videos, I see spontaneity in spirit and a stagnating ideal, nor define it as either Indian or oriental, for such finally only robs it of life's privilege which is freedom".

Krishna, the fountainhead of Vaishnav spirituality. A small portion of Tagore's rabindrasangeet directly addressed Hindu divinities, within which the somewhat erotically charged perspectives "Vishnu kunsu pe yavanaka (popularly Haley, Courtsey)" with a powerful subtext of being accepted as an imperfect individual. In Sulagna P.B.'s "dance video of Ami Chitrangada filmed in an interior space lined with furnished arches and pillars act like backdrop of a proscenium zone of multiple classical vocabularies. In contrast, staged under a tree draped with saffron fabric, Subhajit pays a solo homage to interconnected sites, where the dancer attains the celebrated movement idiom created by him. In Maharajio ki shahe the dancer takes a more personalized approach to movement exploration, including placing his body at a site to produce particular affects to show an organic connection between song, nature, Bengaliness (YouTube.com 2021d). Dance practitioners and dance writes note Tagore's unfolding within this body and, in its own way, out of the former's views on interculturalism that stood for unfettered creativity and embracing nobleness in dance: There are no bounds to the depth or to the expansion of any art which, like dancing is the expression of life's urge. We must never shut it within the bounds of a stagnant ideal, nor define it as either Indian or oriental or accidental, for such finally only robs it of life's privilege which is freedom."

While conducting the digital ethnography, two channels stood out for its consistent approaches of dancing rabindranitya in Santiniketan style. Sundar: Rabindranitya and Rabindranitya Riya joined YouTube in March-April 2020. The first channel is managed by an ensemble of artists connected with Visva Bharati, the second is by a solo artist who has graduated from Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata. These experienced dancers scrupulously adhere to rabindranitya style as taught by their institution, which means, there is an absolute, uncorrupted way Tagore's composition are danced. The stylistic movements are based on an amalgamation of Manipuri and Rabindranitya, but veer on abstract expressivity and non-realistic representations. Manipuri movements are preferred for songs with a gentler cadence, while simultaneously incorporating traditional and new, Manipuri and Kathakali movements. She has often filmed her dance on a terrace of a house surrounded by greenery or brick walls. This gives the appearance of an atemporal space of the home came to be denoted as confines through their performances, is a coherent harmony of movements, song texts, and Tagore's core sentiment of dance as a celebration of infallible human spirit, the nature and its resplendent colors. They derive their sensibility and resources from a group of scholars and performers who have been initiated at Santiniketan in creative arts. Their YouTube channel is not only a space to “maintain the legacy of rabindranitya in Santiniketan style" (YouTube.com 2020g), but all the processes and lines of enquiry that had made rabindranitya happen. They draw a continuity in traditional representations of dance for example, in a discussion, Tagore scholars Amarnath Mukhopadhyay and Sudhi Ranjan Mukhopadhyay speak about the role crafts and scenography play in enhancing the essence of dance-dramas (YouTube.com 2021e). They distinguish presentation and application (pragya o byobhata) of material objects in ornamentation of characters and scenes for - the aesthetic of Tagore's dance videos filmed exclusively for a digital audience in houses and gardens, they also share choreographies performed in studios and concerts. Sundar continues to seek nobleness of dance language simultaneously expanding rabindranitya's referential lexicon.

As I mentioned before, as artists along with others settled into the pandemic everyday, sites beyond the four walls offered more possibilities for filming dances. In between the first and the second wave when morbidity and mortality had declined, extraordinary control measures came briefly undone. The pressure to re-emerge financially and reconstitute creative and social lives gave art a new context of making dance films. Besides discussions, dancers show their proficiency in diverse forms to retain audience attention for YouTube. Unlike the traditional accompaniments; the team at Sundar dance to Kabiguran and Rabindranritya Riya use rabindrasangeet sung with a gentler cadence, while for songs with a pronounced percussive rhythm, vigorous Kathakali steps are molded on abstract expressivity and non-realistic representations. Manipuri movements are preferred for songs with a gentler cadence, while simultaneously incorporating traditional and new, Manipuri and Kathakali movements. She has often filmed her dance on a terrace of a house surrounded by greenery or brick walls. This gives the appearance of an atemporal space of the home came to be denoted as confines through their performances, is a coherent harmony of movements, song texts, and Tagore's core sentiment of dance as a celebration of infallible human spirit, the nature and its resplendent colors. They derive their sensibility and resources from a group of scholars and performers who have been initiated at Santiniketan in creative arts. Their YouTube channel is not only a space to “maintain the legacy of rabindranitya in Santiniketan style" (YouTube.com 2020g), but all the processes and lines of enquiry that had made rabindranitya happen. They draw a continuity in traditional representations of dance for example, in a discussion, Tagore scholars Amarnath Mukhopadhyay and Sudhi Ranjan Mukhopadhyay speak about the role crafts and scenography play in enhancing the essence of dance-dramas (YouTube.com 2021e). They distinguish presentation and application (pragya o byobhata) of material objects in ornamentation of characters and scenes for - the aesthetic of Tagore's dance videos filmed exclusively for a digital audience in houses and gardens, they also share choreographies performed in studios and concerts. Sundar continues to seek nobleness of dance language simultaneously expanding rabindranitya's referential lexicon.

Like artists of Sundar, Riya C. of Rabindranitya Riya does not tamper with the satirical, embodied, and movement aesthetics of old Santiniketan style. In this way, she acknowledges receiving a shared, inherited repertoire that was hierarchically transmitted to her in institutions of learning. She recasts it for her digital audience producing a template for aspirational traditional rabindranitya soloists. As dancers today cultivate individual distinction, Riya C.'s dance videos provide a structure for creative elaboration while simultaneously incorporating traditional and new, Manipuri and Kathakali movements. She has often filmed her dance on a terrace of a house surrounded by greenery or brick walls. This gives the appearance of an atemporal style of rabindranitya, the simplicity of which makes her videos popular. Since the beginning of the pandemic, she has published rabindranitya videos at least once or twice every month. In her words, she wants to spread the "Tagore tradition" (YouTube.com 2020h) and to entertain YouTube audiences having learnt for 14 years and earned her degree in Rabindranitya. However, in rabindranitya in the digital medium, can also be summated...
in the words of Martin Kämpchen who anticipated the possibilities of bringing performances of Tagore forward in future:

"Why not experiment more and more with the conventions of performing his plays and dance dramas? Why not add European or Japanese styles of acting, novel scripts, or costumes? If you want even video installations. Have a dance performance while reciting Rabindranath’s poems, enact some of his ballets, allow different instruments to play his tunes, add modern experimental music to his dance dramas – and so on.

The results may, in many cases, become unconvincing, they may end up a failure and not be Rabindranath anymore. But in some successful productions, the mind and art of the Indian poet will reveal a surprising sparkle and impact that is capable of shaking and moving us more deeply than perhaps the original play did which we have watched a dozen times since childhood. Let us remind ourselves that tradition— including the traditions around Rabindranath—can be kept alive and relevant only when it is confronted by new ideas and styles. If these confrontations are being renewed, we soon will confront a museum, rather than a living tradition.”

Dances to radhinrasangeet bridges the generational and other hierarchies, including professionals, amateurs, and hobbyists, and Santinketani and new styles, giving a contemporary outlook to a nostalgic, revered but “quaintly aesthetic. Rabindrasangeet continues to challenge the imagination of contemporary choreographers, upcoming and established dancers which they rose to accept and transform. These transformations allowed dancers to adapt to the imagination of contemporary choreographers, upcoming and established dancers, which they rose to accept and transform. These transformations allowed dancers to embrace the quotidian aspects of dance with the underestimation of this essay’s capacity and social interconnectedness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The newly significant space for informal community gathering and cultural participation had existed before the pandemic. In the digital ethnography of regional Mexican music conducted by Maqoldes and Strub (1–14), it was encountered that audience watched related videos not only for familiarity but a continued sense of community and identity. Likewise, there’s a desire to dance during the pandemic aided Parkinson’s patients (Kelly and Levinthau 64–65), and students and teachers in higher education (Schmid and McGreary-Nichols 135–142), ballet in domestic spaces (Ferrer-Best 30–49) or as I deliberate—without a live audience—dancers attempted to embrace the quotidian aspects of dance in domestic spaces. In the following segment, I come into the pandemic lives when dance as a digitally native content evolved with everyday life.

Rabindranritya and Sociality in Times of Precarity

"As I finish my practice and trace the arch of the terrace, I felt sad and proud. I have to appreciate the warmth of my room, the possibilities of choreography and the roof offers. But, at what time? Perhaps the original play did which we have watched a dozen times since childhood. Let us remind ourselves that tradition— including the traditions around Rabindranath—can be kept alive and relevant only when it is confronted by new ideas and styles. If these confrontations are being renewed, we soon will confront a museum, rather than a living tradition.”

In the years 2020–2021, dance videos on Tagore’s compositions peaked in the period between Bengali New Year (mid-April), International World Dance Day (April 29) and Tagore’s birth anniversary (May 8/9). Using Tagore’s song texts, the dancers earnestly express their artistry towards emotional, physical even spiritual freedom. The digital ethnography made apparent that performers need to constantly acquire new modes of performance to remain relevant in the larger public domain. The digital had become ubiquitously infused with all parts of pandemic lives, but a valid vehicle of cultural expression. To practice art, was for some soulful and sobering, offering sanctuary from the unpredictability of pandemic and sudden feelings of being unmoored from daily life. For the rest it came to be an act of replenishing the praxis of art and everyday life, where artists learnt how to dance during this period. A performance for the digital suggests larger and presumably heterogeneous audience. Although radhinrasangeet could be viewed as a representative of a region’s collective personhood, Tagore’s compositions rouse deep emotions beyond the Bengali-speaking peoples.

Sociality, in all its light, shade and complexity underwent a change in micro-contexts of everyday life. If interaction over the digital emerged as norm, some interactions within households and residences changed during lockdowns too. Since they lived in a high-rise urban neighborhood with no living downstairs, one dancer mentions “I could not stamp my feet, so I opted for sit-down choreography,” i.e., to not move lower limbs at all (B33, 2021). Some spent “quality time” with their daughter by making “duet choreography in this period” (U40, 2021), taught their father “how to hold the phone and film in landscape mode” (B36, 2021), saw “other dancers performing traditional music and songs as she knows more about Bengali culture” (S35, 2021). “Other dancer-friends” kept them motivated though for the first five months of the pandemic they felt extremely “vulnerable not having met their parents” even if they lived not far away, and “dance was a way to connect with them over distance” (M33, 2021). The field of socialities was marked with a vortex of different emotions that came from staying far away from family and friends; their words spoke of “disconnection, isolation, rage, hopelessness” all of which led them through profoundly affective experience making them unthinkably connected to others. Of grief, they say, although they lost no one to death, the collective grief of many people felt like an encumbrance. To dance during the pandemic was to be at a privileged place. It meant their health, preparedness, materials, affects, sentiments, hardships could be largely adjusted to the social, economic and medical crises. They responded that they each of them have experienced either of three forms of precariousness—health risks, loss of kin and unstable employment. Precarity is an existential vulnerability or conditions of intense uncertainty resulting into a different mode of being.32 The “absolute lack of control over one’s present and future” continued and convinced them to “join a local volunteer organization to raise funds for household help”; as a gratitude, they made a private dance video for the donors (S35, 2021). Voluntarism and reciprocity aside, dance videos were primarily made as expressions of creativity. Except two, all dancers informed that their dance videos for YouTube were neither monetized, nor were they financially compensated for making them. Fifty percent of them held other jobs and danced recreationally, other five are dancers by profession out of which three experienced economic challenges due to the loss of performance and teaching opportunities. This demonstrates the manifold ways in which pandemic precarity engulfed individuals from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. The pandemic made it difficult to live in a way that perhaps was considered “not an economic safety net; “making videos did not generate income” but it got them noticed by viewers leading to enquiries and new students, leaving them realizing “there is a future in teaching online” (M33, 2021). Although precarity offers tenous opportunities to create lasting forms, these artists have found a dependable vehicle of expression in filming themselves dance. It can

32 Riya C. has a second channel where she publishes dance covers on music other than rabindrasangeet.

33 Riya C. has a second channel where she publishes dance covers on music other than rabindrasangeet.

34 Sea Long and Moore (38) grasp various definitions of sociality, especially acknowledging the distinctive of human sociality, collective behaviour and belonging, as well as processes underlying socialities online.
be as a genuine response to reconstruct artistic skills during lockdown i.e., teaching oneself techniques of filming, editing audio-visual materials, or a process to mitigate the aching awareness of dissonance. There is an earnest effort towards beating social confinement, emotional exhaustion, even spiritual freedom—this is where they find Tagore’s compositions soothing. Amidst the reality of confinement, rabindrasangeet inspired “to appreciate the minute and the particular” of everyday life (B36, 2021), the verses describe “many layers of human emotions” (U40, 2021), and continued to help them “understand life” (C42, 2021). Deeply motivated by Upanishadic philosophy, Tagore wrote about everyday life and human emotions with profound sensitivity. His words are alleviating, apotropaic even “during any moment of human crisis or loss” (K39, 2021). Choreographing Tagore’s compositions implies their messages are reflected within his words, through which “a global audience, a larger group of people can cope with distress—is it a responsibility and a goal for a performing artist” (K39, 2021).

Through a “synthesis of verses, movements, music and visuality”, Tagore’s compositions “can educate and entertain the digital audience” (B36, 2021); the verses speak of “continuous re-creation and spontaneity” as instilled his “philosophy of creativity and freedom” (Chakravorty “Intercultural Synthesis” 250). We see the dancers engage with and speak of embodying the Tagorean thought of sustaining the self even against the forces of nature. They might “not engage with the larger civic, social, cultural or political sides of the worlds at all times”, but in the lockdowns they considered making dance videos as “a service to people, to give a little of their lives, to those who are at the convergence of digital inequality and many other forms of precarity. It connects with those who have appreciated the care and sense of safety their homes provide, but not knowing if art has impacted the lives of the refugee, the migrant, the vibrant, residents of care homes, or in palliative care. Nor do the peer-research include dancers from other intersections of caste, class, gender. Secondly, while I focused on creativity, sociality, and visibility on YouTube—though I reflect on precarity—the responses I have are inadequate in knowing the breadth of economic and social differences that sharply rose amongst performers without stable social or financial support systems, thereby raising the complexities of creating art. Precarity is strongly associated with the field of performing arts or work associated with creative and cultural industries. Some performers have more stable and better-paid work than others, but precarity is more acutely experienced by those who are already battling other disadvantages and vulnerabilities. This research is largely based on individuals who were not forced to find other means of earning a living, nor faced exploitation as artists by digital platforms. They created, collaborated, and curated a communal experience with or without their peers. From this perspective, the essay is insular in scope. It does not offer comments on distribution of precariousness, intermittent work, or the loss of work dancers faced during the pandemic. What it does, is to make visible creative labor of unnoticed performances that peppered our screens in our lockdown lives.

### Conclusion

In revisiting dancers in everyday spaces—the stage and out of the studio—and while studying new relationships between artist and audience, choreographer, and site, we see dances created during the pandemic that facilitate an understanding of connectedness and solidarity, as well as touch upon new findings on telepresence and video-making by individuals for a global, digital audience. At the time of lockdowns, many were creatively exploring their rooms and roofs, i.e., domestic spaces out of curiosity, gratitude, even boredom, thereby bringing private spaces more into the public especially virtual domain. Moreover governments, citizens, artists, and cultural workers reacted to the unprecedented disruptions to their lives by embracing some amount creative activity, suggesting that for few, dance did extend a sense of togetherness despite distances. I focus on a small fragment of this tapestry: the vernacular and contemporary culture of Bengal, which shows that Rabindranath Tagore’s compositional legacy possesses an ability to be interpreted innovatively. This essay is the first scholarly examination of rabindranitya in the digital medium, and role of creativity and sociality in the co-constitution of experiencing dance emplaced within this site.

With digital ethnography as one of the methodological tools to research culture and society in the digital space, I examined dance at multiple sites regulated by pandemic restrictions. However, this research does not fully embrace the potential of the pandemic moment. Firstly, the drawback of digital ethnography and conscious sampling is that I cannot connect with those who are at the convergence of digital inequality and many other forms of precarity. It connects with those who have appreciated the care and sense of safety their homes provide, but not knowing if art has impacted the lives of the refugee, the migrant, the vibrant, residents of care homes, or in palliative care. Nor do the peer-research include dancers from other intersections of caste, class, gender. Secondly, while I focused on creativity, sociality, and visibility on YouTube—though I reflect on precarity—the responses I have are inadequate in knowing the breadth of economic and social differences that sharply rose amongst performers without stable social or financial support systems, thereby raising the complexities of creating art. Precarity is strongly associated with the field of performing arts or work associated with creative and cultural industries. Some performers have more stable and better-paid work than others, but precarity is more acutely experienced by those who are already battling other disadvantages and vulnerabilities. This research is largely based on individuals who were not forced to find other means of earning a living, nor faced exploitation as artists by digital platforms. They created, collaborated, and curated a communal experience with or without their peers. From this perspective, the essay is insular in scope. It does not offer comments on distribution of precariousness, intermittent work, or the loss of work dancers faced during the pandemic. What it does, is to make visible creative labor of unnoticed performances that peppered our screens in our lockdown lives.

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