

Editors' Note

It has been very exciting to observe how this issue of *Dance Research Journal*, Representing Indian Dance, has come together. This seems to be a time when a second generation of persons of Indian origin all around the globe are coming of age and asking questions about their respective cultural representations. The contributions to an open call for this journal cluster around the ways that geo-specific traditions and ethnicity are represented and transform in global recirculation. The contributors writing from diverse geographic locations and academic and artistic fields present insider, outsider, participatory, subversive, and established perspectives. Yet, common issues surface and inform each other: an interrogation of theories and their impact on reading, writing, choreographing, and performing the postcolonial dance experience; the notion of cultural representation/heritage as burdensome; and finally the resurfacing of an age-old fascination with an Ur image of otherness, of dancers of the past.

Avanthi Meduri, in "Bharatanatyam as a Global Dance: Some Issues in Research, Teaching, and Practice," culls her experiences of teaching Indian dance in colleges in the United States to discuss the implications of her earlier studies of Rukmini Devi Arundale, a key figure in the transitions that relocated *sadir* from a regional dance form to the status of national symbolic capital in the early twentieth century. Meduri proposes that Arundale be re-situated not as an indigenous appropriative figure in a local and national history, but as a globally involved activist, and in terms of subject formation and global flow, rather than from the perspectives of colonially inherited binaries such as tradition/modernity, insider/outsider. In doing so, she examines how some theoretical perspectives veil as much as they reveal.

In "Living History, Performing Memory: *Devadāsī* Women in Telugu-Speaking South India," Davesh Soneji offers a profound, nuanced, and sensitive ethnography of the very real lives of some *devadāsīs* of Andhra Pradesh, their post-Independence "rehabilitation" and their current perceptions of themselves as still dedicated as they continue to perform dances for each other in private. Meanings and subtle contextual implications arise through his inclusion of the original words. Here I must acknowledge how exciting it is to work crossculturally. It took an editor question from Ann Dils for me to look again at the article and discover something very relevant that Soneji and I had overlooked, taken too much for granted since we have grown up with the issue—the profoundly inter-implicated Hindu-Muslim relations embedded in the language and terms! For example, *zamindār* would be the Urdu pronunciation of the word *jamindār*, literally landowner. In pre-independent India, the area of which Soneji writes

was within a state known as Hyderabad, with a predominantly Hindu population but Muslim rulers (*Nizām-s*) and aristocracy. It was not and has not been an area of conflict. Here Urdu is still spoken among other languages such as Telugu. Urdu, is a crossover language that sounds like Hindi or Hindusthani, but is written with Arabic alphabets and contains many Persian words. When the *kalāvantulu* use Urdu terms, as *zamindār*, one would understand that this was a Muslim patron, a secular context for performing, and possibly also culturally sophisticated viewers. Many Hindus had converted to Islam by now for generations but retained their cultural interests. In the context of the recent genocides and religion-based politics that so affects Ananya Chatterjea's art-making, arises yet another perspective, that of the ongoing and transparent cultural embeddedness of Hindu-Muslim exchange within India (with its second largest population of Muslims in the world after Indonesia). The irony is not obvious to the non-indigenous reader either that the lead male Hindu role of Devdas in the recent Bollywood version as described in Sangita Shresthova's article here, is played by an intensely popular Muslim Bollywood star, Shahrukh Khan. (Watch for the diversity of names in the credits of Bollywood films.)

I found it provocative that images, distanced or immediate, of the dancer-ancestress surface in most of the writings in this journal and in a variety of sources—the latest Bollywood films, intercultural theatre, contemporary dance praxis, new “South Asian” dances in Britain, archaeological sculptures, and in current usage of common Sanskrit terminologies in different regional dance forms. In response, *DRJ* co-editors Ann Dils, Jill Green and I agreed to include “The Sanskritized Body,” an updated version of my earlier article, so as to summarize the contextual background for many of the articles in this issue. My writing here interrogates how and why historic perceptions of the *deva-dāsī* as debased, persist despite all of the changes in our perceptions of women, embodied knowledge, and visual representation.

Alessandra Lopez y Royo (“Issues in Dance Reconstruction: *Karaṇas* as Dance Texts in a Cross-Cultural Context”) investigates *karaṇa*, as dance units described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, as sculpturally represented in historic temples. She finds they inform all the classical forms not just as archetypal shapes, but as representations of a systematic way to generate movement and dance patterns today. Her investigation is informed by her bodily practice of both Odissi and Indonesian dance as much as by theoretical concerns. This provocative and important micro-analysis of movement sources, continues cross-cultural discussions of embodiment recently developed within American and international dance discourse. This article dialogues with Janet O’Shea’s earlier writing that celebrated the accomplishments of Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan in *Dance Research Journal* in 2001. It also opens up creative spaces for future investigations linking Indian perspectives with East Asian and Euro-American academic perspectives.

In “Dance as Cultural Understanding: Ideas, Policy, and Practice,” Gregory Sporton investigates epistemological problems in funding culturally translocated dance forms from the United Kingdom where South Asians are increasingly predominant in the rapidly changed demographics of British urban life. Based on his observation of arts funding and academic writings, Sporton interrogates assumptions of modernity that

inform crosscultural readings of dance. Ignoring origins, he argues, this perspective deprives each dance of its particular individual significance and adds the burden of its being representative. This translates as a demand for dance that *must* be representative, and also *must* be original and transcultural, and that this demand is evident in the aesthetic directions of visible arts. Sporton's profound identification of hegemonic implications of what makes culture burdensome, is in this very issue relevant to reading how Meduri and Chatterjea both refer to the "burden" of heritage, in contrast to early post-Independence researchers such as Kapila Vatsyayan (*DRJ* 32/1) who speaks of delving into cultural representations of Indian dance as liberatory. Similarly the *kalāvantulu* women in Soneji's article in this issue hold their inherited dances very close and dear to their sense of identity despite the hardships that that this identity has exacted.

Sangita Shresthova, writing from Nepal and the United States has submitted an article, "Swaying to an Indian Beat . . . *Dola* Goes My Diasporic Heart: Exploring Hindi Film Dance," that offers the perspective of young persons of South Asian origin educated in American universities (here, Princeton and MIT) that might see the dance represented on Hindi films as a model of both a kind of trans-Indianness and also as a way to negotiate place. She starts with a fertile example, the Bollywood film *Devdas*, and en route traces how earlier versions of this same story of a "professional" court dancer have been represented, thus connecting the popular indigenous perceptions of historic Indian dancers with the current media.

Ananya Chatterjea ("In Search of a Secular in Contemporary Indian Dance: A Continuing Journey"), writes from her translocated choreographic perspective, of how global Indian politics, and social pressures are deeply imbricated in the ways that Indianness in dance is presented within India and the United States. In constructing Indianness within the United States, immigrants participate in the political agendas of Indian communal politics even though the same representations have different resonances within India where Hinduism provides a dominant filter for cultural experience whereas in the United States it offers an alternate space. The tension between the secular and religious in dance has historically resonated not only in indigenous and Orientalist writings, but also in the way that institutions evolved (see two works by V. Subramaniam: "Gender Monopolies in Indian Classical Dance: A Sociological Analysis of Cause and Context," in *Sruti* 135, December 1995, and *The Sacred and the Secular in India's Performing Arts*, New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1980). For example, V. Subramaniam has written of how, as early as in the ninth century, temple and court sponsors of the dance were inextricably intertwined. Rulers needed temple priests to confirm their sovereign status and perform court rituals while they also controlled by subsidizing the temples. Chatterjea looks to the ways that current Indian choreographies employ multilingual vocabularies, global associations, and personalized histories to interrogate the notion of dance as Hindu, while holding on to its status as high art. In the process she invaluablely informs us of how last year, international stage and screen star, Mallika Sarabhai, used her visibility and staked her own personal safety to support human rights activism at home.

Following the articles is a collection of other materials concerning Indian dance,

grouped together as “Resources and Reflections.” Purnima Shah’s comprehensive report on a recent conference on South Asian Performance at Columbia University, serves not only as a partial survey of the current research in Indian classical dance, but includes observations and responses informed by her impressive performing career and academic experience. Following, Alessandra Lopez y Royo reviews *New Directions in Indian Dance*, edited by Sunil Kothari, a beautifully-illustrated volume that includes articles on Indian dance as a contemporary idiom.

Preethi Athreya (Chennai, India) reviews a European “intercultural” production that exploits and thereby highlights extreme positions on cultural production. Dancers reproduce their classical Indian dance techniques, seemingly oblivious to how they are being reframed within the apparently non sequitur scenarios of more reflexive performers. Finally, Ann Cooper Albright (Oberlin, Ohio) reflects on how the notion of *rasa*, a historic formulation of intersubjective reception, informs her own experience as a viewer and underscores its transcultural validity. This section concludes with a glossary and is followed by an eclectic collection of book reviews and reports.

And finally, the questions that surface in this cluster of articles—a concern with the secular-religious dialectic in the Indian performing arts, and the *devadāsī*. Why are we all still writing about “her”? Is this a turn-of-the-century fear of losing a past? Is this about the transformation of memory? When Medhuri began to organize a traveling exhibit of photographs, she discovered that Rukmini Devi “emerges as not a dead subject for research, but a living ghostfigure” (Email dated 11/4/2004 from Avanthi Medhuri). Speaking for myself here, I propose that in interrogating histories of this dancing ancestress that I seek myself, my own past, present and future. And my heart goes out to those whose collective memories, whose imagined communities have been erased. To interrogate individual and communal memories, is to interrogate presence. It enables imagining a future, reconceiving the present, and dancing more fully.

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Guest Editor

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Ann Dils and Jill Green, Editors