

Keynote Speaker

Dr. Prarthana Purkayastha (Reader/ Research and Knowledge Exchange Lead, Royal Holloway University of London)

Title: *A Digital Archive of Beauties and Beloveds: Nautch in the Age of Mechanical Reprodarshan*

Abstract

The transmission of Indian dances and dancers through mediated visual forms (sketches, paintings, mass-produced prints, matchbox labels and photographs) has had a long and lively history. In this talk, I turn to digital archives of popular nineteenth-century chromolithographic prints and photographic traces of Indian ‘sundaris’ (beauties) and ‘jans’ (beloveds). These reveal how little-known Indian nautch dancers proliferated the popular visual realm despite, and perhaps even due to, stringent colonial-era regulations of female dancing bodies deemed deviant. Charting the arrival of visual art technologies and prolific art studio activity in colonial Bengal, I study the visual remains of fictional and real nineteenth century women performers to re-examine the erased labour of nautch dancers in modern anti-colonial Indian theatre. Drawing on Walter Benjamin’s idea of the mechanical reproduction of art, this talk outlines how iconic colonial-era dancer-actresses played a pivotal role in a process I call *reprodarshan*, one in which mass-produced images of women performers were viewed by their spectators within the unique affective economy of ‘darshan’. The talk explores the role of digital visual archives in offering historians and scholars of dance a crucial opportunity to reassess the vitality and significance of marginalised subjects in Indian dance and theatre.

In the order of Presentations:

Name: Swetha Mangalath

Independent

Type of Presentation: Paper Presentation (30 minutes)

Title: *Globalising Mohiniyattam: Idea of Feminine Dance and its Mediation through Digital Platforms*

Abstract

Classical Indian dances have evolved today to become globalized, blending cultural identity with universal appeal. In this context, digital platforms play a pivotal role in facilitating the spread of unique identity as well as the multiplicity of the art forms. This study focuses on *Mohiniyattam*, a classical dance form from Southern India, examining its feminine identity and its dissemination and acceptance in the global arena through digital training platforms. The construction of the dance form's identity is analysed using Michel Foucault's concept of episteme and the gaze of power groups across different epochs, considering its mediation and transformation. *Mohiniyattam's* unique feminine nature is historically constructed and reconstructed according to dominant episteme on feminine identity.

The global identity of *Mohiniyattam* is explored through its mediation via digital learning platforms, with a case study of *Natyasutra online*- one of the largest digital media learning platforms for Indian classical arts. Digital tutorial videos are examined as channels of communication, applying the Uses and Gratification theory of Media, to understand their impact. The study finds tutorial videos have limitations in terms of reach to broader audience, compared to dance films and documentaries. However, they gratify the target learners, those who demand for novelty, in terms of learning and performing new choreographies. They contribute to spreading the reconstructed identity of the dance form among users. This study suggests further exploration of the scope of virtual platforms and mediation processes in removing the exoticism associated with *Mohiniyattam*. Tutorial video contents, archived videos, surveys, interviews, and secondary sources are used to comprehensively examine the mediated communication techniques of *Mohiniyattam* and the interpretation of the concept of 'femininity' in the 'Feminine' dance form.

Biography

Swetha Mangalath, an independent researcher and Mohiniyattam dancer from Kerala, India and currently based in Cambridge, UK. Formerly an assistant professor at St. Aloysius College, Mangalore and program assistant at the National Broadcaster of India- Doordarshan. Holds postgraduate degrees in Media Studies and Dance and a Ph.D. from Mahatma Gandhi University in Media and Performance studies. A freelance art journalist, Research Associate at the Centre for South Indian Studies. As an educator and performer actively promotes the Classical Indian Dance style- Mohiniyattam through lecture demonstrates and workshops, especially in diaspora communities.

Name: Hiten Mistry

Institutional Affiliation: Centre for Dance Research, Coventry University

Type of Presentation: Paper Presentation (30 minutes)

Title: *Resilient Rhythms: UK South Asian Community Dance Practitioners during the Covid-19 lockdown.*

Abstract

This paper delves into the transformative impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on the South Asian Community dance practices in the UK, offering some early insights from my PhD Study. In March 2020, the lockdown prompted dance artists to explore innovative remote dance engagement. This paper explores the future landscape of South Asian Community dance in post-pandemic Britain, identifying elements worth retaining from the period of dance adaption. Focusing on what is argued to be the resilience of South Asian dance practitioners, this paper provides a perspective on how community dance evolved during the lockdown, showing practitioners' capacity to adapt and sustain virtual practices despite facing multiple challenges such as a sense of loss and isolation. Central to the paper is the exploration of the contemporary British Asian hybrid voice as the study sheds light on practitioners' perspectives on their practice gathered through a series of case studies and interviews. Beginning with a brief overview of the UK South Asian community dance sector and its development through to the current post-pandemic era, the presentation will underscore the relevance of South Asian dance to the identities, mental health and lives of diasporic British South Asians today. The aim is to offer valuable insights into the dynamic landscape of South Asian community dance practices in the wake of the pandemic.

Sources

Amans, D., (2017). *An Introduction to Community Dance Practice*. 2nd Edn. London. Palgrave

Tomlinson, J (2002) *Cultural Imperialism*. 1st Edn. London. Continuum

Biography

Hiten Mistry is a Bharata Natyam Practitioner based in Leicester, U.K. A 3rd-year Ph.D. Dance Researcher at the Centre for Dance Research at Coventry University, researching the impact of COVID-19 on the UK South Asian Community Dance practices. One of the UK's leading South Asian Dancers in 2020, he was listed as one of Akademi's 40 under 40 dance artists to look out for. As a Choreographer, Hiten is inquisitive about pushing the boundaries of the Bharata Natyam Dance form, exploring and exhibiting its versatility. He teaches Bharata Natyam classes in Leicester and Birmingham under his school, Natya Shakti.

Name: Rohini Acharya

Institutional Affiliation: Visiting Assistant Professor of Dance, Oberlin College and Conservatory

Type of Presentation: Paper Presentation (30 minutes)

Title: *#bharatanatyam: Transforming Bharata Natyam Through Social Media Platforms*

Abstract

In this paper, I examine how second-generation South Asian Americans utilize social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok to rework Bharata Natyam techniques, compositions, and themes through contemporary issues from within their own generational, political, social, and cultural context in the US. Through ethnographic research and choreographic analysis, I analyze the aesthetic and thematic changes practitioners make to the Bharata Natyam repertoire through the combination of dance, music, text, and dialogue to create “viral” videos on these platforms that reflect their experiences of living in the US. I argue that second-generation practitioners are interested in utilizing social media to transform Indian cultural attitudes around gender, religion, and nationalism through practices manifesting cultural hybridity that make Bharata Natyam an accessible and relevant practice. Making Bharata Natyam an accessible and relevant practice means making work that is accessible and visible to audiences globally and increasing performance opportunities and resources for practitioners to showcase their work. While second-generation practitioners rework Bharata Natyam on these platforms, I also examine the ways they reinforce issues of Indian nationalism in the diaspora in their promotional material, the events they perform at, and the ways they label their work once they receive a lot of views and “likes” on videos they upload to Instagram or TikTok. I analyze the tension between wanting to challenge Indian cultural attitudes (caste, class, gender, religion, and nationalism) and reinforcing these issues in their work as I highlight the stakes for South Asian American dancers in the diaspora to develop Bharata Natyam in the US. In examining how second-generation practitioners rework Bharata Natyam through social media platforms, I further discuss the importance of these platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic and how the pandemic changed the circulation and reception of Bharata Natyam practice.

Biography

Rohini Acharya is a Bharata Natyam performer, choreographer, and teacher. She holds a PhD in Dance Studies from The Ohio State University, an MFA in Dance from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, and an MA in Performance Studies from New York University. She is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor of Dance at Oberlin College and Conservatory. Her research examines how concert stages, festivals, competitions, and online platforms provide opportunities for second-generation South Asian Americans to rework and transform Bharata Natyam practice in the US.

Names: Hetty Blades and Vipavinee Artpradid

Institutional Affiliation: Centre for Dance Research (C-DaRE) Coventry University

Type of Presentation: Single 30 min presentation

Title: *Sharing Movement: Collaboration, ownership and making Indian dance online*

Abstract

This presentation discusses some of the findings from *Moving Online: Ontology and Ownership of InternetDance*, an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded fellowship that examines the intersections of ontology and ownership in relation to dance online. We reflect on observations of dance artist Anjana Bala's choreographic process while making *Optics* and interviews with UK-based practitioners of Indian dance to think-through how online sharing shapes practices of collaboration and ownership within their work.

Biographies

Dr **Hetty Blades** is an Associate Professor in the Centre for Dance Research (C-DaRE) at Coventry University. She is currently Principle Investigator on *Moving Online: Ontology and Ownership of Internet Dance* (Arts and Humanities Research Council 2022-24, grant reference: AH/W01002X/1). She has worked on research projects funded by AHRC, Digital Catapult (EPSRC), British Council and Coventry University. Hetty is Co-Lead for Postgraduate Researchers in C-DaRE.

Vipavinee Artpradid's research applies embodied and inclusive qualitative research methodologies for social change and draws from her background in media anthropology, social anthropology, and cultural studies. She is currently leading funded projects on mapping and evaluating the AHRC Dance Research Matters Networks ([AHRC AH/Y002105/1](#)) and collaborating with [FRONTLINEdance](#) to develop embodied phenomenography for inclusive dance programme evaluation (British Academy SRG2324/240089). Her PhD ([2020](#)) applied phenomenography to dance audience engagement to explore variations in ways of understanding disability. She has written on integration and inclusion in dance ([2022](#)), embodied hearing technologies ([2022](#)), and kinaesthetic empathic witnessing ([2023](#)). Vip is an Assistant Professor at the [Centre for Dance Research \(C-DaRE\)](#), Coventry University.

Name: Ranjini Nair

Institutional Affiliation: University of Cambridge

Type of Presentation: Paper Presentation (30 minutes)

Title:

Abstract

In this paper, I present the argument that social media facilitates the “break-down” of the all-encompassing narrative hold that the state sustained over what Indian classical dance is, was, and could be. In his book *Pirate Modernity: Delhi’s Media Urbanism* (2010), Ravi Sundaram examines how low-cost technology can circumvent the state to provide subaltern populations access to versions of modernity denied to them by the state. For Sundaram, postcolonial cities produce a media experience that assumes constant breakdown. This produces a need to recycle or bypass existing infrastructures causing breakdown. And so most inhabitants of Indian cities have “grown up with the rhythm of technological irregularity” and “the ingenious search for solutions, or jugaad as it is known in Northern India”.

This "bypassing" is exactly how Indian classical dancers use social media today to side-step or even augment—depending on their political views—the narrative provided by the state. If existing infrastructures for the dissemination of Indian classical dance are controlled by the state via various cultural organizations, state broadcasting networks, their grading systems, and empanelment processes, social media then becomes the jugaad on offer.

The infrastructure provided by the state includes performance opportunities, scholarships, and grants run by the cultural wings of the state like the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the Ministry of Culture, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, and the national broadcasting network known as Doordarshan.

Social media then becomes the ingenious search for solutions, in its ability to create its own platforms, its own ways of generating funds, its audience, without the interference of the state— perhaps even despite the interference of the state and its attendant gatekeepers. Through this breakdown, which I posit as a positive development, multiple narratives surrounding Indian classical dance are able to find expression, rather than the state-run narrative which only allows for Indian classical dance to stand in as a metonym for upper-caste Hindu cultural hegemony.

Biography

Ranjini is a kuchipudi dancer and PhD student at the University of Cambridge. As someone starting to make a tentative foray into choreography, her work is interested in the power structures embedded into the formal aesthetics demanded of the dancer. She sees writing about dance as an equal part of her practice and has written for Indian media outlets on dance in India.

Name: Yashashwani Srinivas

Institutional Affiliation: Doctoral Student, School of History, University of Leeds

Type of Presentation: Paper Presentation (30 minutes)

Title: *Cast(e)ing the stage: Memoirs of the Anti-caste Movement in Karnataka*

Abstract

The post-colonial Dalit movement in India, particularly influenced by the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra, played a pivotal role in mobilizing Dalit youth in Karnataka. Gaining substantial momentum in 1972 amid allegations against the prominent Dalit politician B Basavalingappa in the 'Boosa Incident,' the movement culminated in the establishment of the Dalit Sangharsha Samiti (DSS) in 1977. Persisting for nearly five decades, the DSS has emerged as a crucial and actively engaged anti-caste movement in post-colonial India. This paper delves into the examination of cultural manifestations, encompassing dance, songs, street plays, etc., employed by the DSS between the 1970s and 1990s to protest incidents of caste discrimination and untouchability.

Structured in two parts, the first segment focuses on two case studies of caste atrocities and the corresponding cultural responses. The latter part addresses the caste politics of spatiality and lacunae in documenting and digitizing such anti-caste protest culture. Forming part of my doctoral project, this research aims to explore the underexplored correlation between culture and politics, alongside the interplay between socio-political movements and formal political structures in India, employing the DSS as a case study. The study draws upon interviews, focused group discussions with DSS members and senior leaders, and archival research at the Karnataka State Archives in Bengaluru.

Biography

Yashashwani Srinivas is a PhD student at the School of History, University of Leeds. Her PhD is on the Dalit Movement in post-colonial Karnataka, for which she has secured funding from the prestigious Arts and Humanities Research Council. As a researcher working on themes of caste, gender, print culture and social movements she has held positions at universities and organisations India, the UK and the USA. She co-founded community education initiative- Neelam Iravupadasalai with Dalit film maker and screen writer Pa Ranjith.

Name: Roopa Mahadevan, Surabhi Bharadwaj (USA) and Veena Basavarajaiah (India)

Institutional Affiliation: Independent Artists

Type of presentation: Performance for 30 minutes followed by a post performance discussion focusing on the process for 30 minutes

Title: *Fostering Sisterhood over Zoom*

Abstract

The Maze is a devised artistic creation that fuses text, movement, poetry, music, theatre, and cutting-edge technology to challenge prevailing notions of beauty, femininity, motherhood, and the deification of womanhood. In navigating the complex labyrinth of societal norms and expectations, we seek to explore the political through the personal, drawing from lived experiences and stories of women navigating patriarchy.

The Maze was co-created on sessions on Zoom over a period of two years. Surabhi, the performer lives in the USA and Veena, the director resides in Bangalore, India and this online digital space became the tool for meeting, moving, conversing and creating the work, despite the distance and time difference. This app was used extensively during the pandemic by artists trained in Indian dance around the world, redefining not just the pedagogy of the form in the way it was taught and learned but shifting the ontology of performance through live streaming and online shows. We attempted to use this tool to see if it can enable intuitive movement exploration, emotional connection and a creative process that is deeply personal. We also used embodied practice to create the sound scape in collaboration with the music composer and the piece was awarded the Isadora Duncan award for the innovative sound score in 2023.

What does a professional space look like in this kind of process? How does one hold space for the collaborators online? If we are relating to each with movement, what part of our body is making these connection when we are online? We were able to develop a deep sense of sisterhood without having shared a physical space, what aspect of this online space enabled intimacy? These are some of the questions that continue to fascinate us as we continue to perform and share this work.

Biographies

Roopa Mahadevan is a leading Indian classical vocalist and crossover artist in the South Asian diaspora. Known for her powerful and emotive voice, multidisciplinary talents, and collaborative spirit, Roopa's artistic projects take her to diverse soundscapes and corners of the world - from Chennai's Music Academy to the cutting-edge venues of New York City and the cultural centers of American suburbia.

Surabhi Bharadwaj (Artistic Director of Siddhi Creative) is a Bharatanatyam dancer, choreographer, educator, lighting designer, and arts administrator. Trained under many eminent teachers, she holds an MFA in Bharatanatyam from Sastra University, Thanjavur and an MFA in Dance: Design and Production from Saint Mary's College of California.

Veena Basavarajaiah is an established movement artist based in Bangalore, a performer, choreographer, and director. With a MA in South Asian Dance Studies from Roehampton University, UK, she has written several essays on South Asian Dance. She is an illustrator who uses cartoons to question the art world through her Instagram profile [Cartoon_natyam](#).

Names: Mohamed Haseeb N and Shibinu Shahul Hameed

Institutional Affiliation: PSMO College and University of Mangalore

Type of Presentation: Paper Presentation (30 minutes)

Title: *Many Sounds One Sea: Revisit into the Kolkkali Performance of Mappilas of Malabar.*

Abstract

Mappila Kolkkali (Stick dance) is a group performing art with sticks practiced mainly by the Mappila fisherman community. Among the Mappila art forms, Kolkkali belongs to a special category, it is a mixture of music, movement, physical strength and emotional stability. More resemblance to the martial art *kalarippayattu*. The first part beginning with *Mappilappattu* and a simple body movement known as '*marinjadi minkkali*' and ended with an intricate step '*ozichil mutt*'. The pattern of body movements varied in accordance with the rhythm of Mappila songs and oral commands (*vayitari*). There are two body movements, first one is slow known as *Chayal* and fast movement is known as *Murukkam*. *Talakali kolkkali* is prevalent among the fisherman of Malabar and *Kurrikalum kuttikalum* is popular in interior parts of Malabar. Generally the band consists of twelve members. They divided into two groups to form an inner circle (*Agam*) and an outer circle (*puram*). In order to demarcate the inner and outer circle generally the band wear different colors of costume and belt either in green or black in color. Kolkkali was a source of inspiration in the anti-colonial struggle and played a key role in the socialization process of Mappila community. This is an attempt to understand the tradition and changes that happened in Kolkkali by analyzing its different steps, styles, and costumes which are recorded by Dutch ethnomusicologist, Arnold Adriaan Bake in 1938. Through this musical voyage, connecting different historical phases in the light of Bake recordings of 1938 and restudy conducted by Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy and Amy Catlin Jairazbhoy in 1991, I hope my paper provides wider dimensions into Ethnomusicology.

Biographies

Mr. Mohamed Haseeb N is currently working as Assistant Professor, Department of History at PSMO College, University of Calicut, Kerala, India. He completed graduation and post-graduation in History with special focus on 'Indian History and Culture' from Calicut University. Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR) has awarded Junior Research Fellowship in 2019. He is pursuing his Ph.D in Mangalore University. His special interest is in the field of *Mappila song*, a unique musical genre compiled and composed by Mappilas of Malabar. Apart from Mappila song, he is an acknowledged expert in other Mappila performing arts namely *Vatta pattu*, *Daff muttu*, *Arabana muttu* and *Kolkkali*. He presented papers at several conferences, including the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM), International Council for Traditional Music (ICTMD) world Conference, British Forum for Ethnomusicology (BFE), Royal Musical Association (RMA), and the Association of Ethnomusicology-Turkey. He used to engage with the local cognoscente of Mappila singers and got trained intensively for almost twenty-five years in this field. He is actively engaging Arnold Bake restudy project from different parts of Kerala along with Professor Amy Catlin

Jairazbhoy, University of California especially with Teffi recordings of Dutch ethnomusicologist Arnold Bake from Malabar and beyond.

Dr. Shibinu S is currently working as Associate Professor and Head, Department of Economics at PSMO College, Kerala. He garnered his bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees from the University of Kerala. He is a Research Guide at the University of Calicut. Currently, he is member of the AC Steering Committee and Faculty of Humanities of the University of Calicut, Kerala. Formerly he was member of the UG and PG Board of Economics of the University of Calicut. He is working as Senior Research Fellow at the International Institute of Migration and Development, Kerala. He is also the Director of the MK Haji Chair for Migration Studies, Kerala.

Dr. Shibinu has authored three books- Nitaqat and its Impact on the Labour Market of Kerala, Gulf Migration on the Educational Mobility of Muslim Women-A Study of Malappuram and Economic Development-A Theoretical Perspective. He presented research papers at several conferences, including International Council for Traditional Music World conference (ICTM), International Migration Conference, Germany. In 2023 he presented a paper titled "Letter Songs and Trans-locality in Music: The Emotional Voyages of Mappilas Migrants of Kerala", in 12th Symposium of the ICTMD Study Group on Music and Minorities with a joint day with the ICTMD Study Group on Indigenous Music and Dance, University of Kelaniya, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Name: Antara Chakrabarty

Affiliation: Doctoral Candidate, Sociology, South Asian University, New Delhi, India

Type of Presentation: Paper Presentation (30 minutes)

Title: *Digital Resonance: Sylheti Dhamail Folk Dance and Performative Assertions in Cyberspace*

Sub theme: Online Embodiment and New Ethnographic Approaches

Abstract

Premised on the background of an emotional and ethnolinguistic solidarity among the Sylhetis across Assam and Bangladesh there is a problematic cartographic and ethnic history dwelling on self and other vis-à-vis Sylheti and Bengali. In this backdrop the proposed paper seeks to collect empirical and ethnographic account to decipher the idea of performative assertions through social media platforms like Facebook basing on the altar of memory and trauma. Sylhet in this case, was a southwestern district of Assam, separated from Mymensingh, an eastern district of Eastern Bengal, i.e., Bangladesh, by the tributaries of the river Meghna. (Majumdar 1947) The final vivisection of Sylhet during Indian partition of 1947 pushed the districts of Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj to India, Assam collectively known as the Barak Valley. Yet, belonging is also an analytic for understanding how history is remembered and articulated as a claim to territory, rights, discontent and membership in unstable diasporic place. In contrast to the Brahmaputra valley¹, the Sylhetis of the Barak valley, Assam are grappling with their nativity that is at stake as they are often subject to being ostracized as ‘refugees’ or ‘outsiders’ in their own lands. The Sylhetis are till date looked at as refugees and outsiders. The Sylheti folklore present myths, jokes and legends to assure a sense of cohesion and cultural crystallization too. These collective memories symbolize and encapsulate the loss of a distant home. This digital ethnographic research envisages to put together the components of this collective memory. Do such performances made through the digital platform blur the proto-nationalist interests? But the question is, if performance was ought to be ephemeral, how does it serve the purpose of a community question overtime? It may be understood as how it can transcend through one-time performances leaving its essence etched in the memories of the communities performing it. It serves as a tool to transmit social knowledge, memory and assert a collective identity. In such a way, every performance expects something out of its spectator, a response, in coherence with a social current or indifference and ridicule.

A layman’s idea of the term ‘folklore’ lies in the past, in the form of archive, memory, legend or a mythical fairy tale. The ideal conception of folk as a performance consisted an ‘embodiment of the ability in a troupe of plebeian singers in the street’. (Vasudevan, 2011) Significantly, most of these folklores are transmitted through imitation rather than writing down of the folk beliefs and notations of the songs. (Titon, 1992) But how does one keep at abeyance the question of authenticity of folk and its antiquity? How can one process the changes made to such folk performances overtime due to collective stigma and contested nationalism?

This, as put by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, calls the “the production of locality”. It moves beyond the binaries of what today constitutes the local and the global, rather reinforces the idea that local itself has transcended into a global space due to technology. We

¹ Brahmaputra valley is resided by the pre-dominant Assamese population

in the 21st century live in an information society which thrives on Internet and virtual space. Be it orality or performance, virtual space has explained the reach of local folklores from the small folk and academic books to the globe. Folklore too cannot be studied without discussing the nuances in the cyberspace. Internet, being a collective platform is open and the contents can be accessed and contributed by any individual with the possession of internet and social media unlike the television which is limited to the professionals. At the same time, the core functions of folklore also come with a set of customs and sanctions invariably in the form of escapades. Such as prohibitions that were enforced on the characters of hero and heroine and punishments in case of breaching such prohibitions. (Bronner S. J., 2007) Something that cannot be essentialized into past and present but addressed as a continuum and spectrum, transmitting through new forms of medium such as mass media. Therefore, a departure from the classical understanding of folk, we now see it as a culture shared by a community. In this larger paradigm, the paper seeks to unravel the Sylheti Dhamail folk dance especially in the contemporary times made through social media platforms and get-togethers. The central question shall remain as if how can such a get-together celebrate the spectacle of archiving memories of such a community which has seen loss, derision and collective trauma.

Biography

I am **Antara Chakrabarty**, currently a mid-stage Sociology doctoral candidate at South Asian University, New Delhi, India. My current work involves the study of Sylheti diaspora in India, especially in the Barak Valley region of Assam and their identity assertions made through performative folklores. My areas of interest include performance studies, refugee studies, migration, memory studies, folklore, visual anthropology. Prior to this I have completed MPhil and Masters degree in Development Studies from Jamia Millia Islamia and Jawaharlal Nehru University, India respectively. Apart from these, I have already presented my papers in prestigious institutions all over the world in the last three years and have two articles in line for publication in reputed journals.

Name: Dr Tom Hastings

Institutional Affiliation: Lecturer in Dance, London Contemporary Dance School, The Place

Type of Presentation: Paper Presentation (30 minutes)

Title: “Why did you go to India and what did you bring back?”: American Postmodernism in Kerala (1970-76)

Abstract

The above question was put to the American choreographer Yvonne Rainer by *The Drama Review* upon her return from India, where she had spent six weeks in 1971 performing her own work and viewing performances. Rainer recorded her encounters with Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kathakali and other dance forms, including Chavittunatakam, in her “India Diary”, a kind of travelogue whose entries in Delhi, Chennai, and the state of Kerala reflect a profound sense of cultural difference. Indeed, Rainer reported being ‘flooded with contemptuous feelings toward my own culture’ as well as a feeling of “culture shock” upon her return to Manhattan, and the trip led her to investigate the possibility of working with myth in performance.

In 1976, performance studies scholar Richard Schechner spent several weeks attending the Kathakali Kalamandalam in Kerala, where he participated in training and conducted ethnographic work. In his published text on this trip, ‘Performer Training Interculturally’ (1985), Schechner compares the Kathakali training regimen to the ‘Euro-American tradition’ in which he himself makes performances, evaluating similarities and differences across cultures.

In my presentation, I read Schechner’s and Rainer’s accounts of their time in Kerala as cultural documents of American Postmodernism, figuring both accounts as indicative of the transculturation of Indian performing arts during the 1970s. In dialogue with Indian dancer and scholar, Ananya Chatterjea’s critique of Rainer’s “India Diary” (2004), I ask the following questions: How did Rainer and Schechner bring their respective aesthetic criteria to bear on Indian performing arts? In what ways do their accounts marshal Indian performing arts to respond to anxieties and problems in American Postmodernism, with a specific focus on the question of transmission? And finally, reflecting on my own experience of viewing a demonstration of Chavittunatakam in Kerala, I ask, what are the effects of this postmodern genealogy in the present?

Biography

Dr Tom Hastings is Lecturer in Dance at The Place, London. Tom works on contemporary performance at the intersection of politics, and theories of race and gender. He completed his PhD in History of Art at University of Leeds in 2018, which focused on the status of props in the work of American choreographer Yvonne Rainer. His current research concerns the social aspects of performance, and he is working on a book project that excavates the history of the UK culture wars through performance case studies in India, Ghana, Trinidad, and the UK. He regularly writes criticism for magazines including *Art Monthly*, *Frieze*, and *Texte zur Kunst*.

Name: Giridhar Raghunathan

Institutional Affiliation: PhD Candidate, University of Roehampton, London

Type of Presentation: Paper Presentation (30 minutes)

Title: *The dual onus of decolonialisation and de-Sanskritisation of the transnational Classical Indian dance*

Abstract

The relation of art and tradition is recognised as a powerful means to decolonisation (Gibbons, 1979). Yet, in performing arts such as Indian classical dances, the term tradition has multiple characteristics. Whilst some practitioners affirm that tradition means tracing the Sanskritic past of Indian classical dance through literary works such as Natya Sastra (Subrahmanyam, 1979, 1997, 2001), other scholars and practitioners focus predominantly on the role and contribution of hereditary dancers (Soneji, 2011, Krishnan, 2013). The chronological proximity of the 19th and 20th century devadasi dance practice ascertains a stronger, direct and a relatively accessible link to the dance form thereby strengthening it as a source of tradition. Thus, the attribution of where predominantly the tradition of the forms come from is polarised between this Sanskritic and regional positionalities. Within this dichotomised ideological backdrop, this presentation attempts to look at how bharatanatyam, one of the eight classical dances of India tries whether or not to decolonise its institutionalised curriculum. It argues that the 21st century transnational bharatanatyam dancer is entrusted with the responsibility to both decolonialise and de-Sanskrit-ise their performance-practice. It captures the experiences of doubt, confusion, fear and frustration that emerge during this process of a combined decolonialisation- de-Sanskritisation.

Biography

Giridhar Raghunathan is a PhD candidate in Dance Studies at the University of Roehampton, London, UK. He holds master's degrees in Bharatanatyam (Bharathidasan University, India) and in Medical Nanotechnology (SASTRA University, India). His research interweaves classical Indian dance, gender and sexuality. He has delivered lectures and workshops in India, North America and Europe. He is the co-organiser of the biennial international conference on Emerging Trends in Classical Indian Dance Research. Giridhar's PhD is supported by Roehampton University Sacred Heart (RUSH) scholarship.

Names: Srinwanti Chakrabarti and Karin Bindu

Karin Bindu's Institutional Affiliation: University of Vienna

Presentation: 30-minute presentation including prerecorded videos and Zoom talks

Title: *Digital metamorphosis of the project "Life in transition"*

Abstract

The project "Life in transition", originally performed in Vienna before the Covid-19 pandemic, was shown as a very realistic emotional process. Contradictions of positive and negative emotions, joy and destruction, happiness, and frustration, were expressed by the fusion of two extraordinary women in performance coming from different artistic realms such as Odissi Dance and Transcultural Percussion, accompanied by Jazz Saxophonist Edith Lettner. The project, choreographed by Srinwanti Chakrabarti, was meant as an artistic experiment for research and development of the chosen theme "Life in transition". Despite all above-mentioned contradictions, ongoing life experiences were regarded and communicated as universal truth, where humanity finds its way of coping up, finding peace, spiritual calmness, and hope.

The pandemic forced both performers into digital activities: As dance teacher Srinwanti Chakrabarti created Odissi Online Tutorials while Karin Bindu experienced digital field research and methods of social network analyses, applied on two Facebook groups of female frame drummers. Inspired by the proposed topic of theoretical and practical reinterpretation of Indian dance in digital cultures, this collaborative research project of Odissi dancer Srinwanti Chakrabarti, located in Chile, and multifaced Austrian percussionist Karin Bindu elaborates selected scenes of the original performance "Life in transition". Digital media technology such as Split screen and VN Video Editor plays the role of "co-creator" as defined by Werner in 2019. Individually recorded dance and music scenes, artists introductions and recorded Zoom talks about theoretical and practical experiences in the digital realm of performance art and science are merged into short videos and included into a powerpoint presentation.

Biographies

Srinwanti Chakrabarti – a dancer par excellence – is not only an internationally recognized Indian classical Odissi dancer but also an innovative choreographer and dance teacher. As the founder and director of Srijathi – a center for art and culture in Paris and India – she combines research and experiment with the tradition of Odissi dance. Numerous lectures with live demonstrations, workshops and performances took her to India, the USA, Canada, England, China and several European countries. Srinwanti currently lives in Chile. www.odissionline.com; <http://www.srijatiarts.com>

Karin Bindu, Mag. a Dr.in phil. – percussionist, musician, lecturer, and ethnomusicologist – created lectures about the Ethnology of India and about the Theory and Practice of the South Indian Suladi Talas at the University of Vienna. Since 1991, she integrates her knowledge and research about musical rhythms of India, Trinidad, Cuba, Turkey, Egypt, Europe, and West Africa into drumming lessons, performances, musical and ritual practice, lectures, and articles. Her dissertation "Percussion Art Forms: Aspects of the Production and Communication of South Indian *Talas* in the *Kutiyattam*" was printed in 2013. <https://www.rhythmuse.at>

Name: Cherie Sampson

Independent

Type of Presentation: Paper Presentation (40 minutes)

Title: “*every.single.one: healing dimensions of dance in stratified mediated space*” Cherie Sampson

Abstract

When new media artist, Cherie Sampson was diagnosed with cancer in 2017, she informed her mentor, Anjali Tata-Hudson, that she wished to continue dancing through treatment and work with the dance’s expressive vocabulary as a focal point for stamina and healing. By that time Sampson had been a student of Bharatanatyam for 8 years with Soorya Performing Arts, St. Louis, MO (2009- 2014) and Anjali’s School of Dance (2014 - present). Tata-Hudson was a founding member of the Post-Natyam Collective, a group of four women trained in Indian dance who met and choreographed new works via Skype, a dancer, choreographer and Physical Therapy Assistant.

With Sampson primarily home-bound during treatment, Sampson & Tata-Hudson met, conducted instructional sessions and collaborated remotely. When Sampson felt well enough to get into the studio, she engaged in solitary improvisational healing dance sessions that enacted the myriad of disparate medical processes she was undergoing as well as the raw emotional, mental, psychic states of being. Simultaneously, via Skype, Sampson learned two traditional Bharatanatyam dance items focused on Kali and Ganesh that were at the center of the therapeutic process involving movement and dance in Sampson’s “integrative” oncology journey and recovery. (Healing in a cancer context doesn’t always mean being disease-free, but experiencing embodied adaptation, acceptance, and periodic renewal.) Over time, the two artists co-choreographed creative movement segments based on both the improvisational phrases and traditional items that are now integral to the storytelling and movement vocabulary in a live performance work written and performed by Sampson, titled, “*every.single.one*” that depicts personal, familial and community experiences with hereditary cancer.

Throughout treatment, Sampson also documented the cancer process in audio-visual media, which has been incorporated into a series of short experimental films, that are part of the projection design in “*every.single.one.*” In one film, a layered and chaotic soundscape of phone calls captured in the first 72 hours post-diagnosis with family and medical practitioners is contrasted with contemplative images of nature and extreme closeups of hand gestures and eye expressions. The artists experimented with abhinaya phrases over Skype to accompany the soundscape, followed by a staging of the gestures for the camera by Sampson that sets the pacing and visual space for the completed film. The capacity for collaboration in virtual space and the resulting audio-visual art works is the focus of Cherie Sampson’s presentation for the *Roots beyond roots* symposium.

Biography

Cherie Sampson is an intermedia artist working 30 years in site-responsive performance, installation and electronic media. She has presented her work in symposia, exhibitions and film/videoart screenings in numerous countries with solo live performances in Canada, Cuba, Finland, Netherlands, Norway, South Korea, Spain, UK and the U.S. She is the recipient of many grants, including two Fulbright awards, a Pu`in Foundation grant, and many University of Missouri research grants, where Sampson is a professor in the School of Visual Studies. She has trained in Bharatanatyam with Soorya Performing Arts, St. Louis (2009-14) and Anjali's School of Dance, Kansas City (2014-present).

Names: Dr. Royona Mitra (Brunel University London), Dr. Anusha Kedhar (University of California, Riverside), and Dr. Anurima Banerji (University of California, Los Angeles)

Type: Joint Paper Presentation (30 Minutes)

Title: *"It's Gender, Not Caste": A Digital Discourse Analysis of Indian Dance's #MeToo Movement and the Negation of Intersectionality*

Abstract

In recent years, caste justice has emerged as a central concern in the field of Indian dance. While historically, key forms of social stratification have been substantively explored, caste has been a marginal concern, even as it remains a major force in shaping social relations and arts practices in India and its diasporas. Barring a handful of notable exceptions (Dalwai 2019, Pillai 2022, Prakash 2019, Soneji 2012, Thakore 2022), very few studies have incorporated caste into their analyses.

While academic scholarship on Indian dance has been relatively silent on the question of caste, the digital sphere has been decidedly noisy. The recent turn towards a caste reckoning in Indian dance studies, initiated by anti-caste dance artists who self-identify as caste-oppressed, has taken place largely online--leading to prominent and field-altering discussions. Yet, one major rejoinder to these important anti-caste interventions, predominantly from dominant-caste voices, has been the position that "gender, not caste" is the real oppressive system to reckon with.

In this paper, deploying the method of digital discourse analysis, we examine the nature of recent public discourse on gender-based violence and discrimination and its sustained dismissal of caste oppression in relation to three prominent dance institutions in India – Kathak Kendra, Kalakshetra, and Narthaki.com. We do this by tracing social media posts, online journalism, and survivor/witness testimonies. We argue that while these forms of public discourse have catalyzed important conversations on interlocking injustices that are otherwise omitted in mainstream platforms, the institutional position of the status quo vis-à-vis the #MeToo movement in Indian dance continues to echo the refrain "It's gender, not caste," eliding the intersectional nature of violence.

In doing so, we also raise questions about the complex political economy of the virtual ecology in which these discussions are situated; the efficacy of online and offline activism; whether diffuse structures of hierarchy are replicated or unsettled in the online spaces; and, ultimately, whether, and/or to what extent the digital domain is re-shaping the politics of Indian dance – relying on insights from Legacy Russell's *Glitch Feminism*, Safiya Noble's *Algorithms of the Oppressed*, and Shoshana Zuboff's *Surveillance Capitalism*, among others, to frame our perspectives.

Biographies

Royona Mitra is Professor of Dance and Performance Cultures at Brunel University London. She is the author of *Akram Khan: Dancing New Interculturalism* (Palgrave, 2015), which was awarded the 2017 de la Torre Bueno First Book Award by DSA. Her second monograph, *Unmaking Contact: Choreographing South Asian Touch*, is forthcoming in 2024 with Oxford University Press. She is currently working on a co-edited anthology project titled *The Oxford Handbooks of Dance Praxis* with Anurima Banerji and Jasmine Johnson, contracted with Oxford University Press.

Anusha Kedhar is Associate Professor in the Department of Dance at University of California, Riverside. She is the author of *Flexible Bodies: British South Asian Dancers in an Age of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2020), winner of the 2021-2022 Emory Elliot Book Award from UCR and the 2022 Sally Banes Publication Award from ASTR. Her other writing on gesture, choreography, and Black Lives Matter protests has been featured in *The Feminist Wire* and *The New York Times*.

Anurima Banerji is Associate Professor in the UCLA Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance. She is author of *Dancing Odissi: Paratopic Performance of Gender and State* (Seagull Books/University of Chicago Press, 2019), recipient of DSA's 2020 de la Torre Bueno Prize; co-editor of *How to Do Politics with Arts* (Routledge, 2018) with Violaine Roussel; and co- editor of the *Oxford Handbook of Indian Dance* (forthcoming, Oxford University Press) with Prarthana Purkayastha. Currently she is working on a monograph, *The Impossibility of Indian Classical Dance*, and *The Oxford Handbooks of Dance Praxis*, co-edited with Royona Mitra and Jasmine Johnson.

Name: Shalaka Kulkarni

Independent

Type: Performance (30 Minutes)

Title: *Dance Interrupted*

Abstract

Following is a proposal to present an excerpt of 'Dance Interrupted.' This presentation is part of my multiyear project that began in 2022, exploring myths, mythological female identities, and the now illegal Devadasi (Ancient Temple dancer) system in India with intersections and interruptions of AI technology. This interdisciplinary presentation highlights the intersection of myth, tradition, and contemporary social issues. The performance will present a hybridized form of Indian Classical dance, contemporized yet with evocative choreography rooted in Bharatnatyam and Kathak collaborating with AI-generated visuals; the performance creates a powerful narrative.

The project places a spotlight on the clandestine world of the illegal Devadasi system and human trafficking, drawing parallels between the historical subjugation of women in the name of tradition and the modern-day exploitation that continues to persist. The dance performance becomes a medium for advocacy, shedding light on the shadowy corners of society where such injustices persist while reflecting on multiple perceptions of ideas of 'justice,' 'feminism,' and 'equity.' The AI-generated media creates a disturbing visual spectacle as a stark reminder of the need for societal introspection and change. 'Dance Interrupted' presents a model based on Indian Classical dance dramaturgy to engage its audience emotionally & intellectually through a multidisciplinary approach.

The project is also a personal exploration of activism I prescribe to build upon the practices of dance makers like Ananya Chatterjea. The making of the work, research, my brown body, the choreography, & its myriad facets as a diaspora artist firmly rooted in traditional Indian Classical dances derives and drives my activism. I have created a personal hybridized artistic dance language categorized as 'contemporary,' which I consider an inspired response to the regular stimuli of living outside India. Immigrating has activated my art-making differently, and I am curious to understand if AI does the same.

Biography

Shalaka Kulkarni is an interdisciplinary dance artist. Trained in Indian Classical dances, she creates experiences bridging the ancient and contemporary, uplifting marginalized voices. Kulkarni began training in Bharatnatyam as a child in India and in Kathak under Sandhya Desai in USA. She holds an MFA in interdisciplinary arts & media from Columbia College Chicago, where she worked closely with the Modern dance master Nana Shineflug. An actor, dancer, choreographer, writer & filmmaker, she has toured original work and participated in collaborations in India, USA, and Europe. She is an educator and has created work for numerous performers and artists.