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Classicism on the

Threshold of Modernity:

Expanding the Physical Parameters

of Odissi Dance for

Contemporary Audiences

PhD Thesis

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July 2005

Laban, City University, London, U.K.

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3 CD'S

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Chapter Six: A Way Forward

List of Abbreviations

(for video excerpts)

Chapter: CH

Excerpt: E

Video: V

List of Video Excerpts (CD 1)

Chapter 2

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CH2/E2/V1/Alasakanyas on Rajarani temple c.1000AD

CH2/E3/V1/Mother Goddesses at Parasurameswar Temple

CH2/E4/V1/Hirapur Temple and the 64 Yoginis

CH2/E5/V1/Matrikas, dancing Ganesh and female dancer inside Mukteswar

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CH3/E6/V4/Bathing prior to pooja, or ritual prayer

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List of Videos (CD 2 & CD 3)

CD 2

1	Mangalacharan: Pada Vande	09.09 mins.
2	Pallavi: Mukhaari	14.26 mins.
3	Abhinaya: Patha Chaadi De...	12.20 mins.
4	Abhinaya: Shyama ke Anga Lagoongi...	06.17 mins.
5	Moksha	05.21 mins.

CD 3

6	Yantra for trio	12.11 mins.
7	Yantra solo	12.49 mins.
8	Saraswati	06.08 mins.
9	Phenomenal Woman	03.55 mins.
10	Caryatid Rests	06.00 mins.

Documentary Video (VHS tape)

1   "Odissi - A Dance of Sculpture" (48 minutes, on VHS tape / PAL format)

List of Illustrations

Acknowledgements

Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis examines the present practice of Odissi, the classical dance form of Orissa in Eastern India, with the view to identifying its strengths as a performing art and building on them. The objectives were to share this dance tradition both on stage and in the studio, not just as a stylised Indian movement form of limited interest, but as an integrating dance experience of relevance to today's multicultural world. The primary concern has been determining parallels with yoga and ritual and addressing the question of transcendence through dance, as understood in the Indian tradition.

A choreological perspective has been adopted for this study and Odissi viewed from the position of the student, performer, choreographer, teacher and audience member, all roles which this researcher has performed personally. The basic parameters of Odissi's movement and dance techniques have been analysed informed by this discipline. Odissi has been reviewed historically, both when it was a medieval temple ritual and more recently when it was reconstructed as a classical Indian art after the country's Independence. The hypothesis that the practice of this dance was unconsciously governed by a bedrock of tantric thought forming its covert structures has been explored.

Choreographic works have been created in collaboration with traditional musicians using established forms of composition to explain working methods within the tradition and experience its limitations. An alternate way of embodying Odissi based on tantric practices has been outlined. Works that explore this and that stretch the traditional sound-movement nexus of this dance form in the process, have also been created.

The results of this research project hence fall broadly into the following inter-related areas: an understanding of Odissi dance and movement in relation to its culture and society; a hypothesis about the phenomenological nature of the medieval Orissan temple dance ritual; an outline of an alternate way of practicing Odissi based on tantric principles; and a choreological documentation of compositions created that make the practice of dance a form of yoga as defined by the Indian tradition.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Aim of the Study

This study was a response to my reservations about the commonly acted upon belief that the right way forward for a traditional dance form like Odissi had to be in the footsteps of its Gurus. I perceived this premise as being the cause for artistic stagnation within the tradition. The primary processes of learning are imitation and rote which mature into intuitive perception, because the principal 'object of learning' is the ability to create and evoke an 'experience of transcendence' through the medium of the performance. Knowledge about dance is hence 'transmitted' from Guru to disciple; after 17years of discipleship I however felt limited in my efforts to develop this skill any further. The aim of this study was to understand Odissi as a combined 'creative art form and spiritual discipline' through a practice-based investigation of Odissi informed by a Choreological Studies perspective.[1] Embarking on understanding Odissi afresh from a different vantage point as a system of movement; as structures of choreography; as well as a psychological space experienced in present time containing defining structures of history and tradition, provided a means of augmenting what I knew of Odissi 'intuitively'.

The creative exploration is framed within the choreological view that a "triadic perspective" is needed in the study of dance where equal weight is given to how dance is experienced by the performer, choreographer and analytic viewer.[2] My experience of Odissi has encompassed the roles of dancer, choreographer and analytic viewer so I draw from a cumulative phenomenological experience, coloured by the sum total of my memories, aspirations, intentions and other factors that determine 'individuality'. This 'cumulative first voice', articulates the results of critical inquiry into the subjective experience of engagement in Odissi's practice in all three capacities. It has validity as it is able to state the nature of embodied movement and dance as I perceive it, within the context of a complex contemporary India in a global world.

The primary purpose for engagement in the arts as understood in Indian aesthetics is to develop objectivity, through detachment, towards subjective experiences. This allows the subjective experience to be used as fuel for a

transcendental experience. It is essential to listen to the 'cumulative first voice' with detachment, in order to be able to use it to generate knowledge that will serve the purpose of achieving the artistic goal. Yoga, which provides the uniting theme in all Indian art, has articulated the course to be followed in order to do this. It teaches creating the mental structure for distinguishing the self or 'I', from the Self or 'third person seer/witness'.[3] The success of a critical inquiry into the nature of any subjective experience is possible by cultivating a 'witness' view of the 'cumulative first voice'. In this study, the attempt has been made to articulate the experiential first voice from the perspective of the 'witness', while locating it in terms of its "larger narrative of culture, power and history"[4]. This dialogue has facilitated the process of discovering the 'Guru' within.

1.2   The Context of this Study

Odissi dance is at a challenging point in its history. It has 'come of age' as an art form in India but not so in the Indian diaspora. It is caught between the changing value systems of 'classicism' and 'modernity' as interpreted by three generations comprising its creators, their students, and their students in turn. The framework of 'classicism' that has been carefully put in place by its founding Gurus and loyally upheld by their disciples ever since, has however missed establishing procedures for ensuring natural growth, a lapse which is stymieing the tradition.   This study is aimed at addressing this discrepancy by redefining and relocating Odissi in contemporary, cosmopolitan India where it currently has its greatest presence. In doing so, it prepares the ground for Odissi's wider acceptance in a larger world.

At its core, all 'classical' dance in India shared common fundamental principles with other Indian art traditions. Originality and self-expression feeding from individual experience were not the prime objectives, in contrast to modern thinking. Acquiring technical skill was fundamentally a means of learning to still the mind and value in any artistic work rested in its ability to imprint the viewer with an experience of this inner tranquility.[5]   Odissi is 'classical' in that it bears a spiritual allegiance to this tradition.[6]   In 1926, Heinrich Zimmer had illuminating statements

to make to the western world about the perception of value in classical eastern art. He pointed out that western classical works had a strong corporeal presence which eastern traditions seemed to deliberately avoid.[7] He espoused the view that the 'Indian sacred image' had to be viewed according to its own parameters of value in order to be understood or appreciated.[8] Since then, Indian artistic images in sculpture, painting and architecture from different periods of history have been well appreciated for what they are. Indian classical dance is in a more difficult position because although it embodies a classical aesthetic, it exists in contemporary time and space.

Odissi acquired the full dimensions of its present repertoire in the 1960's and 70's, having been created from texts dating back it is believed as long ago as the 2nd century BC, temple sculpture dating back to the 6th century AD, and indigenous dance forms[9] that existed in Orissa in the late 1940's and 50's.[10] It was created more as a means of affirming self-identity in Orissa than as a means of spiritual transcendence. It however professed this purpose and attempted to live up to this vision. Recognition of these facts and an acknowledgement that it is a contemporary Indian dance creation is an essential first step for its further growth. Otherwise, it will remain bound by the belief that any change in working systems or choreographic experimentation constitutes 'trespassing with a time-tested spiritual tradition'.

1.2.1 The Dilemmas of Creating a Tradition

In the process of Odissi's creation, it inadvertently furthered some modern values by emancipating dance from many years of social ostracism. It fostered democracy by making highly respected Gurus of male individuals from the lower economic strata of society involved in the performing arts, who were seen to be the traditional custodians of this dance knowledge. They wielded authority over female students from upper class families who did not have this access by birth but who subsequently became the celebrated performers. This however entailed submission and subservience to the Guru's vision. These celebrated performers were mostly their own, and their Guru's, primary patrons. The traditionally exalted *guru-shishya*, or teacher-disciple, relationship for the initiation of disciples into spiritual knowledge hence evolved into a cloudy balance of material exchange with many undertones.[11]

To remain true to its spirit, Odissi needed to be a 'sacred channel' drawing in divine energy through the material form of the body and providing an access to inner space. Due to Odissi's inherent structures, the language it articulated best was that of devotion to God. It was however a 20th century creation that had to survive in a materialistic world. Dance had to be an 'attractive performance' that 'celebrated the power of the body', expressing itself effectively in external performance spaces. Generally for the dancer who became successful in this system, the spiritual experience took on secondary importance and this was perceived by discerning audiences. The problem was compounded by the fact that the creators of Odissi nurtured the perception that the dance form represented an ancient, sacrosanct tradition that had continued to the present day.[12] This modern myth served to excuse Odissi from having to reinvent itself, unlike other contemporary art forms, and with time, form became more important than content.

1.2.2 Negotiating 'Modernity'

'Modernity' within tradition in this context can be seen to have manifested as a largely suppressed pressing need for 'independence and originality'[13], which is perhaps being more acutely experienced by Odissi's third generation, than by its second. The third generation were the recipients of a form that had already been seen on stage for over two decades; but they were expected to keep it intact and 'pure' because that is what the Guru had ordained. This nurtured a dissonance in thinking minds that was largely ignored by the founding Gurus. Regrettably, it seems to have been generally ignored by the second generation comprising the founding Guru's first students as well, though there were exceptions[14]. Cosmopolitan audiences were out of patience with repeating repertoires and many dancers responded by converting their solos into group presentations.[15]

Very few dance artists working in India in the last quarter century embarked on a rethinking of traditional working processes; most functioned on the premise that the purest form of knowledge they had access to, was at "the feet of the Guru". Fewer still did so and arrived at successful visions for a contemporary Indian dance that stemmed from investigations into the fundamentals of traditional grammar. In this researcher's opinion, the most significant contributions to formulating a new

vision for Indian dance following such a course have been from Chandralekha in Bharatnatyam and Daksha Seth whose primary discipline was Kathak, but who subsequently worked intensively with martial arts. Other influential artists have been, and still are, Leela Samson in Bharatnatyam, Kumudini Lakhia and the much younger Aditi Mangaldas in Kathak. What is of interest to this study is their common engagement in varying degrees with the principles of hatha yoga and the martial arts.

While these artists do not represent an exclusive listing of the most popular figures in Indian dance (which would include a large majority that have loyally followed their teachers), they have spurred the contemporary need for change in tradition. This has manifested in the desire to see something "different and exciting" amongst audiences, and to do something likewise amongst dancers in all classical dance forms. To the best of my knowledge, the contributions of the above mentioned artists have yet to be analysed with the objective of mapping thought behind their choreographic experimentations from the perspective of Choreological Studies[16]. This would be an invaluable resource for Indian dance to have and use. Scholarly and critical writing on dance performance in India is surprisingly limited given its prolific practice[17]. In gaps like this, the absence of Choreological Studies as a discipline in India is most regretfully missed.

This practice-based study in Odissi was spurred by the not uncommon view held in India, but more so in the UK, that classical Indian dance is unmindful of contemporary thinking and aesthetic requirements and that it has to cross its boundaries to access global audiences. The positive fallout of such perceptions in the UK has been the phenomenon of highly successful companies like Shobhana Jeyasingh's working with Bharatnatyam[18] and Akram Khan's using a Kathak base, whose primary vision is a trans-cultural exploration of form. The impetus in these works is to define identity, and develop personally integrating dance languages for its artists of Asian origin, amidst the world of western contemporary dance. Following in this vein Mayuri Boonham and Subathra Subramanium of Angika have also recently made a significant mark by being invited into the London Contemporary Dance School as Choreographers in Residence.

The study addresses the concern that changes in Odissi's form and traditional practices are urgently needed to better communicate in the languages of the day. Of equal concern however, is that the process of change be undertaken with a better understanding of Odissi's spiritual legacy and its promise that dance is primarily a path to self-knowledge. The project is therefore not directly pursuing an exploration of new form to arrive at a meeting point with contemporary western aesthetics or to define a trans–national identity. Its objective is that the tradition's strengths be better understood and these used to initiate change. Otherwise there is every chance that as form metamorphoses into something else through time, the core strengths of tradition will become confused and difficult to access. In the process of this exploration, the project has redefined the framework for Odissi, challenged its rules and suggested a way forward in accordance with spirituality as understood by its tradition. To the best of my knowledge, it is the first such study to be undertaken in any form of Indian dance.[19]

1.2.3 The Contribution of Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan

Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan has made a profound and influential contribution to the present understanding of Indian classical dance practice and its place in the cultural fabric of the Indian sub-continent.[20] Her work reflects a choreological perspective in that she states "The theory of Indian dance cannot be understood in isolation without taking into account the world view, the vision and the total commitment to the principle of unity and multiplicity" (Vatsyayan 1997:9). Her interdisciplinary approach to the subject has included an investigation of dance through literary, sculptural and epigraphic sources from different regions of the country, which she combined with dance training in the disciplines of Kathak, Manipuri, Bharat Natyam and Odissi. Her work has included critical study of theoretical manuscripts on dance and the closely allied arts of architecture, sculpture[21], music and painting, from different regions of the country, as well as creative writing on dance in Indian literature.

Dr. Vatsyayan has made a singular contribution to the present understanding of the Natya Shastra, the earliest known extant manuscript on dance, music and drama in the Indian tradition, particularly its exposition on the technique of body

movement to be used to evoke sentiment or *rasa*. Her combined practical and theoretical approach to the study of contemporary forms of classical Indian dance has built on the tradition established in this treatise of analysing body parts for their movement possibilities and emotive values, to focus "on technique, the nature of movement, articulation, shape, form, effort, energy rather than the repertoire with its literary or poetic content (Vatsyayan 1997:iii)", in her critiques on current practices. Her discussion on Indian dance technique was informed by Laban's thought.[22] O'Shea (2000:84) observes that Dr. Vatsyayan's "technique paradigm" for the analysis of dance, "facilitates the interpretation of the cultural priorities evident in a dance form while not reducing dance to the status of reflecting its culture, time, period, or social group". Of particular significance to this study is the fact that her work has demonstrated the common approach in the Indian tradition of 'privileging an upright symmetrical body' (ibid p 83) and its vertical meridian as the axis from which all movement is initiated and returned to; the possible reasons for which have been explored and built on in this present work on Odissi.

Dr. Vatsyayan has also stated that considerations of technique were the primary concern of historical treatises on the dance arts. The "spiritual aims and philosophical attitudes were taken for granted .... The technique of all arts, as enumerated by the theorists and manifested in the creative works, makes it quite clear that it did not permit or condone negation of the established and verified laws of execution. Once intuitive idea had been grasped by the artist on the spiritual plane, he followed faithfully and rigorously the laws of arrangement of word, line, mass, colour, posture, sound and movement as laid down in the canons (Vatsyayan 1977, pp 7-8)." This perspective reinforces the present, commonly held view by classical Indian dance practitioners and viewers, that such traditions have 'sacrosanct choreographic limitations'. Unfortunately, at the level of practice, this has contributed to nurturing the feeling that the only way forward is in the footsteps of the Guru, and that the classical traditions are intrinsically limited in satisfying contemporary requirements for a fulfilling dance practice.

The present study augments this understanding of Indian dance technique by addressing the issue of embodiment, in the stipulated requirements for the use of the body in Indian dance. By 'digging deeper' into the embodied experience of one classical Indian dance technique with reference to the principles of hatha yoga, it

claims to have arrived at a legitimate rationale for stretching the boundaries of traditional choreographic forms, remaining faithful to its spiritual tradition. It demonstrates the premise that "The work of art and also the artist and the actor ... become participants in a ritual where the work of art is the *yantra* - the device through which the *sadhaka* (artist) sees the vision of the Absolute as much as the audience to whom the work of art is presented (Vatsyayan 1977:9)", while taking into account Odissi's changed context, audience and performer. The exercise establishes in the context of Odissi, that if the fundamental principles of Indian dance movement become a vital lived experience, they can be the vehicle for creating choreographic forms that are classical but not traditional, and that successfully meet the requirements of a contemporary dance practice. In this they prove their timelessness.

1.3 Methodology

The 'mechanics' of spiritual discipline, is well explored, tried and tested territory in the Indian traditions of yoga and tantra. While these mechanisms operate through ritual dance, Choreological Studies has not yet addressed itself to formulating any theoretical frames for their examination. Choreological Studies however 'tills the ground for thought' in different aspects of dance. This inquiry did not commence with a clearly defined, linear course of research; it set out instead to examine everything seemingly relevant to an understanding and experience of how to personally dance Odissi better. The benchmark to be reached at every point was greater 'connectivity between body and spirit' and the creation of compositions that allowed for deeper meditative engagement in the process. Hence the practical component of this thesis is its central thread.

A primary building block provided by Choreological Studies was the vocabulary with which to articulate kinaesthetic experience, and discuss movement and choreography in tangible terms. The discipline also has useful tools for an understanding of choreographic working processes and structures, allowing for

reflection while actively engaged in their exploration. These resources became the starting point for becoming critically aware of the strengths and limitations of the Odissi practice and of identifying the specific tasks and approaches this particular project needed to address itself to.

The first requirements were that Odissi's practical, theoretical and philosophical working parameters be clearly defined. Its oral compositional conventions as practiced by Gurus and musicians be put into written form for critical viewing. Engagement and observation during these processes as co-author and dancer, would allow present problems to be experienced objectively. Creating new choreographic work within these systems was essential to establish 'ownership' of the traditional practice. A parallel, sustained practical engagement with yoga and tantra was required to understand 'body-mind integration' as established in these spheres as an experiential yardstick for comparison with.

The second phase was to formulate alternate methods of training the body in Odissi's vocabulary and to develop choreographic material using this that provided entry into the 'integrated body-mind space' experienced during yoga; also the professed ultimate purpose of Odissi dance. The rationale followed was that by grounding an alternative way of embodying movement for generating new choreographic material in established yogic techniques indigenous to tantric ritual, the study would cause change that was in intrinsic harmony with its tradition. The guiding principle for exploring these 'new physical parameters' was hence what was found to be personally useful in developing a more integrating dance practice.

The kernel of this study is constituted by a process of combining the intellectual and practical probing of ideas in tantra with their practical validation and incorporation into Odissi dance. The modes of inquiry used during this project (at different stages) can be described as comprising: a choreological approach to the study; the application of choreological tools to the understanding of Odissi's grammar and syntax; a choreographic investigation of Odissi's composition and its re-elaboration; and an ethnological investigation of the tradition. These were undertaken with the stipulated end objective of making traditional Odissi more personal to me as a practicing contemporary artist and also more accessible to the audiences I was addressing.

1.3.1 Choreological Approach to the Study

The study documents a process of experiencing, analyzing and reshaping Odissi dance with the objective of modifying its practices to accommodate contemporary needs for both dancers and audiences, using perspectives belonging to the discipline of Choreological Studies. Given the nature of this particular project, it has included gathering first hand information through fieldwork generally associated with Ethnology, a consideration of Odissi from the perspective of Art History[23] and both practical and theoretical studies in yoga. This has provided essential information for the understanding of Odissi movement, its embodiment and its choreography.

Modes of choreological inquiry, as outlined by Dr. Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Dr. Ana Sanchez-Colberg, have informed this study. These require combining the roles of performer, choreographer and analytic viewer and moving "beyond the theories of reading dance that place the creator, the performer or the audience in a privileged position".[24] A "triadic perspective" is adopted instead, which looks at the dance work holistically, taking into account how it is experienced by all concerned. This has encompassed "practical knowing in the viscera; engagement with works and with one's own performing; propositional knowledge and debate about theoretical positions on dance practice" and an "understanding of the complex networks of the contractual nature of the (dance) event" where "the knowledge from one mode interacts with the other through confirmation, questioning and debate". It has been made possible by knowing the dance from "a position of embodiment and corporeality" while also theoretically engaging with its semiotic and phenomenological content.[25] In this way the dancing body has been understood 'not just as a physical vehicle of meaning but an inter-subjective identity-in-the-making.'[26]

The study's first phase commenced with Odissi's origins in temple dance as seen through architecture, sculpture and tantric developments in religion. This is in conformance with the view articulated in Choreological Studies by Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Ana Sanchez-Colberg that by participating in the poietic processes that went into a past dance event, an understanding of its essential nature was possible, despite its immanent structures having been lost.[27] It is only on the basis of such understanding that a tradition can hope to explore its own, logical, pathways forward, for all concerned. The tantric tradition has a multi-layered view of the

'individual self' and uses well established techniques for causing a separation between the 'conscious witness' and the 'conscious experiencer'; this is the first psychological challenge of any form of yoga. These aspects of the psyche compositely form the individual and their separation and reintegration effects the experience of time and space. It also has fundamental ramifications on how dance is embodied by the performer and hence received by the viewer.

A theoretical understanding of these premises was supplemented with a practice of yoga that became the basis for forming and retaining an awareness of the 'conscious witness' during the course of the lived dance experience. An important tool in doing this was developing awareness of the tantric body map, comprising 'centres of consciousness' as vital points in the spinal cord. Working with this body map led to the hypothesis that the present practice of Odissi dance is unconsciously governed by its structures, as are indeed classical sculptural figures and architectural forms in the Indian tradition. This understanding provided the point of departure for a revitalized practice of Odissi.

Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Ana Sanchez-Colberg have described the criteria for 'shared symbol systems' in the documentation methods appropriate to Choreological Studies, as systems where the "verification of data validates the findings of the researcher, or questions them".[28] As an appreciation of the fact that Orissan classical dance was at one point a temple ritual was important to this study, a 48 minute documentary film entitled "Odissi – A Dance of Sculpture" was created based on this researcher's MA thesis in History of Art, from the National Museum in New Delhi. This provides sharable audio-visual information about Odissi's tantric past through images of dance as it evolved in temple sculpture and substantiates the proposal of embodying Odissi with the tantric body map, as a way forward for the tradition, suggested in Chapter 5 of this study.

1.3.2 Choreological Concepts that have informed this Study

The starting point for an analysis of Odissi's movement and choreographic structures was a theoretical study of Laban's writings. Choreutics[29] outlined his view of movement and of ordered structure in dance, which he expounded using spatial

models for the kinesphere. In Effort,[30] he developed the idea that movement was determined by varying factors of Weight, Space, Time and Flow. Laban recognized that these "factors of motion" functioned as signs in dance works and could be read as the "embodiment of inner states of mind".[31]

Valerie Preston-Dunlop's (1981) definition for a 'base fundamental unit' in the study of Choreutics was fundamentally important to the understanding of embodiment. She called this the Choreutic Unit, which manifested as spatial tension, spatial progression, and body design. She articulated the notion of 'intention' behind movement as a determining factor whereby the Choreutic Unit manifested with distinctive virtual qualities or spatial projections. These analytic tools have been collectively presented in the Manner of Materialization theory.[32] Valerie Preston-Dunlop also established a base for the view of the strands of the dance medium as body, action, space and dynamics, and the perspective of a dance work as comprising of a distinctive and inter-related nexus of these strands. These ideas contributed to an understanding of Odissi movement.

Ana Sanchez-Colberg (1992) built on this framework and expanded the notion of performer, movement, sound and space strands of the dance medium. Her model included the consideration of the work's process / production.[33] This was presented as the Glossary of Stylistic Features and provided a comprehensive set of signs across the dance strands, laying the ground for an exhaustive macro-structural, choreological perspective of dance works.[34] This model brought issues of corporeality[35] in the embodiment and creation of dance into focus and also allowed for an understanding of dance style by 'taking into account both diachronic and synchronic aspects of the work's historical context'. She argued that Choreological Studies should not only be the "study of forms and qualities of movement", but also the "study of structures, methods, norms and rules specific to the dance and their 'interrelatedness' to historical, sociological, psychological, phenomenological and artistic structures, norms, rules and methods."[36] She observed that "there exists within dance a covert dance which includes an intricate network of cultural, political, social, psychological, and ideological structures which are inextricably bound to the totality of the dance in as much as they help define its existence and specificity."[37] These ideas have been key concerns in this study.

Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Ana Sanchez-Colberg (2002) put forward the case that a holistic understanding of any dance is only possible with the "binocular vision" of semiotics with phenomenology "approached in tandem".[38] The semiotics of dance looks at how "visual, aural and kinetic images of a kind that can be recognized, within a culture as meaning something" are created. Dance signs have been analysed by Valerie Preston-Dunlop using concepts put forward by Jackobson.[39] Such signs 'serve as a form of communication' but they also provide the means for 'an experience of their singular embodied nature'. The inter-relationship of dance signs can be determined and their polysemantic content identified[40] thereby providing information about a dance's covert structures. While these perspectives were not explicitly used to structure an investigation, they greatly conditioned the understanding of the possible experience of ritual dance outlined in Chapter 5 of this document.

Nattiez's tripartite theory developed for the study of the semiology of music, and subsequently borrowed by Choreological Studies, provided a useful reference frame to place data in the context of the 'total Odissi fact'.[41] This included its significance to the 'poietic' process of Odissi's creation; to the 'neutral trace' that constitute Odissi's surface structures; and to its 'esthesic' resultant as audience response to this dance or the 'never ending process of meaning construction that the receiver makes of the trace'.[42] The poietic processes examined have included the choreographer's intention and manner of structuring meaning; and the performer's reinterpretation and embodiment of this when the choreographer and performer are different individuals. The focus of the study has been the issue of embodiment and therefore emphasis has been placed on the poietic process and its resultant trace. The processes that went into the creation of the present tradition have been examined; its present problems discussed; and subsequently an alternate mode of practice outlined.

1.3.3 Application of Choreological Tools to understanding Odissi

In the present Odissi tradition, the external modes employed in the use of the strands as determinable from the Glossary of Stylistic Features is almost consistent from performer to performer and recital to recital. The performer's primary intention

remains constant through the performance even though this is expressed through different kinds of composition. Borrowing Nattiez's terms[43] the underlying 'signified' is constant and the 'signifiers' appear in fixed traditional patterns, to the extent that transgressing these codes is regarded as being tantamount to loosing the identity of the form. This makes the strand model an inappropriate tool for understanding Odissi.

The Glossary of Stylistic Features however brought into sharp focus the specific and limited nexus of the strands that Indian classical dance uses in comparison with the possibilities inherent in the theatrical medium. It also focused attention on the repeating body designs of chowk and tribhanga that form the basic building blocks of Odissi, severely circumscribing what the dancer is able to do with the dance. This raised the question of why this was so, and how to vary this framework to achieve a broader spectrum of theatrical possibilities without impairing the integrity of the form. Given the classical roots of Odissi, an important concern was defining the psycho-physiological effects that are perceived, by repetitive movements in the chowk and tribhanga positions, performed in absolute accord with the accompanying percussion.[44]

These questions were addressed by commencing with a practical study of the "Odissi dance exercises" and their component movement isolations, used to first introduce a new student to the form. The basic dance sign under investigation here was a three-fold entity containing a concept, pneumonic pattern and movement; the integrated element of sound and movement together constituted the 'signifier' of the sign.[45] The exercises contain variations in the use of the limbs around the pivotal body positions of chowk and tribhanga to changing tempos. Basic movements have slight differences in their interpretations within separate schools and can be seen to constitute the basis for sub-styles in the tradition. Their study was useful in both articulating the intrinsic qualities of Odissi's technique and in recognising how it is built on a limited set of movement principles and articulated in 'acoustic space'.

Odissi's covert structures were penetrated by investigating the 'base substratum' from which signs in the tradition acquired their shape and form. Signs were identified in the choice of elements used within the strands of Sound and Movement and in their relationship to each other. The "synchronic confrontation" of

these signs was seen to have created meaning for the performer and the viewer.[46] The areas of 'shared meaning' operating within contemporary Indian culture, common to Odissi's choreographers, performers and metropolitan Indian audiences was considered along with the fact that this had changed since the time Odissi's identifying signs were first formulated. The 'meaning' created by one performed work which transgressed traditional codes has been discussed using Jakobson's (1960) model for the constitutive functions of communication between the addressor and the addressee.[47]

Investigations were made on the nature of the embodiment of dance signs. The choreological tools of primary relevance to the issue of embodying Odissi as a consciousness transforming act were the Manner of Materialisation of Choreutic Units in Odissi. i.e. their spatial tension, progression, projection and body design, and also their arrangement in space and time in the choreographic composition. Practical explorations concerned with the embodiment of Odissi movement as a meditative practice were undertaken. This was important for an experiential understanding of the traditionally stated purpose of classical Indian dance.

1.3.4 Choreographic Investigation

Odissi's choreographic forms are perceived within the tradition as being self-contained, finished products. It is believed that deviations from these choreographic parameters disturb its 'symbolic image'. Experimentations are never 'as good' as the 'traditional' form and are undertaken by dancers when the latter is 'too difficult' to do. Being part of the tradition, I was of the view that this perspective was a result of the rigid forms of transmission of dance skills within the Guru-disciple (shishya) tradition which did not pay attention to the experience of learning, teaching and choreographing, undergone by all concerned. Creating more of the time-tested, market-tested product, was more important than the process of its creation and the experience of its performance.

In this study, attention was paid to what the dancer experiences and intends during the dance. The ground tested was that by intending Odissi movement to function as a consciousness transforming ritual act, it could be embodied with

greater performance energy, experienced as an integrating, creative phenomenon, and also successfully released from its rigid rules of composition. In doing this, traditional methods used to combine short movement sequences in Odissi and choreograph dance phrases and complete compositions, were examined, built on and modified. This process was informed by the uses of Choreographic Devices as enumerated by Ana Sanchez-Colberg in the Glossary of Stylistic Features.[48] It allowed for an objective recognition of Odissi's use of the spectrum of possibilities in dance. Within these parameters, dancers embodied the same set of compositions very differently, depending on their ability for improvisation, use of effort, and their 'Manner of Materialization' of movement.

New works in traditional forms were created before venturing into changing this form. These pieces were the result of a personal 'distillation' of the formal criteria of each genre of composition and were carried out over a two year period under the guidance of Guru Trinath Maharana. One composition each of the Mangalacharan, Pallavi, Abhinaya and Moksha were made. Within their structures, extraneous elements or alternative ways of working were identified and a new version created with changes that were essentially deletions and alterations of what I perceived to be unnecessary patterns. This logic was followed through in both sound and movement.

The exercise was essential in claiming ownership of the tradition. It was also necessary in articulating how to embody Odissi as a performative art, where the performance situation is changed from being that of the audience merely watching the dance as passive outsiders, to becoming a transaction based on mutually recognized signifiers.[49] These signifiers were primarily created by embodying classical movement in a form that allowed for a 'corporeal empathy' between the performer and the viewer, albeit within the stylized Odissi code. A factor that alienated the target audience of this project from appreciating Odissi, was that the languages being sung were not always being understood.[50] A decision was taken to explore working with text in English for experimental choreography as this language is widely understood both in India and abroad. The choreographic experimentation used Odissi's movement vocabulary but altered the traditional nexus between sound, text and movement.

Odissi's movement structure had a rationale in tantra and this had been identified as an intrinsic strength. It dictated retaining Odissi's choreographic proclivity towards using symmetric, spatial body designs and spatial progressions that 'opened the knees and lowered the body towards the ground'. It also placed limitations on an exploration of movement outside the framework of what logically expressed the 'tantric body map'. While the chowk and tribhanga satisfied this criteria hatha yoga *asanas* also offered body designs that were in full accord with this map. Transition movements to form the *asanas* are governed by the principle of moving in a sequence of 'still moments', as is Odissi, inspired by temple sculpture. Incorporating *asanas* into Odissi presented an interesting direction for choreographic exploration. It allowed scope for an exploration of movement and its embodiment in a way that was arguably in consonance with the dance's spiritual heritage.

Additional works created included a short piece using Odissi's vocabulary to interpret secular subject matter from a non-Indian source to illustrate the versatile applications of this dance language. One dance on film was also made in collaboration with British musician Michael Weston, where the semiotic context of Odissi as a "spiritual" form of movement was highlighted by dancing in full traditional costume as a ghost, inside a secular architectural space using contemporary western music.

The works created have been documented. Their 'overt structures' have been seen to translate specific 'intention' into sound and movement within a classical Indian Odissi framework. Their creation required a "mix of proprioceptive and exteroceptive attending" and a "kinaesthetic searching for feeling with openness to phenomenal experiencing".[51] As meaning is "not only created by the artist but also by the recipients of the work"[52] their newness has to be seen within the context of what the "old looked like" to its audiences.[53]

1.3.5 Ethnological Investigation

Also part of the first phase to the study, was the need to identify Odissi's practical, theoretical and philosophical strengths and weaknesses, and in so doing, develop an objective perspective on the tradition. My own thought processes were

coloured by experiences acquired as a long-term disciple within the system. Students in the tradition learn the skills needed to dance Odissi proficiently, but at the same time also acquire ingrained, habitual ways of using these skills and I was no exception. My concern was that this rigidity, and consequent lack of creativity with the vocabulary, was due to the nature of the 'transmission' of knowledge from Guru to disciple within the tradition. I was particularly interested in investigating the creative-learning processes experienced by students generally and was also keenly aware of the lack of communication that existed between dancers and dance students studying with different Gurus. It was also important to have an understanding of how Gurus and musicians viewed the process of the transmission of skills and the creation of new work within the tradition.

In the absence of any studies in the subject, it was necessary to create a space for a dialogue about dance between Odissi dancers in which I could be a participant-observer, outside the hierarchical order that prevailed in *gurukuls*.[54] This was done by organising a series of interactions with dancers in both Bhubaneswar and New Delhi which took different forms. They included group walks to monument sites, yoga workouts and semi-structured discussions. The subjects focussed on were personal objectives in dance, working methods and problems being encountered. The latter inevitably led to discussion on the dynamics of inter-personal equations with Gurus, musicians and sponsors. [55]

The making of Odissi was investigated through both published articles[56] and interviews with scholars, Gurus and musicians who had been involved in this process. Informal discussions with teachers and dancers of the tradition were important to understand how Odissi's movements had been embodied and used by different Gurus in order to make their own statements and subsequently, separate *paramparas*.[57] The responses of audiences to both classical and experimental Indian dance performances were investigated through personal performance and observation at performances of other dancers. This was supplemented by informal interviews with artistes and members of the audience, both in Bhubaneswar and New Delhi.

1.4 Stages of Research

The central thread in the work of this thesis comprised an intellectual probing of ideas and conventions contained in Odissi's form, along with their practical exploration, validation and extrapolation, in movement and dance. Hence the 'practice' of Odissi formed the primary component of work at all stages of the research. The tangible results are this written thesis along with choreographic compositions that have been performed, presenting both traditional and contemporary work in harmonious juxtapositions with each other. This practice-based research can be seen as having occurred in four phases:

Phase 1, 1996 -1998

Phase 1 focussed on reviewing Odissi's movement and dance in the context in which it presently exists. This comprised understanding its ethnographic background and viewing my place within it as a contemporary member of the tradition. It also comprised articulating the specific conventions of this tradition and its distinctiveness in the larger genre of Indian dance along with an assessment of its position and potential for contribution to dance in an international sphere.

The first piece created was a short dance film Caryatid Rests which rendered the image of the Odissi dancer as a 'spirit entity'. I worked with improvisation using Odissi's basic exercises and movement vocabulary to different sounds. This was a means to free myself of the association of movements with traditional pneumonic patterns and frontal presentations. I analysed Odissi's technique and choreographic forms and created new work in classical formats with guidance from Guru Trinath Maharana. I also improvised with *abhinaya* using spoken English text and developed ideas for Shyama and Gitanjali.

Pada Vande, Mukhaari pallavi and Patha chaadi de... were first performed with live musicians as a sequence, on 24th November 1998 at Nrutya Parva (23rd- 30th November 1998), a national festival of Odissi dance organised by the Central Sangeet Natak Academy at Rabindra Mandap, in Bhubaneswar, Orissa.

Phase 2, 1999

Phase 2 focussed on extending the classical parameters and conventions of the Odissi performance and both creating and performing work that was more expressive of myself, personally. I completed the choreography for Shyama and Gitanjali using the thumri form of music and spoken English. I also created digital recordings with the assistance of Michael Weston for Pada Vande, Mukhaari pallavi, Patha chaadi de, Moksha, Shyama and Gitanjali with the idea of presenting these pieces together, as a whole evening of work, establishing a gradual and harmonious transition from traditional form to contemporary work.

A composite performance presenting both traditional and non traditional work was first performed to the recorded soundtrack at the British Council Theatre in New Delhi at a two day billing on 19th and 20th March 1999. The sequence presented was as follows: Pada Vande, Mukhaari pallavi, Patha chaadi de, Shyama, Gitanjali, Moksha and Caryatid Rests. The evening's work began and continued as a live performance in traditional costume with largely traditional music, but culminated in film to a western contemporary sound score, retaining the traditional costume and movement material.

Phase 3, 2000 – 2002

Phase 3 focussed on exploring Odissi's covert structures. The process of embodying dance with reference to the tantric body map was developed as a result of many improvisations with yoga, kriya technique visualisations and dance exercises. These were found to engage the mind as much if not more than the body and provided a template for a 'mental warm' prior to dance, which greatly enhanced focus and performance energy. These exercises also became a means for living the separation of 'self' from 'Self', on the dance floor.

Seed ideas of movement to the accompaniment of chants and the exploration of transition sequences between Odissi movement and hatha yoga asanas were developed at this time. Some of these were later incorporated into the creation of Yantra and Saraswati.

Phase 4, 2003-2004

Phase 4 focussed on redefining my practice of Odissi as a spiritually integrating, contemporary dance practice, based entirely on classical principles but not adhering to traditional form. I shared Phase 3 ideas through discussion and by leading physical workouts with dancers Masako Ono, Dafne Rusam, Barbara Curda, Valentina Love and Geraldine Rodier. This process of working with other dancers belonging to different countries and backgrounds was possible because we all happened to be in Bhubaneswar at that time (Valentina Love and Geraldine Rodier for a short period), on self-sponsored research/study visits. I finished the choreography of Yantra for three dancers and recorded its sound track. This was performed as a self standing piece on 23rd March 2003 at the Utkal University in Bhubaneswar, sponsored by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, New Delhi. The dancers were Masako Ono, Dafne Rusam and myself.

In 2004, I completed choreography of Saraswati and Phenomenal Woman as solos and recorded their soundtrack and continued to improvise with Yantra as a solo. A selection of solo works created during this study were presented as a one hour performance called "Odissi Mandala" using recorded music and presented in a sequence: Saraswati, Pada Vande, Shyama, Gitanjali, Yantra (solo), Moksha and Phenomenal Woman. This sequence was selected as it represented invocation in contemporary and traditional form (Saraswati, Pada Vande) followed by an exploration of the relationship with God in semi-traditional and then contemporary form (Shyama, Gitanjali), followed by an exploration of the use of nritta in contemporary and traditional form (Yantra solo, Moksha) and finally by a short piece (Phenomenal Woman) that allowed the performance to end on a light note. This was first performed at the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage amphitheatre, on 2nd April 2004.[58]

1.5 Structure of the Document

The thesis is presented in six chapters, four of which (chapters 2, 3, 4 and 6) are accompanied by digital video material. This comprises a documentation of the physical practice that constitutes the basis of this thesis. The study requires an 'integrated reading' of both text and video clips, as they are referred to. The accompanying video documentary film "Odissi – A Dance of Sculpture" may be viewed before the reading, as it establishes the ritual background of the tradition being discussed

Chapter Two provides a general outline of historical perspectives on the Odissi dance tradition illustrated by video clips from the above mentioned documentary film. It does this by a review of dance imagery as seen on medieval Orissan temples, tracing the development of Mother Goddess or Shakti worship as the impetus for ritual dance by women in the daily ceremonies to honour the male deities Hari-Hara, Jagannath and Surya. It describes how this tradition broke down due to political reasons after the 16th century, only to be replaced by the new *gotipua* performance where young boys were dressed as female temple dancers. Odissi was created in the 20th century, using movement patterns from the *gotipuas*, to 'bring life' to images of dance by languorous maidens in medieval temple sculpture.

Chapter Three discusses the classical Odissi dance technique, its vocabulary and its distinctive use of the 'kinesphere' and 'dynamosphere', illustrating its methods of articulating movement. It introduces the notion of 'movement pathways', building on the choreological conception of spatial progressions. A choreological perspective on *rasa* in nritya and nritta is presented which leads to a discussion of style, sub styles and embodiment in Odissi. Traditional dance exercises are discussed along with imagery drawn from an understanding of Odissi's historical purpose of being a means of separating the 'self' experiencing dance, from the 'Self' witnessing this. These images allow Odissi movement to be internalised with greater facility.

Chapter Four records oral conventions of composition in the Odissi tradition. It articulates traditional choreographic parameters for the creation of both nritta and nritya, and examines the close nexus between sound and movement. The exploration is conducted through the practical creation of choreography, including reinterpretations of traditional compositions and the making of new compositions in both traditional and non-traditional forms. The accompanying video material illustrates sections of these compositions as they are discussed.

Chapter Five is an investigation into Odissi's covert structures as a means of determining the purpose and benefit of Odissi's rigid rules of performance. This is approached by an exploration of the possible psychological experience of the phenomenon of ritual dance, performed as part of tantric worship in medieval Orissa. The role of the 'Self' during the process of dance is discussed along with the difference between dance as *sadhana* and as *upasana*.

This theoretical discussion establishes the rationale for exploring how to practically adapt meditative yoga techniques traditionally performed in states of stillness, for use in movement. These improvisations develop as a series of 'walking exercises' performed with different 'mental tasks', which become the basis for viewing the body as being permeated with vital points, from which movement can be projected by intending to do so. It allows the body in dance to be used in consonance with tried and tested principles of hatha yoga, for causing union between body and spirit.

Chapter Six discusses contemporary perceptions and values within the tradition regarding new directions for choreography in Odissi. It critiques the existing *Guru-shishya parampara* and argues that present teaching and learning processes stymie creativity and limit the tradition from meeting its present challenges successfully. This can be countered by going back to Odissi's roots in yoga and tantra, thereby winning back the individual freedom of thought and practice denied by the *Guru-shishya parampara*, which is essential for creative growth. By basing new work in this expanded framework, the tradition not only makes room for contemporary ideas, but also takes Odissi closer to its professed end purpose. These ideas are given practical form in the making of Yantra, Saraswati and Phenomenal Woman.

Endnotes

[1] Chakravorty (2004: 2) observes that "...the visual epistemology of seeing dominates most Euro-American art and theatre practice, where cognition and perception are entirely based on observational empirical analysis." I had been introduced to looking at Odissi through 'models of empirical analysis' where dance is investigated through experiment and observation in Choreological Studies rather than through the filter of traditional theory imbibed as a disciple, and I wanted to continue this process.

[2] See section 1.2.1 of this document.

[3] The 'witness' positions the analytic voice in a 'higher realm of intelligence'; it sets up a structure for 'conversation' with a God or deity in the yogic tradition.

[4] "It is imperative to situate the experiential voice within the larger narrative of culture, power, and history to make it a critical approach". Chakravorty (2004: 4).

[5] "Subjective personal experience played little or no part, and artistic creation began only when the artist had attained, in his own intuitive mind, the state of calm termed as *hridayavisranti* (equilibrium). Having conquered all personal suffering and pain and attained this state of complete detached emotion, he presented through age old symbols the spectrum of life only to re-create a similar state of being in the reader or spectator, a state in which the latter could experience, however transitorily, *ananda* (pure bliss) of art." Vatsyayan (1977: 6).

[6] Classical Indian art is generally held to be best represented by works created during the phase corresponding to Gupta rule in India and two centuries thereafter i.e. 4th c. AD - 7th c. AD. Large areas of the Indian sub-continent were united under a single stable political power by the Gupta dynasty, which encouraged a free exchange of ideas through all parts of its large territories. During this period, an idealist "classical" aesthetic common to areas included in present day India was articulated, which in the later medieval period, developed into regional, stylistic interpretations of its basic ideas. The "ancient" and the "medieval" demarcations of time in Indian history precede and follow the "classical" phase. The "ancient" phase is generally referred to as corresponding to the periods from 6th c. BC - 3rd c. AD, and the "medieval" (divided into early, mid and late periods) from the 8th c. AD - 17th c. AD, respectively.

[7] "Kunstform und Yoga im Indischen Kultbild", Zimmer (1926), was later published in English. Referring to 4th and 5th centuries AD sculptural images of the Buddha from Sarnath and Mathura in Northern India, Zimmer states: "He (the Buddha) does not automatically draw our gaze to himself as does a (western) classical figure in its space...a piece of Indian sculpture is apparently oblivious of our presence and we feel inhibited in our attempt to establish even initial contact with it", Zimmer (1984: 10).

[8] Ibid p9

[9] These were primarily the dances performed by the *gotipuas* and the singing and gesturing that had remained in the *mahari* tradition. At a seminar organized in May 2003 in Orissa by the Central Sangeet Natak Academy, eminent Guru's of the Odissi tradition explained how other folk forms of dance and music were used and continue to be used in the creation of Odissi. These included the Rasa Lila, Shabda Nrutya, Chhau, Sahi Jatra, Sankirtana, Sanchar and Prahlad Natak.

[10] Dr. Vatsyayan (1977) in her Preface to Indian Classical Dance defines dances like Odissi as 'neo-classical' and 'contemporary classical'.

[11] Odissi in Orissa in the 1950's followed the course of Bharat Natyam in Tamil Nadu, where upper caste Brahmin women had started learning dance after Rukmini Arundale established Kalakshetra in Madras in 1936. MH Allen (1997:65) examines and discusses Rukmini Arundale's 'exultation that on an auspicious day in 1943 she was able to dispense with the services of the traditional *nattuvanars* or dance Gurus'.

[12] Govind Vidyarti quotes Smt. Harapriya, one of the last *maharis* (temple dancers) of the Jagannath temple in Puri, Orissa, as saying "When the temple was completed Lord Jagannath, his brother Balabhadra and sister Subhadra were carried in three Rathas (chariots)... Heavenly singers sang while Urvashi and Rambha (celestial nymphs) danced. Here begins the tradition of dancing in the temple. We trace our origin to these heavenly dancers and have been continuing the tradition..." Govind Vidyarti, "With the Daughters of Urvasi and Rambha", Kala Vikash Kendra Journal 1997, p41

Dhirendra Pattanaik, the influential Oriya author of the first book on Odissi published in the early 1960's states that "Our religious scriptures testify that this noble art has been handed down to us by the Gods" and argues that all classical dance was created from folk sources but this does not diminish its sacredness...." Pattanaik champions the idea of the newly created Odissi's mythical sacredness by stating "In the 'Skanda Purana' it has been mentioned that when Sri Bigraha was ceremonially placed at Srikshetra (Puri) Gods and Goddesses came down from heaven to participate in this festival. With them Rambha the heavenly nymph and two Gandharbas namely 'Ha Ha' and 'Hu Hu' also came to dance during the celebration. Legends say that Devadasi girls from Orissa learned the art from them and continue to perform it daily before the great Lord. This is long before Bharata wrote Natya Shastra." Dhirendra Pattanaik, "Some Observations on the Origin and History of Odissi Dance" Kala Vikash Kendra Journal, 1981, pp.1- 2

Such views have served to strengthen the position of Gurus as the 'transmitters and custodians of ancient wisdom' and in the process burdened any creative experimentation in Odissi with a great deal of uninformed criticism.

[13] "In Indian and many Eastern traditions, originality and independence were traditionally equated with egotism and failure to comprehend the true essence of the tradition.....I have often encountered disbelief and even fear amongst dancers at the suggestion of departing from tradition." Coorlawala, NCPA Vol XIII No 2 June 1984.

[14] Please see Chapter 6: Directions being pursued within the Tradition.

[15] I have performed (between 1985-92) in several of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra's compositions choreographed as solos by him and presented as duets or in larger groups, as part of Madhavi Mudgal's very successful dance company.

[16] Choreological Studies is derived from Choreology, the area of practice–based dance scholarship formally introduced by Laban in 1926 to describe the work he engaged in as an "artist/researcher". Laban's seminal contribution to the understanding of dance encompassed several key ideas that have provided the building blocks in the development of this discipline. Subsequently Choreological Studies has incorporated perspectives from several other fields and grown to encompass different specialist approaches to dance study. Valerie Preston –Dunlop and A. Sanchez-Colberg (2002) pp.1-2

[17] The most useful written records of thought behind the above mentioned works were found to be programme notes; Bharoucha's (1995) book on Chandralekha being a welcome exception.
It is this researcher's unfortunate perception that dance reviewing in the Indian press is more often than not, biased, lacking in critical perspectives and at best descriptive; more recently, this is beginning to change. This view is corroborated by Dr. Avanti Meduri's strong statement in an article entitled "Talibanisation of the Performing Arts" written in 2001 for a popular national daily newspaper where she states "I found critical and historical thinking being systematically excluded, over the last five years, in major national newspapers, magazines and conferences on the performing arts…". The Hindu December 18, 2001, New Delhi.

[18] It is a reflection of different audience perceptions between India and the UK today, of what is desired from contemporary Indian dance, that despite Shobhana Jeyasingh's popularity for so many years, she has not found a following in India.

[19] Chakravorty (2004) pp.2-3 lists important theoretical studies in the last 20 years on Indian dance. Significantly, these works have all been done by either non-Indian scholars, or Indian scholars based in an American or British university.

Included amongst these is research in Bharat Natyam by: Meduri (1996) Nation, Women, Representation: The Sutured History of the Devadasi and her Dance, unpublished PhD thesis New York University. Srinivasan (1984) Temple "Prostitution" and Community Reform: An Examination of the Ethnographic, Historical and Textual Contexts of the Devdasi of Tamil Nadu, South India, PhD Dissertation Cambridge University and Kersenboom-Story (1987) Nityasumangali: Devadasi Tradition in South India.
In Kathak by Natavar (1997) New Dance, New Dancers, New Audiences: Shifting Rhythms in the Evolution of India's Kathak Dance, unpublished PhD Dissertation University of Wisconsin, and Chakravorty (2000) Choreographing Modernity: Kathak Dance, Public Culture, and Women's Identity in India, unpublished PhD thesis, Temple University.

In Kalaripayattu and Kathakali by Zarrilli, and on Uday Shankar's turn of the century creative dance style, by Erdman (1995)

[20] Vatsyayan (1997), pp.1-3, p6, describes the history of Indian dance as falling into different periods; the primary focus of her work being its second (2nd c. BC - 9th c. AD) and third periods (10/11th c. AD – 18th c. AD).

[21] Of central significance to this study is Vatsyayan's interdisciplinary perspective of the common concern in classical sculpture and dance with "the principle of the still centre and the continuous flux in the periphery (Vatsyayan 1997: 9)". Her perception that dance movements were articulated through the body's joints and not muscles, allowed the body to be treated as a geometric form where the vertical meridian became a symbol of the spiritual self (Vatsyayan 1977, pp.15-17).Chapter 5 of this study has investigated the symbolic and experiential nature of this central meridian in the embodiment of Odissi as an artistic discipline, conforming to the traditional stipulation that it be *sadhana,* or a path to spiritual illumination.

[22] To quote from the Preface of her seminal work on the subject (Vatsyayan 1977: xxiii)" My training in the principles of movement analysis and dance notation with Dr. Juana de Laban, daughter of Dr. Rudolf von Laban, was not only a stimulating experience but a very fruitful one in my subsequent studies."

[23] Dr. Vatsyayan (1977 2nd ed.) had made seminal contributions to underlining the fundamental purpose of Indian dance and establishing its correspondences in sculpture. The ground had been covered further focusing on Odissi and Orissan temple sculpture by this researcher (Tandon 1994). This material needed reconsidering, further focusing on the experience of ritual dance.

[24] Dr. Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Dr. Ana Sanchez-Colberg (2002: 11)

[25] Ibid p14

[26] "The notion of inter-subjectivity focuses on the subjective, personal experience of one person in contact with another person who is seen as an equally subjective and personally experiencing 'other', not as another 'thing' to be looked at as an object." Ibid p109

[27] Ibid p130

[28] Ibid p129

[29] Laban saw Choreutics as a study of dance that was comparable to the study of "harmonic principles and practice in musical composition" and "form in the visual arts".

He undertook "practical research into the rhythms of the moving human being and thence of the principles of rhythm, timing and dynamics of an autonomous dance art of the twentieth century, freed from music's meter…. Rhythm became the felt rhythm of action—not metric, not counted. The inner resolve of the dancer dictated the rhythm through her attitude to timing, to strength and energy, to breathing and continuity….

Laban saw Mary Wigman's feeling for breath as Flow...." Valerie Preston-Dunlop and A. Sanchez-Colberg (2002) pp.83-94

[30] Laban (1947) pp.7-17

[31] Valerie Preston-Dunlop and A Sanchez-Colberg (2002: 66)

[32] Valerie Preston-Dunlop (1981: 52)
"From a choreological perspective, movement is motion factor clusters and phrases that contain semiotic potential, mediated by the articulation and intention of the mover, and by the engagement of the interactor with it." Valerie Preston-Dunlop and A. Sanchez-Colberg (2002: 67)

[33] Her model was developed through a study of German Tanztheater defined by her as a genre concerned with 'expressing matters physical physically' Ibid p9

[34] Ana Sanchez-Colberg (1992) pp.49-61

[35] "Where the dance's conceptual content has an effect on its material form, where there is an emphasis on emotion and, with it, a focus on the performer's presence as the central factor of the event, a corporeal work emerges. Such a work embodies an anti-mimetic attitude towards the performance event where narrative is subsumed in corporeal form and a polysemantism of the theatrical signs is employed." Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Ana Sanchez-Colberg (2002: 9).

[36] Ana Sanchez-Colberg (1992: 34)

[37] Ibid p12

[38] Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Ana Sanchez-Colberg (2002) pp.103-4

[39] Ibid p259

[40] The theatrical sign is regarded as polysemantic because it is "open to multiple interpretation" and "can be formed from a conglomerate of features belonging to a diversity of sign systems." Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Ana Sanchez-Colberg (2002: 105).

[41] Nattiez (1990) pix
Nattiez begins his Preface to Music and Discourse by stating musical work could not be looked at as a text made of static structures alone. The text had to be analysed as a "total musical fact" comprising in addition to its immanent structures, a set of "configurations" reflecting the processes of its composition which he called the poetic process, and the "acts of perception" it subsequently caused which he describes as the esthesic process.

[42] Valerie Preston-Dunlop and A. Sanchez-Colberg (2002: 268)

[43] Nattiez (1990: 4)

[44] The Abhinaya Darpana, a 10th century text on dance created at a time when the tantric tradition had taken root in India, and other reference texts for Odissi do not discuss these issues. This is not surprising given the nature of such texts as 'condensed manuals' in disciplines that were essentially orally transmitted. The complete absence of a discourse on this subject in the present teaching environment of the *Guru-shishya parampara* led me to explore answers through other disciplines.

[45] Saussure's sign comprised a 'concept' and its 'sound image' or 'psychological imprint of the sound on the senses'. Nattiez adapted this definition for defining the sign in the semiology of music where the 'concept' became the 'signified' and the 'sound image' became the signifier Nattiez (1990: 3).
These ideas are useful in identifying the 'dance sign' in Odissi as well. The 'concept' remains the 'signified' but the 'signifier' is always constituted by an integrated element of sound and movement together.

[46] Valerie Preston-Dunlop and A. Sanchez-Colberg (2002:106), quoting P. Pavis (1982: 19): "the key to understanding the particularity of theatrical communication lies in the notion of the mise-en-scene, seen as a 'synchronic confrontation of signifying systems' whose interaction produces meaning".

[47] Fiske (1990: 35). These six functions include the emotive, conative, referential, poetic, phatic and metalingual.

[48] Sanchez-Colberg (1992: 53)

[49] Theatre is not only a ."cognitive exchange" but also a corporeal exchange provided by the 'personal experience of one person (in this case the viewer) in contact with another (the performer) who is seen as an equally subjective and personally experiencing 'other' ". This fact makes it a transactive "event... happening... occurrence alongside being a complexity of signs" Valerie Preston-Dunlop and A. Sanchez-Colberg (2002: 109).

[50] Composing new works in traditional forms to little known Oriya or Sanskrit poetry is a popular direction taken by Odissi choreographers.

[51] Valerie Preston-Dunlop and A. Sanchez-Colberg (2002: 126)

[52] Ibid p108

[53] "In the language of communication theory, innovation is the outcome of rupturing the metalinguistic function of creating, sending and receiving messages so that a hiatus occurs." Ibid p262.

[54] Any teaching situation where the teacher is 'Guru' and the student is a *shishya* or disciple.

[55] Issues of confidentiality were not formally agreed upon but this study has kept identities anonymous. The participants in Bhubaneswar were all Odissi dancers. In New Delhi they also included dancers from the

disciplines of Bharat Natyam, Kathak and Chhau as the problems confronting each tradition are essentially similar.

[56] The Kala Vikash Kendra Journals provide most of this information. These have been in publication from the 1950's and still do not meet international standards of scholarship. Their importance however lies in the paucity of other published material on Odissi and in the fact that the Kala Vikas Kendra was a central institution in the creation of Odissi in Orissa, closely associated with all individuals involved in this movement.

[57] Lineages traceable from a particular Guru

[58] Parts of this performance (i.e. without Yantra solo and Phenomenal Woman), were staged at the Centre for Performance Research, Aberystwyth, Wales, July 2004, followed by a discussion. "Odissi Mandala" was restaged in New Delhi at the Stein Auditorium, India Habitat Centre as part of the HCL Concert series on 25th February 2005. The order was changed to include Saraswati, Pada Vande, Shyama, Gitanjali, Battu (performed to a percussive accompaniment provided by pakhawaj and khol, and embodied as a spatial yantra similar to Moksha), Phenomenal Woman, and Yantra to a new soundtrack.

Chapter 2

Historical Perspectives on Odissi Dance

2.1 Dance Imagery as seen on Orissan Temples

An exploration of the tantric dance experience within the religious environment of medieval Orissa constituted the starting point of the study. It was begun by a review of earlier research on temple architecture and sculpture between the 6th and 13th centuries, undertaken by this researcher for the degree of MA in History of Art (1995) from the National Museum in New Delhi. This information has been presented accompanying the present thesis as a 48 minute video documentary film "Odissi - A Dance of Sculpture", to introduce Odissi's background through audio-visual means. Excerpts of this documentary are being described here, to draw attention to its most significant elements.

The dance ritual that inspired Odissi in the 20th century, developed and matured under the patronage of a succession of powerful dynasties in the temples of Orissa as part of an amalgamation of Shaktism, Shaivism and Vaishnavism, in religion. It had been regarded as an institutionalised 'mortgage offering' with which to please the Gods and ensure the prosperity of the kingdom.

Fig 1: Map of India showing location of present day Orissa

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The temple represented the Body of God and performed the function of a 'meditative tool' which could be used by the worshipper for a personal communion with God. It was seen as a microcosmic map of the macrocosmic universe. The ornamental scheme of its exterior was governed by rhythmical mouldings, demarcating a surface grid both horizontally and vertically, on every facade. These carvings divided the temple body into areas corresponding to the foot, legs, waist-girdle, chest, neck and head of God. The resultant architecture proclaimed the importance of symmetry and of rhythmic modulation of mass around a central point in creating the 'divine body'. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH2/E1/V1/The temple as the body of God**)

From the 10th century onwards, female dancers were consecrated to the deity residing in the temple as 'wives' and dance became a necessary part of the experience of worship. An important sculptural motif which reflected the progression of the dance ritual by women was that of the languorous maiden, or *alasa-kanya*.[1] In the early stages of temple architecture these figures had appeared as small motifs. This however changed as the *alasakanyas* grew in stature with time and acquired prominence in the ornamentation of the temple surface. From the 10th century onwards the expressions on the faces of *alasa-kanyas* show them absorbed in meditative rapture and a significant number are depicted in attitudes of dance, or holding musical instruments. These figures have greatly inspired Odissi's curvilinear body language. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH2/E2/V1/Alasakanyas on Rajarani Temple c.1000 AD**)

Odissi mirrors certain features of medieval temple architecture. Dance is bound by fine rhythmic patterns and uses the body symmetrically. A visit to the temple required the walking of a fixed ritual pathway, or *pradakshina path*, which can be seen as having its counterpart in the five-part format of the contemporary classical recital. Deities and secular imagery sculpted on temple walls create a profusion of images illustrating the tantric idea that a vision (*darshan*) of God is only possible once the senses have been fulfilled and so naturally drawn beyond *maya* or 'the illusion of earthly forms'. 'Fullness of emotional experience', a prerequisite for divine communion, is an artistic strategy incorporated into Odissi through compositions that make references to nature, love and desire. These are presented within the context of being part of God's *leela*, or play.

2.2 Shakti as the Impetus for Ritual Dance by Women

In the 7th century AD, Lord Shiva, the central figure in Orissan Shaivism till that point in time, had came to be perceived as a Causal Principle that could not function without Shakti, or Primordial Energy, as His consort. Seven Matrikas, or Mothers, that were worshipped in folk traditions outside mainstream Shaivism, became incorporated as Shaktis (energies) of Shiva. The 8th century saw a lively exchange of ideas between the ascetic practices and philosophies of Shaivism and Buddhism, and the vibrant systems of Shakti worship practiced by the common people. This fertile ground led to the flowering of a tantric religion that was characterised by consciousness transforming rituals using singing, chanting and ritual movement as a means to discovering oneness with God. Within this context, dance acquired great importance. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH2/E3/V1/Mother Goddesses at Parasurameswar Temple**)

Meanwhile, within the tradition of Shaktism, or the exclusive worship of Shakti as the Supreme Principle, the Matrikas were joined by the fierce goddess Chamunda to form the cult of the Eight Mothers, or Ashtamatrikas. By c.900 AD, the Ashtamatrikas had each amplified into eight more manifestations of Herself as the sixty four Yogini-Kaula cult.[2] This cult built shrines comprising of a circular courtyard with the sixty four Yoginis represented along its interior walls. In several of these images, the Yoginis are symbols of contained sensual power, dancing with bent knees. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH2/E4/V1/Hirapur Temple and the 64 Yoginis**)

Through ritual worship, the Yoginis were mentally located in different parts of the spiritual aspirant's body causing an internal unity between the 'female' energies they represented and the 'male' energy of Shiva, considered here as the Higher Self, resulting in the bliss of union. In such rituals, sexual energy was stimulated and contained through will power because the world was viewed as an embodiment of power to be conquered through sexual control and blood sacrifice. Some of these rituals became unacceptable to the more mainstream worship of Shiva.

In the latter part of the 9th century, a new dynasty of Kesari kings had come to power in western Orissa. The second Kesari monarch annexed eastern territories

of Orissa ruled by the rival Bhauma Kings, bringing east and west under one political rule. To strengthen this unity, the Kesaris declared Lord Jagannath, a form of Vishnu the Preserver, as Supreme King of the land. His cult incorporated elements of Shaivism, Buddhism and Shaktism, further consolidating the tantric merger of male and female deities worshipped by different communities at the time. The tantric idea that Shiva and Shakti were divine principles that had to be realised within the self through ritual practices, took firm hold in people's consciousness.

The two primary Yogini temples in Orissa are situated in what was jungle, away from mainstream life, implying they were a breakaway cult from the Shaivite religion practiced in cosmopolitan areas. Despite this, their temporary presence within the religious mainstream gave an impetus to the place and significance of women in ritual proceedings. This is reflected in sculptural images of goddesses and in the proliferation of the languorous maiden motif, found on Shaivite temples built in the metropolitan areas from the 10th century.

At the 10th century Mukteswar Temple in Bhubaneswar, capital of present day Orissa, seven goddesses accompanied by a guardian form of Shiva are represented in a prominent central lotus medallion on the under surface of the roof above the hall of worshippers. This roof also has the first Orissan dancing image of Ganesha, son of Shiva, invoked as the remover of obstacles. Along with these images are sculptures depicting a female dancer performing to the accompaniment of female musicians. These panels announce the formal incorporation of dance by women as part of ritual worship within the sanctum. This is underlined by the sudden increase in size and refinement of the languorous maiden motif on the surfaces of the temple, creating a ring of energy that was believed to energise male cult icons. The dancer performing in front of an image of Shiva would possibly have symbolised an accessible human embodiment of the Shakti Principle. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH2/E5/V1/Matrikas, dancing Ganesh and female dancer inside Mukteswar)**

2.2.1 The Dance Ritual in the Worship of the Deities Hari-Hara, Jagannath and Surya

From the 11th century, mainstream worship favoured Vaishnavite ideas where

spirituality was defined in terms of joy. Vishnu and Shiva came to be regarded as symbols of the Divine Male Principle while the human soul, or *jiva*, was seen as an embodiment of the female Shakti principle. The Lingaraj Temple in Bhubaneswar, built in 1030 AD, was consecrated to Hari-Hara, or half the Destroyer-Creator Shiva (Hara), and half the Preserver-Vishnu (Hari). Its curvilinear spire was built much larger than anything constructed previously, and was a palatial statement of wealth and power. (Refer to: **CD 1 - CH2/E6/V1/Lingaraj Temple to Hari-Hara**)

Vaishnava myths describing God as having taken many incarnations, including that of Buddha and Krishna, the divine lover, took hold in the religious psyche and became the primary inspiration for worship. The idea of forming an equation with God as the 'husband' of the soul was popular. Sensual fulfillment was a prerequisite for psychic maturity and the human goals of duty (*dharma*), desire (*kama*) and wealth (*artha*) had to be attained to make liberation (*moksha*) possible. Spiritual teachers or Gurus were deified and were represented on temple walls as seated luxuriously on cushions, or being administered to by beautiful women. This paved the way for the deification of kings who were eulogised as having the attributes of Kamadeva or Cupid. The temple's ornamentation programme was characterised by secular images celebrating sensuality in which dance had a prominent place. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH2/E7/V1/Dance imagery at Brahmeswar Temple, 1060 AD**)

In the latter half of the 11th century, the Ganga Dynasty came to power uniting previously independent territories from the south and north of present day Orissa, into one large kingdom. This period saw an integration of Oriya culture in which Lord Jagannath was seen as the Supreme King of the land. Despite the sophistication in stone temple sculpture by this time, Lord Jagannath had a scarcely defined wooden body, with similar tribal images of Shiva and Shakti as brother and sister. His form also embodied the spirit of the physically magnificent Krishna, whose myths describe him as the divine lover of the milkmaids of Braj, and as Arjuna's mentor in the Bhagvat Gita. The temple to Lord Jagannath in Puri, an important pilgrim centre even in present day India, was built in the 12th century. It was conceived as a temple palace, replete with elaborate spaces for different activities including the dancing hall, and had a retinue of temple servants which included *devadasis* or temple dancers, living in properties belonging to the temple.

In the 13th century, a Ganga King, Narasimhadeva, built a magnificent temple to Vishnu as the Sun God Surya at Konark by the sea, approximately 35 miles from Puri. This chariot-shaped structure is regarded as the crowning achievement of Orissan temple architecture and has an independent pillared hall for the dance ritual, located on the East-West axis in front of the temple. The dance offering made to Surya from this platform was a statement of grandeur[3] and its isolation from the main structure allowed for a view of the performance from all four sides. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH2/E8/V1/Dancing hall at Konark**)

In the mid-15th century, a soldier in the Ganga army overthrew his king and founded the Somavamsi dynasty. This period was politically fraught, with military threats from both the Afghans of Bengal in the north and the Vijayanagar kings in the south. The Orissan kingdom finally fell to Bengal in the 16th century. The temples were amongst the first targets of plunder. This initiated a process of progressive breakdown in all elaborate ritual traditions, including that of the *devadasis's* dance. Simultaneously, on the religious front, the *bhakti* movement was sweeping across the country where God was to be approached directly through devotional love without requiring elaborate rites administered by the priesthood.

2.3 The Dance Ritual after the 16th Century

In the claim for power over Orissa in the 16th century between the feuding Moghul and Afghan neighbours of Orissan territories, a local ruling family assumed power in Khurda, fifty miles north of Puri.[4] Ramcandra Khurda of this lineage established royal legitimacy by pledging allegiance to Lord Jagannath in the temple of Puri.[5] He was given large tracts of land as fiefs by the Moghul king Akbar. This ruling family got progressively more involved with the functioning of the Jagannath Temple, and eventually moved from Khurda to a new palace they built in Puri to be close to the temple. [6] This temple was the spiritual heart of Orissa and one of the most important centres of pilgrimage for Hinduism in India; it was therefore always a bustling hub of activity.
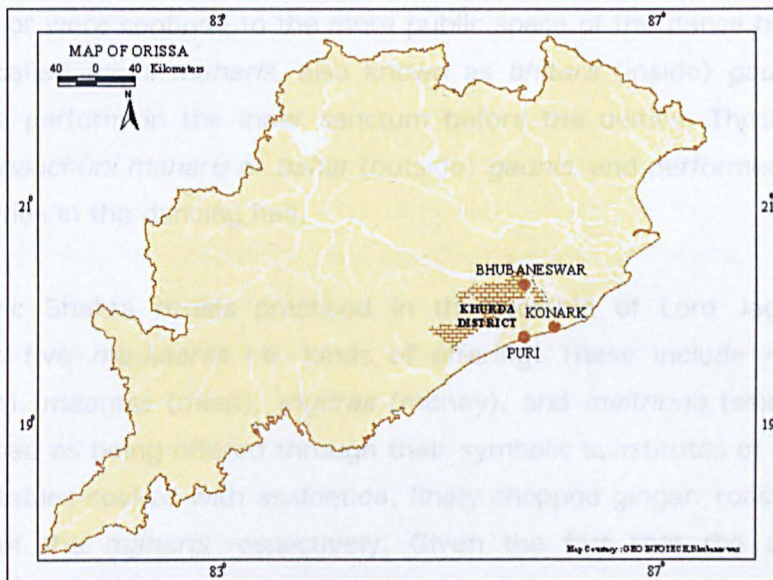
Fig 2: Map of Orissa locating Puri, Konark, Bhubaneswar and present day Khurda District

The Jagannath temple *devadasis* subsequently continued to perform devotional songs, although their main patronage now came from small, private forums. They were called *maharis*, or inhabitants of the celestial plane of *maharlok*.[7] In the course of time, they became mistresses to their patrons and were ostracised from respectable society as prostitutes. After the British takeover of Orissa in 1803 and the severe censoring this tradition received, it was largely through private patronage that fragmentary elements of the *devadasi* tradition continued to survive in to the 20th century. By the mid 20th century, however, the tradition was declared illegal.[8] The few *maharis* that remained around the temple in the 1950's and 1960's have been documented.[9]

Facts about the Jagannath *maharis* referred to here are based on the pioneering research of D.N. Patnaik[10] in the 1950's, and Dr. Frederique Marglin's anthropological study in the late 1970's.[11] According to these sources, the ritual functions of the *maharis* had them perform roles as the representatives of the queen, the wives of God, and the embodiment of the Goddess. As required by custom, they were consecrated by a marriage ceremony to the deity.[12] There were two catagories

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of *maharis*, depending on whether they sang or danced, which determined whether they performed their rituals close to the deities in the inner sanctum hidden from public view, or were confined to the more public space of the dance hall. Those that sang were called *gauni maharis*, also known as *bhitara* (inside) *gaunis*, and were permitted to perform in the inner sanctum before the deities. Those that danced were called *naachuni maharis* or *bahar* (outside) *gaunis*, and performed at a distance from the deities in the dancing hall.

Tantric Shakta rituals practiced in the worship of Lord Jagannath make reference to five *ma-kaaras* i.e. kinds of offering. These include *madya* (wine), *matsya* (fish), *maamsa* (meat), *mudraa* (money), and *maithuna* (sex). These have been described as being offered through their symbolic substitutes of green coconut water, vegetables cooked with asafoetida, finely chopped ginger, roasted beans and the dance of the *maharis* respectively. Given the fact that the *bhitara gaunis* interviewed by Marglin only sang at night and did not dance, and that the *bahar gaunis* who danced were not permitted into the inner sanctum, the often expressed theory that dance was a substitute for sex seems unlikely during the period being considered. In terms of its actual symbolic function, it is likely that the dance merely served as a visual point of meditative focus at the time of prayers for the worshippers present in the inner sanctum.

2.3.1 The Gotipua Tradition

The 16th century also marked a change in the nature of the prevailing worship of Lord Jagannath in favour of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. This cult was popularised by the mystic-saint Chaitanya and in its system of belief, the human soul, irrespective of the sex of its physical body, was quintessentially female. As a result, Lord Jagannath became divine husband to both men and women. This perspective further undermined the position of the *maharis* who had been historically treated as wives of God and were now acquiring disrepute by consorting with mortal men. The Gaudiya-Vaishnavites responded to the social 'need' for a dance offering on festival occasions by training prepubescent boys from village gymnasiums to dress and dance as *maharis*. They were called *gotipuas* (i.e. 'goti' means one, 'pua' is boy) and were meant to perform solo accompanied by musicians with the Guru as both orchestra

conductor and general manager. The boys embodied the Vaishnavite idea of "*sakhi bhava*" (i.e. offering one's self to Krishna as a female friend / confidant). (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH2/E9/V1/Gotipua performance**)

Unlike the young ladies they were emulating, the *gotipuas* had supple bodies trained in acrobatic movement. They also did not have the emotional and physical maturity of the *maharis*. Choreography celebrating Krishna's exploits performed by them was more suited to recreating the prankish aspects of the child Krishna, rather than the more mature aspect of God as the divine lover. A distinctive feature of the *gotipua* repertoire was its interspersed usage of acrobatic back bends with dance sequences in chowk and tribhanga to rhythmic drum patterns. This was called *bandha nrutya* (bound dance) and its acrobatic elements possibly had their origins in some extreme practices of hatha yoga. The training for this was provided through specialised oil massage given by the Guru to the disciple from a very early age. After the age of about 14 years, the body was considered too old and stiff for this practice, which was then discontinued. The *gotipuas* would sing as well, and through the process disseminate Vaishnavite teachings. The *gotipuas* were, however, not permitted to take the place of the *mahari* ritual in the inner sanctum, and performed on festive occasions in temple courtyards or on the streets.[13]

There is debate about when precisely the *gotipua* tradition started, but it is generally accepted to be a phenomenon that occurred after 1568.[14] By the 17th century, it was well established and receiving consistent patronage. Ramchandra Khurda created gymnasiums (*akhadas)* for boys in every street of Puri to train them as protectors of the Jagannath Temple against sudden military invasions. These gymnasiums became centres of cultural activity that also received patronage from rich land owners who supported private *gotipua* troupes. Towards the end of the 19th century, such troupes began to function as professional companies administered by the guru-choreographer.[15] Nowadays, performers within the tradition aspire to learn Odissi because it is 'classical' and respected.[16] The tradition however has a unique vibrancy due to it being unfettered by classical rules. It supports itself through performances, with some assistance from the Government of India.

2.4 The Creation of Odissi

The *gotipua* tradition itself did not conform to a clear enough dance grammar to be considered 'classical' and was regarded as a 'folk' tradition, but it had survived into the 20th century and could therefore be the starting point for the creation of an Orissan classical dance. In the 1950's, male Gurus from this tradition played an important role in reviving the dance of the *devadasis* as seen sculpted on temple walls as they were recognised to be a vital link to this lost tradition of temple worship.

An example of different choreographic structures upon which to pattern Odissi's repertoire already existed in the Bharat Natyam dance of the south.[17] A State recognised organisation called the Utkal Nrutya Sangeet Natya Kala Parishad (later converted into the State Sangeet Natak Academy) was established to provide official patronage for research and development of Odissi dance. From being a shunned activity associated with the disreputable tradition of the *maharis* as was the case in the early decades of the 20th century, dance in this new environment became a much appreciated art and daughters of 'good families' were encouraged to learn it while eminent Orissan intellectuals supported it.[18] During this process, reference to the texts of the Natya Shastra and Abhinaya Darpana offered valuable pointers as to what qualified dance to be termed 'classical'. In 1957, a group of artists associated with this movement in Orissa formed an association called Jayantika to formalise a body of work on dance based on classical tenets. [19]The mainstay of the movement form created was based on pneumonic syllables and movement patterns practised in the *gotipua* repertoire.[20]

Fig 3: Use of chowk by *gotipuas*

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The acrobatic use of the body by the *gotipuas* may have been responsible for the dominant presence of the chowk motif in their rendering of dance sequences,[21] and this position was incorporated into Odissi as a fundamental body pivot. *Bandha Nruthya* did not find a place in Odissi probably because of the disinclination of parents to have their young daughters trained through the traditional process. Furthermore, body positions that flagrantly lifted up legs were seen as indecent for women, reinforcing such prejudice.[22] An explanation often cited by traditional Gurus for the incorporation of chowk as a body pivot into Odissi was that it was the iconographic stance ascribed to Lord Jagannath, presiding deity of Orissa. He continues to be the symbol of a self-consciously nationalist, regional identity in this part of India.

The thrice deflected body position of tribhanga, so commonly used when rendering the motif of the languorous maiden in temple sculpture, was adopted as a second pivotal position for the technique.

Fig 4: Languorous maiden in tribhanga from temple sculpture (middle-late phase)

Regional texts with sections on dance and music were scrutinised for features specific to this part of the country that could be incorporated as distinctive elements in Odissi. Surviving renditions of the Geeta Govinda by descendants of the *maharis* were analysed for their usage of gestures that accompanied their singing, and these elements all synthesised to give Odissi its lyrical movement quality. The dance form developed around the primary positions of samabhanga, abhanga, tribhanga and chowk.
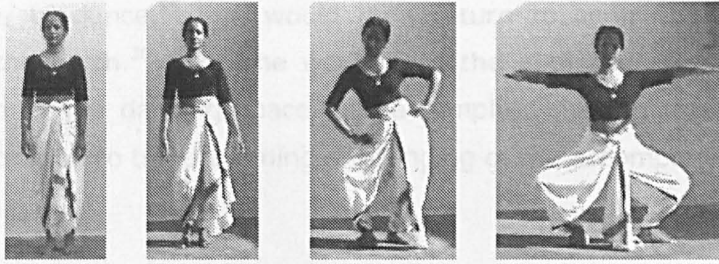
Fig 5: Samabhanga, abhanga, tribhanga and chowk

The surviving *maharis* were excluded from the hallowed circle of Orissa's cultural intelligentsia, despite being the repositories of information on the traditional customs and observances required for the ritual of dance worship before Lord Jagannath. This can be attributed to their low social status in the 20th century where they were seen as little more than prostitutes and so ostracised from interactive discourse with the revivalists.[23] The 'classical qualities' of their dance was seen to be in any case, all but lost.

Guru Pankaj Charan Das, the son of one of the last surviving *maharis* of the 20th century,[24] was regarded as the most accessible resource person to provide an account of the *mahari* dance tradition. He actively contributed to the revival efforts of the 1950's before falling out with the other revivalists over divergent views concerning the pace and content of the dance being developed.[25] Elements of the *mahari* tradition were faithfully incorporated however into the choreography created for Odissi and, in a legitimate sense, Pankaj Charan Das is the Guru of Gurus. In time, a large repertoire of "pure dance (nritta)"[26] and interpretive pieces following the sophisticated tradition of classical abhinaya (nritya) were created. A constant theme of these compositions was that of a dancer surrendering herself to her deity-lover. Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra and Guru Deb Prasad Das become Odissi's father figures through their life time contribution to the creation of this repertoire.

The features of '*sakala dhupa*'[27] (morning worship) of Lord Jagannath in the Puri temple, were meticulously followed to structure the invocatory dance of the Odissi repertoire. The solo female dancer was required by the new tradition to enter the proscenium stage and offer flowers to the image of the deity placed stage left.[28] She then turned to stage right and 'took blessings' from her Guru, who sat as part of

the orchestra, to dance.[29] She would then return to centre stage and take the blessings of the Earth.[30] Here she would face the audience (corresponding to the north position of the dancing space in the temple), seeking their permission and begin her invocation to the drumming and singing of the accompanying orchestra.

Fig 6: Mangalacharan at Ashoka Convention Hall, New Delhi

The piece called Mangalacharan (auspicious beginning) having these features became the necessary first item to any recital. Minor variations to the basic theme were then introduced by different Odissi gurus. The dancer entered and directly advanced to the apron of the stage, offered flowers while gradually lowering the body to touch the Earth with both head and hands in obeisance, then rose and returned to stage centre, the *Brahmasthan* or seat of the Creator, to commence the performance.

The spirit of this invocation was continued throughout the repertoire. Ideas about both the sanctity of theatre space and of the dancer on stage were of primary significance. The central vertical axis of the body passing through the middle of the head through to the space between the feet, was called the Brahma sutra or Creator's meridian, a useful tool to meditate on as the link between earth and sky. The dance began by lowering the body along the Brahma sutra with knees opening sideways to bring it closer to the earth.[31] The lowering was essential for forming both of Odissi's basic body pivots, the square chowk, and the triangular tribhanga explained in the next section.

Movements of the "pure dance" category at both the beginning and end of the recital, started from this symmetrically articulated chowk, iconographically

reminiscent of Lord Jagannath, with the dancer positioned at the *Brahmasthan*, or centre stage.
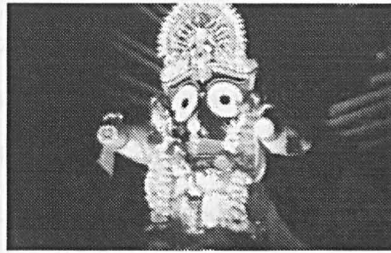
Fig 7: Lord Jagannath

In this way, the dancer took on the role of a divine intermediary for the viewers for the duration of the performance. Movements developed from this basic stance and were frontally addressed to the deities, imagined as being part of the audience. Exits demanded a reverential sideways, bowing off stage.

In the evening worship of Lord Jagannath called *sandhya dhupa*, the *'bhitara gaunis'* (i.e. senior *maharis* sanctioned for performing the worship of putting the deities to bed) sang passages from the Gita Govinda, away from public viewing. This was a 12th century mystic love poem that celebrated, with explicitly sensual overtones, the relationship of Krishna and Radha, symbols of God and the human soul. The repertoire of stanzas sung in this tradition was faithfully translated into a large body of compositions for Odissi in abhinaya form. They were performed as centre pieces between the formalised beginning and end.

Dhirendra Nath Pattnaik (1988), an active participant in the creation process as both dancer and researcher summarises the sequence and nature of the events that lead to the creation of Odissi, and these are useful to recount:

> 'It was only in the early fifties that Odissi dance as a classical school of dancing came into prominence. It was the time when eminent Gurus of today like Guru Pankaj Charan Das, Kelucharan Mahapatra, Late Deb Prasad Das, Mayadhar Raut etc. were just out of the traditional theatres where they were employed as dancers and dance directors. All of them started earning their living as independent

dance teachers. They were not only teaching Odissi but also a little bit of Bharat Natyam, Kathak, Manipuri and Folk dances. Most of them were appointed in cultural institutions on low salaries. At that time Odissi was not fully revived. A performance of Odissi was a continuous item of pure dance and songs, hardly covering about ten to fifteen minutes. When it was claimed as a classical school of dancing, controversies gathered around it. It was but natural that, till that time, its history and repertory was not built, the technique was not codified, the costume was not designed and the Gurus were not sure about the form and character of the dance. Each of them was following his own method of teaching and performing which was crude and unpolished. This position continued till late fifties.' [32]

The first performance of Odissi was presented in Cuttack, Orissa, in 1953. The piece comprised a single composition of less than 15 minutes and was presented to dignitaries from outside the State. In 1954, Odissi was showcased outside Orissa for the first time, in New Delhi.[33] Odissi's choreographers, mostly formerly associated with the *gotipua akhadas* became celebrated Gurus and the choreography they created was essentially done on the young female students, some of whom became well known performers. The primary mode of teaching adopted by the tradition was the transmission of exact "motor patterns" from the Guru to the *shishya*. It was expected that through "identifying with the feeling states that belong to them", the student/disciple would be 'imparted the knowledge' to embody the dance, like the Guru.[34] In this new environment, the dance form developed enough by the 1960's to be accepted as a 'classical form'.

The primary consideration that presents itself from the sequence of events outlined above is that Odissi, as it exists, came into being by a group of people many of whom are still with us and able to share their experiences, process of creative exploration and discovery. These individuals have become revered Gurus of the tradition they founded, and have transmitted a large body of repertory to their students. It is a significant reflection on the continuing central place of religion in Orissa that these founders of Odissi chose to retain the basis of *bhakti*, or devotion, in their articulation of this new dance system. It provided their endeavours with not only a moral authority but also a source of genuine inspiration.

2.5 The *Guru-Shishya Parampara*, lineages in Odissi and the position of this researcher

The term 'Guru' is used to refer to the teacher and is not gender specific. Its literal translation from Sanskrit is 'remover of darkness'. The Guru enjoyed a very important role in the tantric tradition of medieval India as he/she became the medium for the direct transfer of self-knowledge through the teaching of tried and tested yogic techniques. In esoteric cults particularly, it was only through the Guru's grace that *guhyadarshan* (secret vision of God) was possible.[35]

The *Guru-shishya parampara* became a well entrenched cultural phenomenon in India through the course of centuries. The term today carries the connotation of 'spiritual mentor' and imparts the teacher a 'superior spiritual status' as compared to the student.[36] A subservient attitude is both maintained by the student naturally, and expected as such by the teacher. Ashok Ranade (1998) has described the initiation of a new entrant into the *Guru-shishya parampara* as a "baptising into Indian cultural citizenship".[37]

The first generation of Odissi dancers (in the 1950's) were male Gurus from traditional rural backgrounds of Orissa, and they created the repertoire on female students who subsequently became the primary performers. In time, two principle 'lineages', or *gurukul paramparas*, were established; that of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra and of Guru Deb Prasad Das. These primary teachers also trained other male dancers who became eminent teachers and choreographers, rather than performers, in their own right.[38] This second generation of Gurus developed their own repertoires and moved to other cities but always acknowledged a 'debt' to either one of the primary lineages. The women dancers of the first Gurus meanwhile were primarily responsible for publicising Odissi outside Orissa in the larger metropolitan cities of India where it flourished, and from where it went abroad.[39]

Common formal observances in the social interaction and codes of conduct between members of the tradition today are reflective of the traditional reverence accorded to the Guru. This includes touching the teacher's feet along with the instruments being played at the start of every work session, much as sacred objects

including the image of God, are touched in a temple. Being bare footed in the dance space is a sign of being 'receptive to absorbing nourishing energies' as on temple precincts. Elders of the tradition bless younger members by touching their heads which is not dissimilar to the act of blessing performed by temple priests who bless and anoint the forehead centre of the visitor with sandalwood or vermilion.

In Bhubaneswar, the two primary lineages have now branched into many distinct 'offshoot *gurukuls*' and the compositions of a particular teacher are guarded as 'in house property'. The student's dance education therefore is basically a learning of the in-house repertoire. The term Guru continues to commonly signify a male teacher who primarily teaches female students usually from more affluent and socially higher placed families, not necessarily associated with the arts. The student and her family believe the Guru has a legacy of 'traditional knowledge' in dance by birth. The Guru however continues in most cases to be socially (and often also economically) disadvantaged as compared to the student, and is dependent on his students for earning his livelihood. A valid criticism of contemporary Odissi *paramparas* is the fact that this dance form is not usually practiced as a spiritual discipline. The resulting situation is fraught with misplaced idealism on the part of the student towards the Guru, and with mutual insecurities, that have resulted and encouraged different degrees and kinds of abuse and exploitation of the *shishya* within the *parampara*.[40]

Traditions of the 'transmission' of skills and repertoire are closely governed by the ideology of the *gurukul*, where the student comes to a teacher's home-cum-school to 'study at the feet of the master' and modern institutions that teach dance in Bhubaneswar or Delhi essentially operate on the same principle. The difference is a question of degree. It is believed that Bhubaneswar, because of its more conservative world view, offers a more 'authentic' *gurukul* experience. Many dancers from around the world continue to flock to Orissa for this reason, believing it will provide them a cultural experience that is essential for imbibing the spiritual ethos of the tradition.

The aims of this study were to examine the parameters within which Odissi operated, modify working methods if necessary and 'expand' traditional rules of choreography to make new work that would be a logical development of classical

structures. I belonged to a 'third' generation of dancers in this form and for the purposes of this study, had decided to base myself in Bhubaneswar. I soon found myself being treated as a 'grandchild student' by my teacher's teacher, Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra.[41] Learning/interactions with more than one *gurukul*, which is usually run by a single teacher and his immediate relatives/students, is not encouraged.[42] It soon became imperative that, to function effectively, I needed to secure the dual position of outsider/observer and insider/participant, in my environment and I decided to ensure I was not seen as attached to any existing *gurukul* in Bhubaneswar by working independently.

It was most useful therefore that the Central Government Sangeet Natak Academi, in collaboration with its Orissan counterpart, hosted in 1998 a major nationwide festival of Odissi in which I participated with a local postal address independent of any established school. This festival, along with my self-declared status as "researcher", put me in a position of being able to approach different dancers, Gurus (including my teacher's teacher) and musicians, to watch classes or conduct informal interviews, with a degree of operational freedom that local dancers in Bhubaneswar do not exercise.

Endnotes

[1] An additional index of the phenomenon was the addition of specialised pavilions to the main sanctum, to provide space for the growing complexities of worship accorded to the deity in tantric ceremonies. These provided additional surface space for sculptural images. Pavilions for worship which housed congregations were 'female' structures, joined to the 'male' sanctum with a 'marriage knot'.

[2] This cult is associated with Matsyendranath, a Shaivite, who took to the worship of Parvati, consort of Shiva, as Durga astride the tiger. The 64 Yoginis were seen embodying different natural forces and were all represented astride plants and animals, while some even had animal faces.

[3] The Konark Temple bears sculptural panels depicting *chalanti pratimas*, or processional icons, of other deities including Jagannath, visiting the temple, thereby establishing Surya's supremacy.

[4] The sea ports of eastern Orissa were sought after by neighbouring territories as they provided an important means of trade.

[5] Marglin (1989: 124)

[6] The progressive change in focus of these Hindu kings after 1568 when Orissa finally succumbed to the invasion by the Afghans of Bengal, till their final move to Puri with the British conquest of this region in 1803, has been interpreted by scholars as a self created "compensation" for their loss of political and military power. Marglin discusses the marked 'divinisation' of the king through the changing nature of rituals and temple functions, as a result of this. Ibid pp.125-6

[7] Dr Jeevan Pani has explained this word as connoting 'auspicious + woman', who experiences the highest aesthetic realm of *maharloka*. He maintains that the term *mahari* came to be used after the 16th century. The reasons he cites are that the *devadasis* are referred to as *bandhaa naachuni* (bonded dancers) and not *maharis* or *devadasis* in an inscription dated 1500AD on the *Jayavijaya-dvara* of the Jagannath temple. The term *mahari* is also not mentioned in the Orissan text Abhinayachandrika on dance, dated to the 15th century. It uses the term *batu-nrutya* however, which can be interpreted as being the dance of the 'bonded servant to the deity'. The Tradition of Mahaari Dance, NCPA Journal Vol. XIV, No3, Sept 1985, pp.25-6

[8] Madras Prevention of Dedication of Devdasis Act XXXI passed in 1947. Srinivasan (1985) pp.1874-5 discusses caste politics and 'reform movements' in the Madras State leading up to this in the context of its pan-Indian picture. He also discusses gender roles and the economic structure of devadasi households in Tamil Nadu prior to 1947 and how this ban effectively benefited male members of the devadasi family, ibid pp.1871-2

[9] Some archival material is available with the Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi. The most recent video recording is of *mahari* Parsumani, made in May 2003.

[10] Dhirendra Nath Patnaik, was the author of the first book on Odissi published first in Oriya in 1960, and subsequently in English in 1971. He states that in addition to the Jagannath Temple, maharis were attached to the Shakti shrines of Mangala in Kakatpur (Puri District) and to a temple at Khambakul (Cuttack District). Patnaik (1990: 73)

[11] According to a consensus conducted in 1955, the Jagannath Temple had 30 *devadasis*. By 1975 when Marglin begun her research, she identified 9. Marglin (1989: 11)

[12] The word 'mahari' also means 'queen'. The etymology of the word and the social connotations of this title have been discussed by Marglin (1989: 77). A description of pre-puberty and post puberty consecration ceremonies are described on pp 68-75. Her being the embodiment of the Goddess is seen in her orientation and placement within the shrine at the time of dance and in her dance being called a *patuara* (procession). Marglin ibid p172

[13] The only exception to this rule I am aware of is in the village of Dimirisena near Puri, where *gotipua* dancers today are performing within the sanctum on festival occasions.

[14] DN Patnaik mentions theories about their origins. Patnaik (1990: 74)

[15] Ibid p74

[16] The older *gotipuas* of Raghurajpur village near Puri, interviewed by this researcher expressed the view that "Odissi dance was finer, had more appeal and was hence economically more viable."

[17] Important contributors to this were Rukmini Arundale, principal founder of Kalakshetra established in 1936, and Balasaraswati, traditionally a *devadasi* who performed as a highly successful concert artist acquiring international recognition after *devadasi* dancing at temples was banned in 1947.

[18] M.H. Allen (1997: 63) discusses the social currents surrounding Bharat Natyam's acceptance and "revival" by the 'good families' of Tamil Nadu in the 1930's. He describes the process as encompassing "re-vivification", "re-population", "re-construction", "re-naming", "re-situation" and "re-storation" of the practice of *devadasi* dance in south India. "The groundwork for this ... was laid by intertwined cultural and political forces within the Indian nationalist movement .... Orientalist thought and Victorian morality", Orissa, physically positioned between the drifts of fervent cultural debate in Bengal, political capital of British India, and Tamil Nadu, developed Odissi through a similar process, building on the its own surviving *devadasi* tradition, approximately two decades later.

[19] "In the year 1957, some of the Gurus of Odissi formed an association called "Jayantika" to work for the development of Odissi dance, but it didn't progress much till 1960. This is the year when this writer completed research work on Odissi and published a number of articles and a complete book on the subject. With a view to taking advantage of this research and the findings all the dance teachers became members of Jayantika and activised the organisation. All of them signed, in blood, a declaration to the effect that they would conform to the technique and the style to be determined unanimously by discussion, demonstration by all its members." Pattnaik, The Role of Jayantika in the Revival of Odissi Dance, Kala Vikash Kendra Journal 1988, p20

[20] Three primary participants in this process, Gurus Kelucharan Mahapatra, Late Deb Prasad Das, Mayadhar Raut had had training in the *gotipua* tradition and seemed to dominate the course of choices and decisions being made.

[21] The chowk is a fundamental starting point for their back flips which are used to punctuate rhythmic dance sequences performed with a vertical spine.

[22] A popular story describes a dance competition between Shiva and Parvati to establish who the better dancer was. Every difficult position Shiva took, Parvati would follow easily. Finally in frustration Shiva raised his leg straight up to point to the sky. Parvati could not follow this move out of modesty, and so lost.

[23] It can be suggested in their defence however that the *devadasis'* association with prostitution also stemmed from their ritual position as 'wives of God' and their dance as a 'bodily offering' to the deity they were 'married' to; by performing for several patrons due to economic necessity they could not escape the stigma of not being chaste, irrespective of their relationship with patrons.

[24] He states that in the initial stages of the interest in creating an Orissan classical dance he had started to call the dance and song of his tradition '*devadasi* dance', as a means of freeing it from the local negative associations of the word '*mahari*'.

[25] Dhiren Dash notes Pankaj Charan's objections being that any dance claiming the devotional mantle of the *devadasis*, had to be slow, meditative and languorous. With the example of Bharat Natyam's scintillating footwork to emulate for Odissi, this view probably met with a lot of resistance. He also objected to the dominant use of chowk, the dancing of the Gitagovinda which he maintained was just sung by the *maharis*, and the incorporation of dramatic compositions like Dasavatar in the repertoire. Kala Vikash Kendra Journal 1981 p97

[26] This term is commonly used, and refers to compositions based on an abstract interpretation of rhythm and melody.

[27] The following is Marglin's account of the morning dance ritual, called *sakala dhupa*: She dances without singing, accompanied by the drummer. She faces north while she is dancing. Before beginning her dance she brings her palms together and bows bending first in the direction of the deities and then bending to the *rajguru*......The dance ritual consists of one continuous item of pure dance i.e. without words or interpretative gestures and expressions. It is performed by only one *devadasi*. Marglin 1989, p172

[28] Odissi can be seen again as having emulated the example of Bharat Natyam here. MH Allen (1997: 79) discusses this feature of placing an image of the deity on the stage in the "revived" Bharat Natyam of the 1930's as an act that sanctified the stage for its new non-traditional Brahmin practitioners. Balasaraswati, a hereditary *devadasi* apposed this practice.

[29] Srinivasan (1985: 1875) describes the presentation of Bharat Natyam performances with a similar arrangement for seating the orchestra as being indicative of the "social inferiority of the accompanists".

[30] Students are told this permission from the Earth is needed because 'you are going to stamp on Her'.

[31] These concepts are hardly ever explicitly discussed in the teaching process. They however form fundamental perceptions in Odissi which govern the use of the body at every level and seem to be shared by Gurus across the tradition.

[32] The Role of Jayantika in the Revival of Odissi Dance, Kala Vikash Kendra Journal 1988 p20

[33] After the performance in New Delhi, Dr. Charles Fabri was instrumental in streamlining Odissi's costume and jewellery, and in bringing the dance form to the attention of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, and wider audiences.

[34] Notes on how movement can be embodied, "A Choreological Perspective" by Ana Sanchez-Colberg and Valerie Preston-Dunlop, Laban Centre London, March 2001, p4

[35] *Gurukuls* predate the Tantras in that they existed to teach the Vedas. The Guru enjoyed a very important role in the tantric tradition as he became the medium for the direct transfer of self-knowledge through mantra etc. The Guru was particularly important in esoteric cults as it was only through his grace that *guhyadarshan* (secret vision of God) was possible. Ashok Ranade 1998. The Guru-Shishya Parampara: A Broader View Sangeet Natak Akademi Journal No 129-130, p42, New Delhi.

[36] Feet touching of seniors by juniors in the tradition every time a meeting happens, is one external manifestation of the inherent hierarchy that exists. A failure to observe this custom is interpreted as rudeness even by the second generation of dancers/teachers living and working in large metropolitan cities of India.

[37] Ashok Ranade(1998: 53)
He raises some urgent questions in the context of the music *paramparas* which have equal application to the dance *paramparas*. He questions whether Gurus are aware about all aspects of their discipline, for example can the music *paramparas* deal with voice culture as they do with voice production? Has the *parampara* "geared itself to meet the demands of more inquiring minds from India and abroad? Or is it seeking shelter under a crumbling cover of self-indulgent mystification?" Is it "plagued by a regressive attitude in regard to emerging technologies and techniques of communication?" His queries also include questions relating to the *parampara's* awareness/sensitivity towards the "new equations" between art makers and art receivers in contemporary societies. Very similar questions can be legitimately asked of Odissi dance Gurus and their prominent disciples.

[38] The first Gurus included Pankaj Charan Das, Kelucharan Mahapatra, Debprasad Das and Mayadhar Rout. Their male students (also recognised as Gurus) were Raghunath Dutta, Ramani Ranjan Jena, Surendra Nath Jena, Shankar Behera, Murlidhar Maji, Harekrushna Behera and Gangadhar Behera.
Nilmadhab Bose, "In Praise of Odissi", Kala Vikas Kendra Journal, Cuttack, Orissa 1987

[39] It is universally believed in the *gurukul* system (both within the tradition and in common perception by people outside it), that despite many years of performing and teaching experience, a female dancer is incapable of being 'effective' without a Guru. Even if a female dancer has become a major artiste, she must remain subservient and respectful of the wishes of her Guru. Less subservience is demanded or expected of a male disciple.

[40] The women dancers who teach are not usually regarded as Gurus, though they may be performing exactly the same function as the male Guru. In every situation encountered by this researcher, women teacher's desired to assume the mantle of the Guru with their students, and encouraged feet touching and other overt manifestations of subservience towards themselves in the classroom situation. This approach to teaching effectively retained many of the inter-personal problems associated with the *guru-shishya parampara*

[41] My initial training in Odissi was with Guru Surendra Nath Jena between 1978 and 1984 and later with Ms. Madhavi Mudgal, disciple of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra from 1985 to 1992, performing occasionally with her till 1994. Subsequently I worked periodically with Guru Trinath Maharana between 1995 and 1998.

[42] In a few rare instances students from abroad have challenged this unspoken rule. Between 2002-2004 I was actively involved in establishing a discussion forum through sharing working space with a handful of such dancers in the city.

Chapter 3

The Classical Dance Technique,

Vocabulary and

Choreographic Forms

3.1 Introduction to Odissi's Technique

Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Ana Sanchez-Colberg (2002) have drawn attention to the need for a phenomenological approach to the understanding of 'dance signs' created by the strands of the dance medium, for a comprehensive view of it.[1] The inter-relationship of these dance signs need to be determined and their polysemantic content identified.[2] Valerie Preston-Dunlop created a base for the view of the strands of the dance medium as 'body', 'action', 'space' and 'dynamics', and the perspective of a dance work as comprising of a distinctive and inter-related nexus of these strands. Ana Sanchez-Colberg (1992) expanded on these ideas and also added the consideration of the work's process / production.[3] This was presented as the Glossary of Stylistic Features and provided a comprehensive set of signs across the dance strands, laying the ground for an exhaustive macro-structural, choreological perspective of dance works.[4]   This model brought issues of corporeality[5] in the embodiment and creation of dance into focus and also allowed for an understanding of dance style by 'taking into account both diachronic and synchronic aspects of the work's historical context'.

The 'signs' examined here, are concerned with Odissi's approach to the use of the body, as well as to the articulation of its movement. The study has been informed by the discourse on 'dance strands' and dance signs established by Valerie Preston-Dunlop and further developed by Ana Sanchez-Colberg. It has identified elements of the technique and questioned what underlying phenomenological experience these cumulatively offered the dancer and the viewer that accounted for their continuing existence through so many centuries. This examination allows for 'corporeal knowledge' of the tradition and provides access to the network of covert psychological structures bound to Odissi dance. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH3/E1/V1 Pada Vande**)

Odissi has some marked characteristic features in its use of the body which it shares with other forms of classical Indian dance. These include the maintenance of an upright position for the body's central axis (*Brahma sutra*) through the spinal cord, accompanied with a "giving in" to the earth by lowering the body towards the floor. The body is viewed as suspended on this central meridian and movement

sequences are markedly symmetrical on both sides of the spinal cord in accordance with perceived rules of balance and harmony. Percussive patterns as pneumonic syllables or *bols* conforming to cyclical rhythms are expressed literally with the feet. Movement sequences involving different body parts are embodied as 'synchronic and diachronic acoustic structures'. Movement is highly reified and vividly expressed in stylised gestures of the head, eyes and neck, in keeping with the non-mundane entity the dancer symbolizes.[6] Hand gestures are extensively used as both word symbols and decorative motifs, getting their importance from being experienced as *mudras*. These are regarded as natural body indexes expressive and evocative of specific states of being, and therefore powerful devices with which to evoke *rasa,* or the 'taste' / 'flavour' of a sentiment in a performance situation, for both performer and viewer. [7]

An important consideration, is the context within which dance is experienced right from the beginning of the training process. The student is made aware that the dance is meant to address a deity and that its goal is the 'detached' experience of sentiment as *rasa*.[8] All aspects of the technique contribute to and build on this awareness. The symmetric physical structures of Odissi movement allow a technically competent performer to achieve meditative states of consciousness in the performance of nritta, through the harmonising effect of rhythm, over sustained periods of time.[9] Absorbed concentration on the character of the deity being portrayed in nritya, is also a powerful means of creating this transmutation of the mind. Successfully embodying the mythological stories of deities over decades, to the exclusion of other themes, has the cumulative effect of changing the basic character of the performer, like any other path of yoga. Maturity in technique is accompanied by the transmutation of ideas about the divine nature of the self, from the realms of myth and 'intellectual possibility', in to a degree of experienced knowledge.

When this occurs, the body can be regarded as an instrument to be transcended, not by denying its physicality, but by celebrating its essence. This essence is conceived of as the love and devotion the individual has for God which, by dancing as 'one with the music', allows for the body to 'dissolve' itself in sound and transcend time. Gender is not an issue as the dancer becomes the symbol of the androgynous soul seeking reunion with its Maker. These intentions make the dance

complete as a solo performance.

Three aspects of space have to be negotiated by the dancer in this situation. Firstly, physical space, usually the proscenium stage, with demarcated points for entry and exit, and a defined area for the musicians and the shrine. This space is seen as sanctified, and often ritualistically charged (with incense, oil lamps and even the breaking of a coconut) by the performer before the performance commences. Secondly, the personal kinesphere, has to be prepared to function as a 'virtual dynamic prism' through which the mind can enter inner space. Lastly, inner space itself, which is an egoless frame of mind allowing the subject matter of the dance to unfold, while watching the process as a witness.

Successful performers tend to evolve an individualised 'sequence of events' to enter these spaces as part of the preparation for the performance that are no different in purpose from other ritual acts. In the present repertoire, objects are not incorporated into the performance as signifiers of meaning and the only stage prop generally used is a shrine on the corner of the stage. For a great master of the tradition like Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, dance as a prayer in movement is very much a lived reality. Widespread audiences, especially where such ideas are commonly associated with the performing arts, participate in this belief wholeheartedly and flock to see him, despite the fact that he represents the opposite image of the ideal beautiful young woman necessary to invoke *shringaar rasa* as described in the Abhinaya Darpana.[10]

3.1.1 Movement Pathways

The term 'movement pathway' refers to the choreological concept of 'spatial progression' put forward by Valerie Preston-Dunlop as part of the Manner of Materialisation of Movement. Valerie Preston-Dunlop also suggested that 'virtual spatial forms' occur as "spatial projections when energy is thrown into the space through the dynamic of the dancer's performance."[11] Spatial progressions are being described as 'movement pathways' in this study of Odissi because they appear in the kinesphere as a coherent system of 'lines of stress' or 'veins of energy'. Movement pathways are geometrically related virtual forms and underpin all Odissi movement

like a virtual "bone structure".[12] Classical movement requires to be learnt by repeating the movement pathways of the teacher to acquire resonance in this "bone structure". The clarity and conviction with which movement is articulated along these pathways is part of the process of 'bringing life to movement' and mastering technique. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH3/E2/V3/ Creating a movement pathway**)

Any mapping of movement pathways of individual body parts reveals a distinctive pattern governing the whole body. The feet mapped along the front-back, right-left axis on the floor plane, produces short, primarily linear and some curved, geometric traces. This basic system of geometry is clearly reflected in the three dimensional spatial frame of the whole lower body. The lower body pathways conform to straight and curved lines within a limited range of lengths and directions, maintaining a fixed set of distances from the body's central axes. They are almost always symmetrical and originate from, and return to, a constant centre within the pelvis.

The upper body mapped on any vertical plane produces in comparison longer, curvilinear geometric traces and effectively creates the illusion of expansiveness. Individual movements of the torso, arms, hands, neck, head and eyes, also trace pathways that follow a distinct set of proportions and directions from the central cross of axes. As in the case of the lower body, their geometry also creates largely symmetric forms, thereby engaging the body in a balanced manner on both sides of the spinal cord. Movements here seemingly originate at different centres within a central line linking torso/neck/head to the centre of the lower body in the pelvis, concurrent with the spinal cord. By and large, the torso functions as an upper and a lower unit and movements reflect a pattern of beginning in the trunk and flowing along fixed pathways, to the arms and fingers, and neck, head and eyes. Every instant of a phrase conforms to its underlying geometric plan and flow, and is truly 'free' at very rare instances.

Spatial progressions are made by the composite upper and lower body while holding body designs. These progressions often terminate in another design, with a variation to the first motif. In doing this, fixed points at determined intervals from each other, are established in the kinesphere as 'stations' and are constantly touched along the movement pathway. By repeating this principle, the pathways and

'stations' of the kinesphere are reiterated, creating the "charged space" around the performer. The system develops specialised kinaesthetic abilities: the ability to use the upper and lower bodies as separate units with completely different effort qualities; a strong sense of rhythm, and the control required to move isolated body parts to it; an aptitude to work with focus and projection, particularly using the eyes; and a versatile use of fingers as end points, or continuation lines of movement pathways described by the body. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH3/E3/V11/Chowk 9**)

3.2 The Kinesphere and the Dynamosphere

The understanding of Odissi's dynamics and the distinctive spatial structures these generate through the dancing body, have been informed by Laban's Choreutics and the choreological discourse subsequently furthered at the Laban Centre, particularly by Dr Valerie Preston Dunlop. Laban saw Choreutics as a study of dance that was comparable to the study of "harmonic principles and practice in musical composition" and "form in the visual arts".[13] This aesthetic understanding could be borrowed for the study of dance by seeing the body in movement, as forming patterns within the physical space of its kinesphere, and thereby forming an energy envelope or dynamosphere around itself. He defined the kinesphere as "the sphere around the body whose periphery can be reached by easily extended limbs without stepping away from that place which is the point of support ..."[14] The "space in which our dynamic actions take place" was further qualified as the dynamosphere.[15]

Laban's appreciation of ordered structure in dance was expounded using spatial models for the kinesphere. This kinesphere had "innumerable directions" radiating from its centre into infinity.[16] Movements were articulated by the different limbs within their natural range, forming kinespheric zones; these conformed to "circles which are most appropriate to our bodily construction".[17] Such "prototype spatial forms, rings and scales", were "forms traced in and around the perfect solids: the tetrahedron, the cube, the octahedron, the icosohedron, and the

dodecahedron".[18] According to Laban such spatial forms "rule not only the construction of living beings but also the structure of all inorganic matter and its crystallization. With this discovery the whole of nature may be recognized as being governed by the same choreutic laws, the laws of interdependent circles."[19] Laban saw these "harmonized prototypes of the fragmented movement patterns of human behaviour" as "perfect geometric 'scaffoldings'...(and) their practice was... a participatory experience as well as a tool for negotiation in the theatrical sense; a communal spiritual ritual..." . He however gave "minimal advice as to how they might be useful to making and performing..."[20]

In the context of Indian dance forms like Odissi, Laban's ideas about 'perfect geometric scaffoldings' created by the body in dance, can be seen to have particular resonance. The two basic body pivots of Odissi are strong geometric shapes (chowk, or square and tribhanga, or the 'triangular three bends'), both formed by a lowering of the body towards the earth. Due to this, the Odissi dancer's kinesphere can perhaps be described as being 'condensed' and 'concentrated' during the period of the dance. Movement phrases are punctuated by held still positions; a phenomenon reflective of Odissi's strong roots in temple sculpture. These approaches to movement are maintained as an almost constant feature throughout the duration of the dancing process.[21] The limbs move within the kinesphere in their natural zones on prescribed paths or 'lines of stress' forming a constantly varying network of geometrically forming virtual lines. Within this 'geometric scaffolding' Odissi sets up a distinctive dynamosphere. (Refer to: **CD 1 — CH3/E4/V7/Illustrating the dynamosphere**)

Movements form a 'complex dynamosphere' as they are created by treating the body as two distinct units: an upper unit from waist to head, and a lower unit from waist to feet forming two simultaneous 'sub-dynamospheres'. The movement articulations created in both these units differ distinctly from each other. The impression Odissi generates is that the upper body is "flexible", "light" and "free", while the lower body is "direct", "strong" and "bound".[22] In actual fact, the upper body is also bound in its use of the torso, head, arms, hands and neck, and uses a spectrum of effort qualities from direct to flexible, sudden to sustained, and strong to light, while expressing different situations. The net dynamosphere however exhibits different opposing qualities in separate zones, which work together through a

sustained harmonious resolution.

Within the separate sub-dynamospheres, the maximum variety in the range of effort is displayed in the upper body by the hands and eyes, while the torso and head are less differenciated. There are hardly any instances of complete free flow in the technique and on the rare occasions it is used, the simplest movements read as dramatic bursts, accents or exclamations. From the dancer's centre, 'innumerable directions radiate into infinite space through the kinesphere', but also 'pulsate back' to 'charge' the body, as extended limbs always return to the body at cyclical intervals at the conclusion of movement sections (small cluster of choreutic units) within movement sequences (large clusters of choreutic units).

Tantric ideas underpin the Odissi dance tradition like an unconscious cultural bedrock. Movements as described above are seen to draw geometric diagrams in space and to energise the kinesphere, energised by. These spatial patterns can be experienced as the virtual embodiment of *yantras* or geometric diagrams evolved over centuries in the tantric tradition of ritual worship, for harnessing cosmic energies. Such ideas when embodied through the dancing process allow the body to be used as the 'prism' through which the dancer intuits her oneness with the 'energetic substratum' and its 'resolutions', governing all life. It makes the act of embodying geometric patterns in dance a means of acquiring 'resonance of body with the laws of the universe', thereby functioning as a corporeal form of tantric meditation.

Conceptions of the kinesphere and dynamosphere operating as a virtual *yantra* created during dance, is supported by the sound-movement nexus seen in Odissi's technique. In tantric philosophy, all manifest energy first appears to the senses as sound. This idea is reflected in the device where every set of foot movements is associated with spoken syllables or *bols*. These *bols* directly condition the dynamosphere, which is significantly 'charged' with pneumonic syllables even before dance begins, and thereby determines the rhythmic cycles that will be used by the body in movement. The feet pick up their 'energy impulse' from striking the ground in patterns created by the *bols*, and transmit this to the rest of the body. In this they exhibit bound flow. Absolute harmony is needed between the effort pattern of the syllables and their translation in movement, to achieve a 'clean language'. This

system not only aids in exact recall, but also serves as a useful substitute for notation, particularly in dance sections that emphasis footwork. The lower body is consequently limited in its use of effort, and serves as a 'motor' to generate a rhythmically charged 'body field', within which the upper body expresses itself. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH3/E5/V9/Learning movement using bols**)

3.3 Choreological Perspectives on *Rasa* in Nritya and Nritta

Indian classical dance aesthetics are greatly determined by the concept of *rasa* (sentiment) and its creation, a subject that has undergone repeated and thorough discussion for centuries. The understanding of *rasa* is central to any engagement with classical Indian dance; it is also central to viewing Odissi from the triadic perspective of choreological studies which takes into account how the dance is experienced by choreographer, performer and viewer. It allows for both a corporeal understanding of the Odissi dance experience and for a theoretical framework for its analysis. The *rasa* theory is seminal to the present task of Odissi's deconstruction, and its reconstruction to meet the objectives outlined earlier. It focuses attention on the psychological end purpose of this dance, as well as on the traditional technical means established for achieving it.

According to the seminal text of the Natya Shastra, the spectrum of human experience is always considered as being distillable into eight basic states of being called *rasas*; these include *shringaar* (the erotic) *hasya* (the comic), *karuna* (the pathetic), *raudra* (the furious), *vira* (the heroic/brave), *bhayanaka* (the terrible/fearful), *bibhatsa* (the odious), and *adhbhuta* (the wondrous). Every artistic composition needs to be imbued with one dominant *rasa.* The richness of this *rasa* is determined by the 'transitory presence' of other *rasas*, as 'varied textures' within the primary emotional experience caused by the work of art. When the performer does not succeed in evoking any dominant *rasa* as often happens in today's classical dance recitals, the viewer is left with 'amorphous' emotions and perceives the dancer

as merely having rendered 'stylised and coded movement' without having provided the viewer with an experience of any lasting significance.

3.3.1 Nritya

An important aspect to the *rasa* theory is that all states of being identified, leave a 'quintessential residue' when they are experienced, which is that of spiritual bliss.[23] This is because the phenomenon of *rasa* is experienced when the emotion in question is 'tasted' with the full knowledge that it has come into existence through participating in events within the non-real space of the performance[24] and is hence the result of a 'detached' life experience.[25] This system works particularly effectively with nritya. Odissi's permanent mood or *sthayibhava* is predominantly *shringaar* and is evoked through the course of the recital comprising of both nritta and nritya. The preference for *shringaar rasa* can be traced to the dance's origins in the temple ritual of the *maharis*, and to the dominating influence of the Geeta Govinda in its repertoire.[26]

The Odissi dancer evokes *rasa* by expressing her/his humanity within the context of the soul's relationship to God and through using a highly reified movement vocabulary.[27] The dancer can hence be seen to deal with the body that is "personal, social, emotional, animal, mineral, vegetable, sexual, biological and psychological..."[28] in accordance with tantric philosophy where it becomes the primary means for spiritual enlightenment. Its sensuality is unashamedly expressed, but only within the context of what is perceived as the 'finest' of human love and sexuality i.e. loving devotion to the deity. Such a position conforms to the tantric precept that transcendence is possible not by negation of physical matter, but by its fullest celebration as only the 'ripened fruit'/ 'fully experienced soul', can realistically detach itself from the tree/body.

Also in accordance with the theoretical framework of the performance, nritta and nritya using Odissi's classical dance vocabulary, creates a 'sense of being spiritually nourished' in its viewers. Physical beauty in the dancer on stage is a necessary requirement of the *shringaar rasa* to be evoked for this in the viewer.[29] The dancer's physical image is patterned after the 'classical beautiful body' of

medieval Orissan sculpture where facial features are highlighted (to create fish-like eyes etc.) and the body is heavily adorned with jewellery and draped with body-hugging, fine fabric.

The classical dancer's technical abilities in nritya are reflected in the ability to evoke rasa through movement signifiers suggesting character, situation, and the physical effects of mood in the character.[30] Nritya is created through a systematised usage of coded gestures and allegoric situations. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH3/E6/V4/Bathing prior to pooja, or ritual prayer.** This sequence is being "re-enacted" as a means to entice Krishna, with whom the dancer as Radha, is in conversation during the dance.) These structures are arranged to explore the elements of the dance medium as compositions that are constructed with varying combinations of rhythm, melody, literal and abstract meaning.[31]

3.3.2 Nritta

Nritta is also highly expressive of mood but does not have a similar theoretical framework to use for its generation of *rasa*. Nritta's emotive function can however be analysed by considering the "Manner of Materialisation" of movement, as defined by Dr. Valerie Preston-Dunlop (1981).[32] This choreological concept builds on Laban's initial idea that weight, space, time and flow in movement are reflective of states of mind.[33]

The "Manner of Materialisation" of movement articulates the idea that 'intention' behind movement is a crucial factor in determining how a movement is projected spatially. This can be understood by working with the idea of the Choreutic Unit[34] which was defined as the "base unit fundamental to both fixed form and free association use of Choreutics..." of which "There are two kinds: the line and curve..."[35] It was qualified by the nature of 'spatial tension', 'spatial progression', and 'body design' contained in both the actual and virtual Choreutic Unit defined by the body during the articulation of a movement.[36] The intention with which movement is projected causes the Choreutic Unit to manifest with distinctive, though virtual, 'spatial projections' which can be described and hence made tangible, by using the other component entities of movement (i.e. 'spatial tension', 'spatial progression' and 'body design').[37]

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I am conversant with situations in Odissi nritta where a degree of 'standard stylistic constants' for some of these criteria have been manifested among students of the same Guru, who have trained and performed together intensively for many years. This has occurred when student dancers have diligently tried to emulate the teacher's movement qualities of 'spatial progression' and 'body design' resulting in the impression of 'clones' dancing together. Despite this, individual dancers have a "presence" that makes some stand out more than others, which can be explained by the nature of the 'spatial projection' and 'spatial tension' that is manifested.

The 'intention' behind movement as reflected in spatial projection and tension is most apparent when examining micro-movements of the face and body. In Odissi these can be seen to express transitory shades of emotion at specific points in time and space, and serve to determine the performer's ability to evoke *rasa*. One device used to texture movement in this way, is to improvise with creating hermeneutic interpretations of the formal structures of dance while embodying them.[38] This ability is not formally taught or even perhaps consciously recognized but is often developed by "talented" individuals during the course of years of practice. It distinguishes one performer's Odissi from another's and colours "pure dance" comprising of set choreographic structures with an individual presence that distinguishes a 'rich' rendering of dance from a 'colourless' one.

The essential *rasa* of this kind of dance is experienced (by both viewer and performer) when the Odissi dancer achieves a 'transparency of being' in performance.[39] It requires the dancer to be psychologically prepared to approach the act of dancing formal structures of movement, as a form of communion with a Higher Self. It is then that the dance is as described by Sheets-Johnstone, "a lived experience of meaningful gestures..." and "...skill is integrated with the bodily schema and one is pre-reflectively aware of his body in the act."[40]

3.4 The Issue of Style in Odissi

"Style" in the context of the spectrum of Indian classical dance broadly refers to a regional variation of the mainstream tradition defined by the Natya Shastra of Bharata Muni. The specific features of a regional style like Odissi were acquired through different historical periods of this tradition marking stages in socio-religious change and their reflection in aesthetic ideas.

"Jayantika" was responsible for systematising a basic working vocabulary for Odissi in the mid 20th century, which was agreed upon by a seminal group of Odissi gurus. "Style" within the tradition now commonly refers to different schools of practice associated with Odissi's prominent guru-choreographers the most important being that of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra and Guru Deb Prasad Das.[41]

Through the normal course of time, students of these first teachers, Gurus in their own right, moved away from each other, many migrating to Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and other cities, to establish their own practices. Most of these have come to be recognised as conforming in their work to the primary *gurukul*-styles of Kelucharan Mahapatra and Guru Deb Prasad Das. The students of these second generation teachers have now also established their own schools. As required by the *gurukul* system, each teacher (whether of the second or the third generation) is expected to teach what he/she has learnt to younger dancers.

Within the primary *gurukul*-style of Kelucharan Mahapatra being used as the focus of study in this research, Odissi's basic movement principles have sometimes been reinterpreted to form distinctive movement characteristics describable as secondary 'sub-styles'.[42] These are characterized by commonalities in the "Manners of Materialisation" of movement of dancers within the sub style, and in specific choreographic changes in compositions (especially of nritya) initially created by Kelucharan Mahapatra. Students who change teachers in Odissi within the same primary *gurukul* from one sub-style to another are often reintroduced to the "basics" according to their new teacher. For an inexperienced dancer this can be a cause for a great deal of difficulty, especially if specific "Manners of Materialisation" learnt from a former teacher have already become second nature.

3.4.1 Embodying a Sub-style

Odissi styles are taught by different teachers with individual explanations about how to form the movement being demonstrated. As a case in point, two visual images were given to this researcher by Madhavi Mudgal[43] and Guru Trinath Maharana,[44] both Delhi based teachers trained under the same master, regarding the upper torso movement that characterises Odissi.

Madhavi Mudgal's image required imagining a rod going centrally through the chest, level with the heart (parallel to the table plane). The torso rotated from side to side on this rod. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH3/E7/V11/Chowk 6**)

Trinath Maharana's instructions were that 'the rib cage be tilted inwards towards the stomach, on a diagonal radiating from the body's central axis'. A tribhanga design with body weight on the left foot required 'tilting in' on the diagonal defined by the placement of the right foot in *trasya pada* and vice versa for the right tribhanga.[45] (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH3/E8/V9/Diagonal torso movement**)

Both Madhavi Mudgal's and Trinath Maharana's ideas translate into slightly different movements of the upper body in the dancer embodying them. This use of the torso directly affects the basic design and the progression of all movement in the tribhanga position. It also affects the body's use of tension and release and hence its capacity for 'projection' using the muscles of the torso.

Madhavi Mudgal's usage of the body curtails the dancer's scope to project movement into space, but makes for simple, clean lines instead. Her style appears rigid in comparison to Trinath Maharana's, as it limits the range of movement it allows. Clarity of line is achieved by developing a vivid awareness of the 'door plane' while dancing, as the maximum range of torso movement expressed is principally as a rotation of the chest along this plane.

Trinath Maharana's diagonal construction as a torso movement-map frees the body to explore the circular amplitude possible with the torso. This allows for powerful spatial projections and consequently manifests as less rigidity in the use of the torso. If done without sufficient training, it can easily appear unrestrained.[46] In

Madhavi's interpretation of movement, restraint is synonymous with dignity, and her students are encouraged to cultivate a "contained style" of dance. There is hence dispute between practitioners of both ideas, as to what is the "pure style".[47]

Such movement ideas and restraints develop as a result of the successful teacher's individual body preferences and aesthetic choices and define sub-styles. As encouraged by the tradition, the student learning from one Guru (and therefore exposed to one specific sub-style) spends years faithfully attached to the Guru mastering movements stemming from a single set of ideas. He/she acquires "correct movement" by repeating the motor patterns being demonstrated by the teacher. The problem of 'stagnation' inevitably arises after the challenge of mastering the tasks set have been met with proficiency as movements embodied in this way have not been arrived at by exploring an abstract idea, but by years of constant imitation.

It appears from this that, while imitation is a necessary process in the initial stages of embodying classical movement, it must be learnt in an alternative environment where different sub-styles can also be experienced without the social trauma of having to leave the *gurukul* for another. It is regrettable that technique is always taught as a set of inflexible rules, which are indisputable and "pure", according to the teacher delivering them as this becomes a seriously limiting factor in the student's ability for creative experimentation and self-growth. The continuing existence of archaic teaching practices today can be read as being indicative of an intrinsic insecurity within the *Guru-shishya parampara*.

3.5 The Vocabulary

Movements in Odissi's technique are centred around the joints. They have been described here in the form in which they are traditionally taught i.e. as exercises in the basic body pivots of chowk and tribhanga, using a vocabulary of isolated movements, of different parts of the body. These have been listed according to the system followed in classical Indian texts on dance with additional elements

specific to Odissi as listed by the Odissi Research Centre, a State sponsored institution in Bhubaneswar. Body positions used in the vocabulary have been previously described by me with illustrations in my MA thesis in History of Art.[48] They are being mentioned here without illustrations but with additional descriptions.

At the initial stages of Odissi's formulation, several terms, particularly for different body designs, spatial progressions as floor patterns and spins etc., were put forth.[49] More recently, the Odissi Research Centre published two volumes called the Odissi Dance Pathfinder to formalise such usages. The publications do not make reference to the early terms, but lay out others, based on "consensus in seminars at the Odissi Research Centre".[50] As the purpose of this study is not to investigate and clarify what each of the initial terms meant to most teachers, or to critique the efforts of the Odissi Research Centre, but to examine instead, the present tradition in terms of its actual use of body parts in dance, reference will be made primarily to the terminology and organisation of this information as used in the pan Indian text of the Abhinaya Darpana, as this is the most widespread.[51]

3.5.1 Chowk and Tribhanga

To form the standard Odissi body position of chowk, the feet are turned outwards maintaining a distance of 'two fist + two thumb' lengths of the dancer's own measurements, between the heels. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH3/E9/V11/Chowk 2**) The arms are held up at shoulder height seemingly extending their length, elbows bent inwards making a slightly more than 90 degree angle to the front plane of the body, and thereby forming three sides of a square form. A square is also perceived by the net body design, as the knees and arms create a width that approximates the height of the body. Chowk has two other subsidiary forms characterised by the distance maintained between the heels of the out turned feet. The half or *ardhchowk* is formed when this distance is one fist + one thumb. Mandala is constituted by 3 fists + 3 thumbs (and when used, naturally lowers the height of the body).

The body in these positions is symmetrically balanced on its central axis and experienced as a tightly resolved quadrangle. It can be felt as comprising two opposing triangles: one formed by the line of the arms with its apex at the navel; the

second formed by the line of the knees with its apex at the navel. Seen as these symmetrically positioned triangles, the body in chowk becomes the mythological hourglass-shaped "*damru*" (drum) of Shiva that released the energy thereby causing creation in the universe.

Tribhanga (lit: three bends), the second pivotal body design is formed with feet placed in *trasya pada*. i.e. with one foot in front of the other both facing outwards (at approximately one hundred and twenty degrees) to each other, and heels aligned in front of each other maintaining a short distance of approximately one fist length from each other (hence the position has a left and right counterpart).[52] (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH3/E10/V11/Tribhanga 1**)

The knees are bent (the first of the three bends characterising the position), and the torso laterally shifted (second bend) in the direction of the forward foot. The head as a consequence, naturally tilts in the opposite direction to the torso (third bend). In this position, body weight is unequally distributed between both legs; the forward foot can be lifted off the ground easily in dance without causing a disturbance in the body's balance of weight.

The tribhanga is derived from the abhanga which also has a left and right counterpart. A right abhanga is formed by standing vertically with feet together and parallel, and laterally shifting the torso to the right accompanied by a releasing of body weight onto the left foot. The body assumes this position naturally when holding a child/pot of water on the waist, and the tribhanga can perhaps be described as a 'stylized elaboration' of this abhanga association. In the first tribhanga position of Odissi used for exercise, the hands are resolved into loose fists and placed at the waist (on the load bearing side of body) and at the junction of the thigh and hip on the opposite side. This resolution creates distinct triangular shapes in the body through the bent knees, and through the deflected torso and elbows. It represents the ground plan for articulating images of feminine beauty.[53]

Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra has experimented with a method of dance notation for the use of the body in chowk and tribhanga which is reflective of the movement principles governing this style of dance. All body movements are associated to one of three moving units; the head, the torso and the feet (the hip

being generally held still as required by his technique). Lateral shifts of torso and head are assumed to oppose and balance each other except in some static positions where the hip is rotated along the vertical axis causing the upper and lower body planes to face in different directions. He notates the movement phrase as a series of 'still moments' on a rhythmically divided time line, and writes body details for each such significant position of change according to their traditional nomenclature as described below.[54]

3.5.2 Movements of the Torso, or *Baksha*

Movements of the torso are versatile as has been illustrated above while commenting on the creation of sub-styles in Odissi. These can be better analysed if they are seen to comprise of an upper and a lower unit, each having its own centre which can work to both initiate and terminate movement using this part of the body. The 'upper torso unit' is formed by most of the rib cage, and its 'point of origination of movement' can be placed level with the heart, centrally in the torso's depth.[55] The lower torso unit comprises of the upper waist and the region slightly below the navel. Its 'point of origination of movement' can be felt as being along the plum line of the body, at the navel or just slightly below it. The torso is usually exercised as a single unit by forming large circular movements touching the four extreme positions of back, right, front and left to describe a fluid circle. These four positions have been described by the Odissi Dance Pathfinder as *dakshhyachala* (right), *bamachala* (left), *utchala* (forward) and *prusthchala* (back).[56]

A typical lateral slide to the left or right as required by the tribhanga, is made by first moving from the 'point of origination of movement' in the lower torso unit, and then continuing the slide to its maximum reach by further pushing from the 'point of origination of movement' in the upper torso. These transitions should happen smoothly and seem almost simultaneous. When the door plane of the torso is rotated on the spinal cord to enable the upper body to face another direction retaining the lower body as is, the two centres remain 'linearly connected in torsion' along the body's vertical meridian. In a clear articulation of Odissi, every time the hands are moved (creating a gathering or a scattering movement), its basic impulse, can be traced back to the torso's 'points of origination of movement'. Any expressive

or 'heartfelt' delivery of movement, even when manifest in another part of the body e.g. a gesture of the head, inevitably requires the engagement of these centres in the torso.

3.5.3 Positions of the Feet, or *Pada Bheda*

Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, in conjunction with the Odissi Research Centre, has created a nomenclature to describe the variations of feet positions used in Odissi. In doing this, the text of the Abhinaya Darpana was referred to, and its 10 standing positions with hand gestures, and 6 others without, considered and used. These however proved to be insufficient to describe the various permutations actually seen in temple sculpture, and incorporated into the Odissi practice. Additional words were hence devised, that were descriptive of the additional positions in Sanskrit and an exercise series incorporating 26 placements of the feet created. This series is practised in sequence as an exercise and forms a continuous set to be repeated on both sides of the body. Transitions between placements have been described making the preceding position the point of departure.

List of the 26 feet placements:

1 **Aadi pada.** [*aadi*, Sanskrit for original; *pada*, Skt. for feet].
The feet are positioned side by side and touching along their length, with one big toe crossing the other.

2 **Yugma pada** [joined].
The big toes are uncrossed, otherwise former position retained.

3 **Vipareethmukha** [lit: opposite faced]
Feet turned outward at almost 180 degrees. Heels touch.

4 **Kumbh** [earthen pot]
From *vipareeta mukha*, the heels are raised.

5   Dhanu [the bow]

Weight taken on one foot, and the other crossed in front of it, till the two sets of toes face each other.

Alternatively, from a *trasya pada* position, the forward foot crosses the weight bearing foot, till the two sets of toes face each other.

6   Prushta dhanu [reversed bow]

From *dhanu*, uncross the non weight-bearing leg, and cross again behind the heel of the weight bearing leg.

7   Maha pada [lit: grand foot]

Body weight taken on one leg, while the other is raised, bent at the knee, and foot placed at the knee of the supporting leg.

8   Ek pada [one foot]

Weight taken on one foot while the other crosses behind it at knee level, bent and held against the body.

9   Meen puchha [fish tail]

From *ek pada*, the leg held against the body is extended sideways to simulate a fish tail.

10   Lolita [suspended]

The free leg is brought back by describing an aerial arc, and held up supported by the upper leg, while the lower leg is allowed to be loosely suspended.

Alternatively, from chowk, raise one leg off the ground to a height where its foot is level with the knee of the supporting leg. The suspended foot should be held loosely.

11   Uttolita

The suspended foot of *lolita*, is stiffened and raised till it is aligned parallel to the ground.

12   Ullolita

From *lolita*, the suspended foot is thrust forward with the toes facing front.

13   Nupura [anklet]

The suspended foot is brought to rest at the ankle of the weight bearing leg.

14   Suci [needle]

From *nupura*, the foot resting at the ankle is released directly downwards and placed making only its big toe contact the earth.

15   Kunchita [crouched]

Suci is relaxed, allowing all toes to touch the ground.

16   Anukunchita

The *kunchita* or crouched foot is realigned and placed next to the heel of the supporting leg.

17   Bilagnaparshini

The crouched foot is taken forward diagonally and rested with only the heel making contact with the ground.

18   Uthparshini

The extended foot is turned, its weight transferred to its toes, and the heel made to point outwards.

19   Trasya

Described earlier in the text, it's the standard foot position for the body in tribhanga.

20   Swastika [cross]

The forward foot in *trasya* is slid across the weight-bearing counterpart foot, forming a balanced cross form just above the ankles, as the heels are raised off the ground.

21 Ardhchowk [half chowk]

This is the half chowk as previously described. *Swastika* is eased by replacing the heel of one foot on the ground, while the other foot is appropriately placed maintaining one fist + one thumb length in between.

22 Chowk [square]

As previously described

23 Mandala

Chowk is extended to include an additional distance of one fist +one thumb in the distance between heels.

24 Bandhini [bound]

The weight is transferred onto one leg, and the other raised along the supporting leg till its foot is closely fitted behind the former's knee. The thighs are held together.

25 Ardh swastika [half cross]

This is formed when one foot in *ardhchowk*, is advanced directly forward along the ground. In this series it is achieved from *bandhini* by simply disengaging the lodged foot, and placing it in its appropriate position.

26 Rekha [line]

The feet are aligned in a straight line, with the toes of one touching the heels of the other.
The series is concluded by returning to *yugma pada*.

Except for *rekha, yugma* and *aadi padas*, where the knees are straight, all forms are articulated from the basic chowk or tribhanga, and knees kept bent. This series develops balance and strength in the lower body, facilitating the bound but seemingly fluid, sculptural transitions of body which characterise Odissi.

3.5.4 Gestures of the Head, Eyes and Neck

Movements and static positions of different body parts used in Odissi are approached as gestures, and are exactly as listed by the Abhinaya Darpana. They include *sama* [straight], *udvahita* [raised up], *adhomukha* [looking down], *alolitha* [describing a circle], *dhuta* [a sharp turn to the side], *kampita* [nodding], *utkshipta* [a sudden, diagonally forward arc], *parivahita* [a measured shake from side to side].These gestures are accompanied with a list of their possible uses and are generally employed in combinations. In addition to this list, the "*anchita*" position of the head mentioned by the Natya Shastra, where the head is inclined to one side, balancing the deflected torso in tribhanga is also a common feature.

The eyes are used to express fine shades of emotion. For purposes of exercise, Odissi uses transitions between eye positions, as listed under eye gestures, by the A D. These are *sama* (straight), *allokita* (moving in a circle), *sachi* (looking sideways keenly), *pralokita* (moving the eyeballs from side to side), *nimilita* (half closed), *ullokita* (looking up), *anuvritta* (looking up and down successively), *avalokitha* (looking down).

Guru Kelucharan has further defined these gestures and refers to them in the teaching of abhinaya. For example, *sama drishti* described by the AD as the 'straight glance, without moving eyelashes, like a divinity' has been elaborated into *sama shanta*, depicting peace, *sama bhaya* for fear, *sama krodha* for anger, and *sama bismaya* for wonder.[57] Such variations are arrived at by changing the tautness of eye muscles and eyelids.

The neck performs the function of carrying movement impulses from the torso to the head. The neck is exercised through transitions based on gestures listed by the AD. These are *sundari* (rapid lateral shifting from right to left of the head as one straight block; *tiraschina* (describing arcs with chin from centre to right and back, to the left and back), *parivartita* (making a large arc with the chin from extreme left t to extreme right and back), and *prakampitha* (a forward and backward thrusting of chin).

3.5.5 Hand Gestures, or *Hasta Mudras*

The mainstay of the hand gesture repertoire used in Odissi is derived from the Abhinaya Darpana, though these are supplemented by a regional vocabulary. With reference to Jacobson's (1960) model of communication,[58] hand gestures perform an integral poetic and phatic function in Odissi's gesture language and are used at every instant of the dance. Their conative and metalingual function is to identify the dance as belonging to the genre of 'Indian classical'. In nritya or interpretive dance sections they have crucial emotive and referential functions. In applying semiotic models for understanding their presence in different forms of composition it is however necessary to take account of the fact that hand gestures in classical Indian dance techniques are particularly "polysemantic" and open to "desemiotisation" and that they are used out of their referential frames for aesthetic effect.[59]

The Abhinaya Darpana has enumerated 28 single hand formations and 23 with combined hands, with details of their application. It also lists 13 decorative gestures for use in nritta, or pure dance. In addition, there are 16 formations to represent Hindu deities, 10 for the earthly incarnations of Vishnu, 9 for planets and 15 miscellaneous expressions for caste, in-laws, and other relatives. In addition to this pan-Indian vocabulary, Odissi uses a regional vocabulary to represent 'cloth' [*bastra*], 'betel nut' [*tambula*], 'small flower' [*puspa*], 'bow' [*bana*], and 'parrot face' [*sukachuncha*]. It also has its own combination gestures for 'lotus' [*padma*], 'oil lamp' [*pradeep*], 'peacock' [*mayur*], 'window' [*gabakshya*], and to depict 'coming together' [*ubhayakartari*].[60]

In nritya, hand gestures primarily function as symbols, requiring knowledge of what they mean to understand their full significance. These gestures are used as icons when they physically emulate their object of reference. An example of this is *sarpa sirsa*, or snake head (a single hand *mudra* from the Abhinaya Darpana) formed with a flat palm, where the fingers are bent slightly to simulate a hood. Similarly *Garuda*, a mythical eagle, is formed by interlinking the thumbs of otherwise stretched out palms to form wings which are flapped by a movement of the wrist, while being raised above the head in an arc to describe flight. *Alapadma*, or the open

lotus, is another example, formed with an outstretched palm having its fingers fanned out. Sometimes hand gestures become indexes of states of mind, for example *musti* (fist), used to denote anger, frustration and sorrow.

The "Manner of Materialisation" and syntax of hand gestures plays a decisive role in creating meaning. With changes in spatial progression, spatial tension, body design (with reference to hand placement in relation to the body) spatial projection and its placement in the movement sequence, varied textures and allegoric meanings are created. Such manipulations translate as changes of movement in the fingers and wrist, echoed appropriately by the rest of the body. These become the device for making the *alapadma* (open lotus) mentioned above for example, be used to variously to mean 'flower like', 'full of beauty', or 'radiant like the full moon'.

3.6 Exercises in Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra's System

In any movement phrase, separate body parts as described above, are combined to form 'composite movements'.[61] Spatial progressions in the shape of triangles, circles, squares and rectangles, are created in 'bound body designs' of squares, triangles and circles. In viewing this system, Laban's geometric model for the kinesphere defining 27 directions [62] becomes a useful reference template for appreciating Odissi's geometric approach to space.

While training the body to move its parts in isolation and in combination, a keen sense of rhythm and the ability to control *laya* or speed, is also developed simultaneously. This takes the shape of a series of 20 exercises, to a basic four beat cycle defined by pneumonic syllables.[63] The series comprises 10 exercises each for chowk and tribhanga, each rendered three times, in speeds that double the preceding set. The tribhanga has a left and right form depending on which foot is placed forward in *trasya pada* to begin with. The first *laya* or pace is *vilambit* (slow), the second at twice the speed is *madhya* (medium), and the third at four times the

first pace, is *drutta* (fast).

Six of the 20 basic exercises devised by Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra have been described below. These descriptions state what the body needs to do in the exercise as is taught in the tradition, along with images requiring active imagination that can be used to give these exercises a challenging mental component. By performing these two actions, one mental and the other physical together, the dancer builds a personal kinesthetic framework related to the tantric body map for every movement,[64] and develops the ability to view the kinesphere as a 'prism through which to enter inner space', and movement pathways as 'channels' for projecting thought into the 'shared space' of the universe.[65] It also allows for the dancer to become the 'witness' of the dance; an idea developed further in Chapter Four.

The mental tasks and objectives of each exercise described here are not clearly spelled out in the traditional teaching process. Perhaps this is because traditional teachers do not always communicate through words as effectively as they do through a demonstration. The student is expected to 'imbibe / intuit' the logic of movement structures through many years of practice and in actuality, this is what happens. By defining the ideas and movement objectives inherent in the exercise however, it can be learnt and assimilated for creative manipulation far more effectively.

Exercise 1   Descend and rise along *samabhanga*
(Refer to: **CD1 – CH3/E11/V11/Chowk 1A**)

Features:
Hand gesture: *pataka*, the flat palm
Position of feet: chowk
Eye gesture: *sama*
Torso: centred

The exercise commences with the body in a standard chowk with bent arms held at shoulder level forming a virtual quadrangle. The body rises to the full body height making a vertical movement along the spinal cord, and then descends returning to the original position. This exercise serves to establish a sense of vertical

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movement along the spinal cord and also to warm the knees in preparation for dance.

The dominant choreutic unit in the upper body is the virtual line of spatial tension formed between the tips of the two hands. This 'frames the stable square (square being the symbol of earth)' at the commencement of the movement and is maintained constant as the body ascends and descends along its vertical axis. The eyes simultaneously look straight into the distance creating a strong horizontal spatial projection without being assisted in this by any other body part. These actions in this body design combine to establish a virtual geometric grid defined by the cross of axes.

The dominant choreutic unit of the lower body is the line of spatial tension between the two knees which forms as the body descends, and disappears as the body straightens up. This line between the knees also reads as the base of a triangle with its apex at the 'point of origin of movement' in the pelvis. With each rise of the body, this triangle dissolves into a vertical line, and reforms with the descent. This is initially done keeping to a rhythmic framework in *vilambit laya*, and then repeated in *madhya* and *drutta laya*.

The exercise can additionally be viewed as establishing the 'link between earth and sky' and as a means to focus attention at the 'point of origination of the movement in the pelvic center' which rises and descends along the line of the spinal cord. The successive increase in dynamics can be experienced as the 'activation' of the 'point of origin of movement' in the pelvic center, and the direction of its energy vertically upwards into the spinal cord.

Exercise 2   Jumps (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH3/E12/V11/Chowk 1B**)

> ***Features:***
> Hand gesture: *pataka*
> Position of feet: chowk
> Eye gesture: *sama*
> Torso: centred

Maintaining the chowk position, the body is made to jump where the feet

release contact with the ground along the whole sole surface. The objective of this movement is to develop the idea of using chowk as a basic body unit and of strengthening the legs to sustain this form, through long dance sequences. The dominant choreutic unit of the upper body remains the straight line held between the tips of the two hands, while the lower body retains the line formed between the knees. By holding this configuration while jumping, the visual effect of 'stability in chowk' is greatly heightened.

It can also be viewed as a means of seeing the 'body unit' as a system of 'internally resolved forces' empowered like a 'dynamo' and centred at the 'point of origination of the movement' in the pelvis. The body as such a tight, powerful device is able to create forceful spatial progressions and projections along virtual movement passageways, continuing its inherent geometry through the kinesphere, into its surrounding 'general space'.

Exercise 3   Stamps (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH3/E9/V11/Chowk 2**)

> *Features:*
> Hand gesture: *pataka*
> Position of feet: chowk
> Eye gesture: *sama* and *sachi*
> Torso: movement initiated in upper torso unit, rotated along the door plane

The movement begins in the standard chowk with *sama drishti*. The right foot is stamped accompanied by a rotation movement of the upper torso in the direction of the stamped foot. The torso impulse terminates physically at the wrist in the same side of the body, but extends as a virtual projection through the eyes in *sachi dristi*. This sequence is then repeated on the left side of the body. The upper and lower body co-ordination is achieved by first dipping the torso to the left, then stamping the right foot flat while simultaneously commencing the torso rotation to the right. The procedure is then exactly reversed for the left side. The objective of this movement is to develop co-ordination between torso, arms, hands, eyes and feet maintaining the chowk stance.

The dominant choreutic unit in the upper body remains the line held between

the finger tips. The difference here is that this is retained while the palm and forehand rotates along its length from the elbow in both arms, maintaining the shoulders level. As in exercise two, the eyes follow this movement transiting from *sama*, to *sachi* on both left and right sides. The dominant choreutic unit in the lower body remains the line between the two knees, the difference being that this is maintained while the feet stamp alternately, remaining in their positions.

This exercise can also be viewed as a system whereby the rhythmic pulse of the lower body is centred at the 'point of origination of movement' in the pelvis, transferred along the spinal cord to the level of the heart, from where it is directed through the arms and eyes into 'general space' outside the dancer. The eyes become the 'windows of the heart' and their expressions colour the basic structure of this movement with different emotional qualities. In this way, the exercise becomes a 'kinesthetic arena' into which the dancer can consciously enter at will, to 'release different thoughts'.

Exercise 4   Pulling Thread (Refer to: **CD 1 — CH3/E13/V11/Chowk 3**)

> *Features:*
> Hasta mudra: *hansasya*
> Pada bheda: chowk
> Dristi: *sama* and *sachi*
> Baksha: movement initiated by 'point of origin' in upper unit, rotated along door plane

In the basic chowk stance, the fingers are formed into *hansasya* (the swan face), and hold an imaginary thread that extends behind the head at ear level, aligned parallel to the ground. The torso rotates as described in Exercise Three, and creates a linear spatial progression in the virtual line held by the *hansasya mudras*, to a fixed rhythmic cycle. While executing this, the wrists are held loosely and do the moving, between the tips of the fingers and elbows held still in space. Simultaneously, the lower body expresses a heel (right) – flat (left) – flat (right) pattern, defined by the rhythmic cycle which serves to 'propel' the torso to rotate to the right. This composite series of upper and lower body moves is repeated identically on the left of the body while the feet stamp the opposite heel (left) – flat (right) – flat (left) pattern. This exercise helps to develop a sense for using *hasta*

mudras as 'control devices' for body movement. This ability of the hands and fingers is a well recognized feature of the Indian dance tradition.

The choreutic units in the upper body appear as simultaneous clusters. The first element is the space between the two hand gestures which frame the face, the line held between the joined finger tips 'piercing' the back of the head. The second element is the spatial projection of the eyes that extends the 'held line' beyond the kinesphere into general space. The third element is the torso rotation which affects the tilt of the head causing a compensatory 'opposite movement' or counter strand, along the body's vertical axis.[66] These elements work in unison and reinforce the impact of the virtual line held by the fingertips. The lower body integrates into the upper body movement by augmenting their force, but retains its separate form and action.

Experientially, the movement feels completely different if the *hansasya mudra* is replaced by *musti* (the fist). This is a reflection in dance of the yogic perception that shallowness of breath (called throat breathing) occurs when the hands are clenched, while deep breath (called abdominal breathing) occurs when the tips of the thumb and first finger are joined together, while the other three fingers are held straight and relaxed (as in *hansasya*). The exercise can be performed with the idea that the tips of the fingers are holding and defining 'channels' connecting the base of the ears (to the base of the spine, the front of the knees etc.), which is part of a network of similar geometrically arranged 'channels' running through the kinesphere and 'extending as far as can be imagined' into shared space. By doing this, the fingers become empowered instruments with which to trace virtual lines of force and use them to project movement to infinity.

Exercise 5   Arm circles (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH3/E14/V11/Chowk 4**)

Features:
Hasta mudra: *pataka*
Pada bheda: chowk and *prushta dhanu*
Dristi: *sama* and *alokitha*
Baksha: rotation along door plane to follow the design of the arms

The starting position commences in chowk for the feet with the arms shaped

into a circle with palms placed facing each other, finger tips touching, held at a level slightly below the navel. The body as a unit retaining bent open knees moves sideways first to the right, then back to the left, along a straight line. The foot pattern executed to make this linear progression comprises of 'jump (both right and left) – flat (right) – cross (left, in *prushthdhanu*) – flat (right)'. The arms take these four beats to change their position into a circle framing the head as the body moves right. The eyes (and hence naturally the head) follow the right hand in its trajectory. At the end of these four beats, the body is again in the chowk position for the feet, but now the arms are held above the head. The floor pattern is then laterally inverted, during which time the arms return to their original lower circle positioned at the navel, as the eyes follow the left hand. This exercise introduces the student to covering floor space using chowk, while co-ordinating upper and lower body movements.

The dominant choreutic unit formed by this movement is the circle of the arms which appear at the beginning and end of the movement sequence as still points. They create curved spatial progressions repeated symmetrically on both sides of the body while coming into being and then dissolving. The eyes, head and lower body support and reinforce this pattern. The entire cluster of strands is governed by 'rhythmic geometry' as each point in space is arrived at, at a predetermined time and space.

The exercise can also be performed with the idea that moving laterally in chowk 'opens' the body and allows it to 'enter' the horizontal 'channel' along which the movement has to articulate its spatial progression. The lateral momentum of the body both displaces it in floor space, and simultaneously extends the arms upwards. This upward momentum comes to a natural end as the arms complete the upper circle, whereby the body returns on the 'back surge' of the first impulse, retracing its horizontal displacement back to its mean position. Such images reinforce the idea of geometric lines running through the body, past the boundaries of the kinesphere into shared space; the impulse set outwards from the points of origination of movement in the body, receive the 'echo' of their impulse back into themselves. The moving body hence becomes a 'dynamic device' which can be experienced by the dancer 'in second person'.

Exercise 6   A   system   of   torso   displacement   (Refer   to: **CD   1   —   CH3/E10/V11/Tribhanga 1**)

Features:
Hasta mudra: *musti*
Pada bheda: *trasya*
Dristi: *sama* and *sachi*
Baksha: lateral displacement at both upper and lower 'points of origination of movement' in the torso

Beginning with the right sided tribhanga, the torso is already rotated at the level of the heart. The head is tilted left to counterbalance this. Preparation for movement commences by rotating the upper torso to the left at the upper 'point of origination of movement' along with a compensatory head movement in the opposite right direction. This is accompanied by lifting the right foot off the ground thereby putting body weight entirely on the left foot. The raised foot is then stamped on the first beat of the cycle, immediately commencing a slow reverse rotation of the upper torso to return to the original tribhanga position with a corresponding compensatory head movement. This sequence repeats itself in sets of four and is then laterally inverted beginning with the left tribhanga position. This exercise is meant to introduce the body to the system of displacement and counter displacement, underlying the logic of body movement in Odissi's tribhanga position.

The dominant element in this movement is the spatial projection established by the horizontal line traced from left to right and back from right to left, by the eyeballs. The arms are held still at the waist so do not contribute any distracting element of movement from the primary action of the eyes. The head, torso and feet 'held to the body' as a result, create cordal tensions which reinforce the eyes.[67]

The exercise can also be used to focus attention on the 'points of origination of movement' in the upper torso, and use them as both points for projecting movement into space, and receiving 'movement echoes' created by these projections. The upper point of origin of movement can be identified with 'heart' and 'feeling', thereby allowing for a 'trigger point' for emotional expression in movement. The lower 'point of origination of movement' level with the navel can be identified with 'power' and 'energy', thereby allowing for a 'trigger point' for feeding movement

with power.

3.6.1 "Effort" and Energy in Odissi Movement

Laban states that "Effort" is determined by the body's specific use of Weight, Flow, Time and Space, known as Motion Factors, seen in the delivery of any movement. Weight ranges from heavy to light; Flow ranges from bound to free, Time, from quick to sustained; and Space from flexible to direct. Different combinations of these Motion Factors determine whether the action can be described as gliding, floating, dabbing, flicking, pressing, wringing, punching, slashing etc.[68] Movement has bound flow when initiated in the extremities; as apposed to free flow which starts in the centre of the body and transfers the impulse to the extremities.[69] He also states that "economy of effort...is the first prerequisite of skill".[70] This theory and these ideas have informed the conception of Odissi's use of Motion Factors being a specialized process of 'energy transmutation' between the lower and upper parts of the spinal cord, being suggested below.

Movement of different body parts in Odissi are almost always articulated along direct, geometrically definable directions of space. The lower body in Odissi is 'grounded' by a bound usage of 'heavy weight stamping' while performing direct spacial transitions between different positions of the feet. This general pattern is however textured, as the lower body functions like a musical instrument (literally in that bells are tied to the feet) in generating different kinds of energy templates or 'acoustic spaces' within which upper body movement is accordingly performed. These 'energy templates' have weight variations (depending on the strength of the stamping foot), time variations as sudden and sustained (determined by which beats of the rhythm cycle are marked/embodied), and space variations (usually direct, but also include some flexible usages especially when creating aerial movements of the feet). The upper body in comparison displays a wider spectrum of effort combinations and appears to be distinctly freer. The upper body and can be seen to 'feed' from lower body 'energy impulses' as movements here are punctuated by footwork, which both affect and create upper body impulses. The stamping feet in this system, which constitute the extremities of the lower body, hence illustrate Laban's ideas about the generation of bound flow.

This mechanism can however also be experienced as a 'system of energy transactions' where movement from both upper and lower body are controlled at the 'points of origination of movement' in the central axis of the body, within the spinal cord. The feet are powered by their 'point of origination' of movement, an energy centre in the pelvis. This energy, amplified by footwork in the lower body, impacts the spinal cord in return and can be felt as being 'distributed' to the 'points of origin of movement' in the central axis of the torso. From here it is projected by the upper body through both bound and free flow, depending on the specific requirements of the choreography.

The place of initiation of the movement (being referred to as 'points of origin of movement') in the spinal cord are also places where energy is first expressed as Motion Factors in the body. The extremities of the upper body i.e. fingers of the hand formed into *hasta mudras*, become 'regulating points' for the flow of the movement from these centers, beyond the body as virtual projections.[71] They also become 'receiving devices' for drawing energy from the kinesphere and beyond, back into the body to the 'points of origin of movement' in the torso. This particular energy dynamic, generated by the dancer and transmitted through the kinesphere to the surrounding space, begins and ends with the dance and bears parallels with the energy flows of the kundalini experience of tantra.[72]

Skill is a reflection of an intuitive balance in energy usage, between exertion and rest, in the articulation of any movement sequence.[73] In Odissi this is reflected in an ability for making constant transitions between movement and stillness. It is also seen in a seeming 'effortlessness' in the process of dancing complex patterns of movement, with distinctly different effort combinations for the upper and lower body performed simultaneously, to a definite rhythmic cycle. Individual style in the rendering of classical movement can be seen in the specific combinations of Motion Factors employed in typical movement phrases.

Endnotes

[1] Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Ana Sanchez-Colberg (2002) pp.103-4

[2] The theatrical sign is regarded as polysemantic because it is "open to multiple interpretation" and "can be formed from a conglomerate of features belonging to a diversity of sign systems." Ibid p105

[3] Her model was developed through a study of German Tanztheater defined by her as a genre concerned with 'expressing matters physical physically' Ibid p9

[4] Ana Sanchez-Colberg (1992) pp.49-61

[5] "Where the dance's conceptual content has an effect on its material form, where there is an emphasis on emotion and, with it, a focus on the performer's presence as the central factor of the event, a corporeal work emerges. Such a work embodies an anti-mimetic attitude towards the performance event where narrative is subsumed in corporeal form and a polysemantism of the theatrical signs is employed." Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Ana Sanchez-Colberg (2002: 9).

[6] Most of this usage is as was first codified in the text of the Natya Shastra (circa 2nd c. BC - 2nd c. AD) and later selectively condensed into the Abhinaya Darpana (10th c. AD) for specific usage in dance.

[7] See Choreological Perspectives on *Rasa* in Nritya and Nritta (item 3.3)

[8] Please see item 1.0 of this document stating that the primary purpose for engagement in the arts as understood in Indian aesthetics was to develop detachment towards subjective experiences.

[9] See Chapter 5. Symmetric body usage in dance would create balanced tensions in the lungs; this may also promote an equal utilization of left and right nostril breath, recommended by yoga as a means of creating equilibrium of mind.

[10] Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra died in 2004 at the approximate age of 80 years, continuing to perform to the end of his life.

[11] Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Ana Sanchez-Colberg (2002: 86).

[12] Tandon (1993) "Bone structure" is a traditional Chinese term used to describe the structural components of Zen painting.

[13] Valerie Preston-Dunlop and A. Sanchez-Colberg (2002 : 83).

[14] Rudolf Laban, Choreutics, ed. Lisa Ullman (1966: 10)

[15] Ibid p30

[16] "First fact of space-movement" Ibid p17

[17] Ibid p26

[18] Valerie Preston-Dunlop and A. Sanchez -Colberg (2002: 84)

[19] Choreutics, ed L. Ullmann (1966: 26)

[20] Valerie Preston-Dunlop and A. Sanchez-Colberg (2002: 84)

[21] Odissi is danced at a sustained medium and deep level, with rare leaps or stretches into high areas.

[22] These terms refer to Laban's Effort Theory (1947).

[23] An illuminating account of this idea and of art as *sadhana* or mental and spiritual discipline for yoga, is presented by Vatsyayan (1977 2nd ed.) pp.5-6.

[24] "If the experience in art were to be a replica or a photograph of actual experience in life, we will take it as either personal or we will be indifferent to it considering that it has no connection with us... Being free from any personal or particular impediments is the essence of art-experience; and distinguishes it from actual experiences of life." GK Bhat, Pratibhana, Diamond Jubilee Volume p505, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute Poona.

[25] The implied message is that if life is embraced with detachment, it becomes an experience of bliss, a position eloquently explained by the Bhagvat Gita.

[26] The experience of *shringaar* through dance was considered evocative of '*madhurya bhakti'* or devotion for God as the 'husband of the soul'. This specific aesthetic response is not automatically evoked in uninitiated audiences and is responsible for Odissi being viewed as "out of sync" with contemporary cosmopolitan life. By contrast, this response, or a similar one based on the association of dance with divinity, is easily evoked in audiences in Orissa and allows for even mediocre performances to be appreciated.

[27] A Choreological Perspective Part 1, Core Concepts of a Choreological Perspective (1.1) Embodiment, Corporeality and Enactment. Laban Centre notes by A Sanchez March 2001, p7

[28] Ibid p7

[29] Characteristics of a dancing Girl: She should be slender bodied, beautiful, young, with rounded breasts,

self-confident, witty, pleasing, knowing well when to begin (a dance) and when to stop, having large eyes.... Verses 23-25, Abhinaya Darpana 10th century

[30] These signifiers are known as *vibhavas*, determinants of character/situation and *anubhavas*, physical effects of mood. These contribute to defining the *vyabhichari* or *sanchari bhavas* (transitory moods) within the dominant *rasa* portrayed.

[31] Balasaraswati, acknowledged as the greatest Bharat Natyam dancer of the 20th century, describes the Bharat Natyam recital on which Odissi modeled itself in the following terms:

> "At first, mere meter; then, melody and meter; continuing with music, meaning and meter; its expansion in the centrepiece of the *varnam*; thereafter, music and meaning without meter; in variation of this, melody and meter; in contrast to the pure rhythmical beginning, a non-metrical song at the end. We see a most wonderful completeness and symmetry in this art. Surely the traditional votaries of our music and dance would not wish to take any liberties with this sequence." Balasaraswati (1982: 39).

[32] The "Manner of Materialization" has been presented in Valerie Preston-Dunlop's Choreutic Concepts and Practice, Section 4, PhD Thesis, Laban Center 1981.

[33] Valerie Preston-Dunlop and A. Sanchez-Colberg (2002: 66)

[34] The term "Choreutics" was presented by Rudolf Laban as "the art, or science, dealing with the analysis and synthesis of movement". Choreutics, ed. Lisa Ullman (1966: 8)

[35] Valerie Preston-Dunlop (1981: 44)

[36] Virtual lines and shapes in dance form the basis of the concept of 'Manner of Materialisation'. Spatial progression is described as "the choreutic unit...made visible in motion; it is conceived and 'drawn' in the space by a part or whole of the body. Body design is defined as "A way of moving or holding a position so that a choreutic unit inhabits the body itself. Ibid pp.54-55

[37] Ibid p52 "From a choreological perspective, movement is motion factor clusters and phrases that contain semiotic potential, mediated by the articulation and intention of the mover, and by the engagement of the interactor with it." Valerie Preston-Dunlop and A. Sanchez-Colberg (2002: 67)

[38] A direction commonly taken to make performances more accessible to 'uninitiated' audiences is to present Odissi as 'ballets'. These are also called 'dance dramas' and comprise of a story line illustrated through character roles, interspersed with group sequences of nritta. These presentations are a measure to deal with the "monotony" of seeing a solo performer on stage through out the presentation. Many senior dancers in establishments presenting these dance dramas have however stated that "solo performance was far more challenging" and do not enjoy such presentations created by their Gurus. This is primarily because their skills in nritta and nritya requiring a hermeneutic interpretation of movement

material as it is embodied, is not called forth.

[39] Schechner (1977: 175) quotes Grotowski: The "... performer is ..."subtracted", achieving transparency, eliminating "from the creative process the resistance and obstacles caused by one's own organism" (Grotowski 1968a: 178)

[40] Sheets-Johnstone (1966: 27)

[41] See section on lineages in the Introduction.

[42] To my knowledge, this phenomenon of sub-styles is not as evident in Guru Deb Prasad's tradition, perhaps because he has had a far smaller number of prominent disciples who established successful schools of their own.

[43] Madhavi Mudgal belongs to the first generation of female performers and has been a student of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra. She received her training in the 1970's, and developed her own interpretation of the technique taught to her in the course of time. Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra meanwhile developed his own ideas along slightly different lines and continued to teach and build on the technique and repertoire he had evolved initially, with variations.

[44] Guru Trinath Maharana belongs to the second generation of male gurus of Odissi and was also a student of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra.

[45] *Trasya pada* is described in the section on Odissi's movement vocabulary under positions of the feet, or *pada bheda.*

[46] This freer use of the torso is common among dancers trained in Orissa under different teachers today. It seems reflective of a less 'self consciously restrained' way of being.

[47] Dancers in Orissa who were asked to comment on Madhavi Mudgal's Odissi all claimed she didn't use her torso, while they did, and that was what was special about Odissi.

[48] Tandon, Rekha (1994) pp.24-34 Chapter entitled "Odissi in Relation to the Natya Shastra".

[49] A lot of these terms were derived from the indigenous Orissan text, the Abhinaya Chandrika. A controversy however seems to exist about its authenticity which can only be resolved if the manuscript is made accessible to scholars and published. Kum Kum Mohanty, Director, Odissi Research Centre Bhubaneswar (till her retirement in 2004), contests its validity as "nobody is able to produce it".

[50] Odissi Dance Pathfinder Vol. 1 p106 Most of these new terms, particularly the nomenclature for 'still and moving points' in Vol. 2, are not in use outside this institution.

[51] Several Orissan texts on dance exist and have contributed specific gestures and terminology to the

present Odissi practice. More than providing a working manual for Odissi however, their most significant role seems to have been proving that Orissa had a well developed regional tradition of dance with close affiliation to the mainstream classical tradition of the Natya Shastra, in its history.

[52] Please see video clip "CH3 E10 V11" illustrating the first of ten exercises based on the tribhanga position using *trasya pada.*

[53] The proportions of the tribhanga apply as much to the body in dance as they do to images of the languorous maiden or *alasa-kanya* in temple sculpture. The Shilpa Prakash, a 12th century Orissan tantric text on sculpture, describes the graph on which images in tribhanga are sculpted as requiring a 'rectangular ground plan' in an 'upright rectangle' divided by a 'middle vertical line'. This rectangle is further divided by three horizontal lines forming four equal bands. If this grid is imposed on images of the languorous maiden or *alasa-kanya* seen in profusion on medieval temple sculpture, one generally finds that the head, neck, torso, are contained in the first two bands, and the hip and legs with bent knees, in the third and fourth. The graph also visually demonstrates the effectiveness of suggesting 'movement in stillness' using the device of creating a deviation in the torso from the line of the central meridian which is used in Odissi to simulate 'the stillness of sculpture' in movement.

[54] I have been given to understand he follows a horizontal staff, with the pneumonic syllables and melodic line for the phrase, notated as for Indian music. This has a parallel three part line running with it, providing the space for writing symbols to represent positions of the head, torso and feet respectively. The specific positions of these parts are represented by symbols based on the nomenclature devised for each movement possibility allowed to that body part by the style. The hand gestures and eye gestures are written down in words.

[55] In Madhavi Mudgal's usage of the body described above (see section on "style") the dominant torso movement is in this 'upper torso unit', along the body's door plane.

[56] Odissi Dance Pathfinder Vol 1, p15

[57] Ibid p34

[58] Fiske (1982), 1990, 2nd ed. p36

[59] Valerie Preston-Dunlop and A. Sanchez-Colberg (2002) pp.105-6

[60] Ibid pp.51-2

[61] Short combinations of 'composite movement' units were referred to by one former teacher of this researcher as *khandis.* This term was commonly used by Guru SN Jena with whom I studied for several years. It is not a term I have found used by my other two principle teachers Shrimati Madhavi Mudgal and Guru Trinath Maharana.

[62] Choreutics, ed L. Ullmann (1966) p16 fig 4.

[63] These units of movement could qualify as *khandis*. A section combining a set of different movement units the length of a *khandi*, are called *arasas* in traditional terminology. These can be seen a series of *khandis* performed in combination to a specific set of bols.

[64] The tantric body map has been discussed in Chapter 5.

[65] Choreological studies uses the terms 'internal', 'proximal' and 'shared' space to refer to physical spaces in the context of the dancing body: internal being within the body; proximal being the "narrow layer between the body and its cover of clothes, hair or ornaments"; shared, being the space beyond each kinesphere, but within the demarcated boundaries of the performance space. Valerie Preston-Dunlop (1981), p36.

[66] "Double strands in opposite directions are counter strands, separating strands, meeting strands." Ibid p51

[67] "Several strands in simultaneous arrests are cords, or cordal tensions" Ibid p51

[68] Laban, Effort (1947), p24 figs (A), (B), (C) describe specific variations of space, weight, time and flow which cause one kind of "basic effort" or action to be transformed into something else.

[69] Laban, Mastery of Movement, p18

[70] Laban, Effort (1947), p1

[71] Hand gestures also affect energy flows within the body and are used for this purpose in hatha yoga breathing techniques.

[72] This will be explored in Chapter 5.

[73] Laban, Effort p5

Chapter 4

Composition in Traditional Form

4.1 Defining and Extending Traditional Choreographic Parameters

In Choreological Studies, a contemporary dance work can be analysed as a particular nexus of the strands of Body, Space, Sound and Movement, as suggested by the Strand Theory discussed in Chapter 2. The initial intention here was to use the strand system to deconstruct Odissi and experiment with changing elements in each strand separately. Odissi's use of Body, Space, Sound and Movement were however found to be generally consistent across all categories of traditional composition. This analytic system was therefore inappropriate for determining the uniqueness or merit of any given piece. Odissi had to be understood on its own terms and it was only after such an exercise had been performed, that 'breaking structures' could become a constructive step in the creation of new dance works that stood a chance of being accepted by the tradition.

Reference to the system of strand analysis had pointed to the integral and inter-dependent nature of Sound and Movement in Odissi. When this dance form was created, important perceptions about Body and Space indigenous to the Indian performing arts were expressed. The dancer used his/her body as a "device"[1] to be transcended and gender, as a choreographic statement, had no significant role. The "shared space" of the stage remained devoid of objects/sets as choreographic elements, instead being symbolically an arena representing the "general space" of the universe. This became the stage for the dialogue between soul and God, translated as the reaching out of the dancer from his/her kinesphere into infinite space. Sound was the 'ethereal aspect' of the dance, and was viewed as its 'blueprint/cause', in accordance with the philosophical premise that all matter manifests from sound.

In all Odissi's choreographic compositions, "finding the movement material", "fixing the steps", "making it work on stage", was a process that was dominated by acoustic rhythm. Other organizing principles like 'breath rhythm', 'action rhythm', 'organic rhythm', 'effort rhythm' etc., were subsidiary considerations.[2] Any successful experimentation in these alternate ways of creating movement material as a primary

point of departure would represent a significant direction in the expansion of Odissi's present working parameters. Similarly, any successful choreographic composition using space/objects in space to create movement material would also be a new contribution. Addressing the traditional sound-movement nexus as it applied to both nritta and nritya, and the issue of its embodiment were, however, made the focus of the choreographic experimentations undertaken in this study. This choice was made because it is a primary consideration in classical Indian dance.

4.1.1 Arrangement of the Recital

The repertoire comprising different compositions as Mangalacharan, Battu, Pallavi, Abhinaya and Moksha, included specific types of musical configurations with their own place and purpose in the recital. Invocations to deities were the mangalacharan using both elements of nritta and nritya. Only nritta interpretations of rhythm and melody were called pallavi (lit: to blossom). Only nritya renderings of text through different melodic intonations were abhinaya (lit: to carry forth). The pallavi and abhinaya pieces constitute the mainstay of a recital, with mangalacharan performed as an elaborate 'courtesy' to open the performance. The recital concluded with Moksha (lit: liberation), a piece in nritta devised to 'collect the energies of the performance to a point of stillness' at stage centre.

For the first few decades after the emergence of Odissi, a percussion-based nritta item called Battu was customarily performed after the mangalacharan to introduce Odissi's basic moves using different pneumonic patterns of the drum, with its melodic element being of secondary importance. In the last two decades however, this has changed and Battu has become an optional piece. Both Battu and Moksha use large sections of pneumonic passages from the *gotipua* repertoire without changes. The Moksha starts with *bols* that are contained and measured, building up to a sustained fast tempo that is maintained for approximately 5-6 minutes. The closing of the piece is characterised by both gradually reducing the floor space and the upper body articulations until the dancer is contained in a single spot on centre stage. This contrasts with the dancer's intense outward focus on infinity at these moments, to evoke a strong sense of having centred the mind, a useful device to employ when dealing with the dance arena as a sacred space. Moksha and the recital

with it, usually concludes with a chanted prayer and the repetition of the syllable *Om*.

This Odissi recital comprising these different genres of composition, can always be seen to begin and end with tightly defined nritta sections emphasising footwork to set, recognisable pneumonic syllables. They provide a means of energising the stage space at the beginning of the performance and of concentrating it, at the end of it. Such 'signature' features about how intention, sound and movement are used can be changed successfully, only if their form and function as dance signs is fully understood. This requires 'control' of the sound-movement nexus which was acquired by creating new choreography using traditional patterns.

4.2 The Nexus between Sound and Movement

The 'acoustic space' for Odissi had to be created first to facilitate dance. While there were some manuscripts on music, and many temple images of dancing forms holding a variety of drums, cymbals, flutes, toories (a form of trumpet) and harps illustrating the instrumentation that accompanied the dance ritual, the actual music they represented had been lost. Substantial indigenous information on drum playing was found in the *gotipua* repertoire and folk songs provided some distinctive melodies and singing conventions. To be recognised as a classical dance tradition, however, this was not enough and Odissi borrowed many formal structures of melody *(raag)* and rhythm *(taal)* from the well established classical Hindustani musical tradition of northern India.

The *raag* is an improvisational linear development of a "melodic seed" based on a minimum of five of the seven basic notes.[3] The soundscape required for nritta is a sequence of varying rhythms and melodic patterns within a *raag* and set to a *taal*. This allows the dancer to explore subtle variations of basically similar movement ideas to constantly changing sound structures, which is how Odissi's choreographic phrases are developed. The basic elements of this process can be seen in the Battu composition mentioned above. Here the emphasis is not so much on the melody, as

on the rhythm and on the exploration of simple movement patterns using Odissi's pivotal body positions. Battu is today often practiced in a classroom situation to prepare the body for a pallavi, accompanied just by percussion. (Refer to: **CD 1 — CH4/E1/V8/Inside Mukteswar Temple**)

Over the last fifty years, Odissi has developed its own genre of music using a drone created by the four-stringed tanpura or the harmonium, voice, drum (the pakhawaj, which has a close counterpart in Hindustani music and is described as the original tabla), bamboo flute and small cymbals. Additions to this orchestra usually are the sitar and violin. These elements have been used to build a varied filigree of musical structures within which Odissi's movement vocabulary has been strung together as lyrical phrases. Finished sequences reflect exact accord between the Effort qualities of song, instrumental music and movement, taking the form of an integrated sound and movement nexus.

4.2.1 Elements of the Pallavi

The use of percussion as well as melody in nritta is best showcased in the pallavi compositions of the repertoire representing abstract interpretations of rhythm and melody, usually adopting one *raag* and one *taal,* and generally lasting anything from 9 to 15 minutes. The compositions begin with an *alaap,* or delineation of the basic notes of the chosen *raag* as it ascends and descends the Hindustani musical scale without any percussive accompaniment. The *alaap* is not strictly bound to the *taal* cycle, as the main composition is, and is used as the entrance cue by the dancer. He/she can choose to either 'walk in' or wait till the 'right point' in the percussion is reached and the 'acoustic space' made 'suitably ready' for dance to begin. It is at this point that discernable patterns of footwork tied to the percussive accompaniment come into the picture, forming its 'grounding structure'.

Pallavi compositions are complex structures of nritta following set musical conventions. Different sections of the pallavi are known by specific names. The *sthayi* (A) denotes a basic melodic refrain of the piece that shows the 'face' of the composition, both in its use of the *raag,* and in its translation as movement.[4] It is rendered using traditional sound-words like *'thajhum'* or *'tharijham'.*[5] The melodic

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line of the *sthayi* can stretch over a few cycles of the *taal*. The first few repetitions of the *sthayi* are used to develop simple movement patterns, often beginning with isolated movements of the eyes, followed by head and eyes, torso, head and eyes etc., till the whole body is involved. The dance sequence devised for these first few renditions of the *sthayi* often becomes the pallavi's 'signature', setting out the basic pace and melodic pattern for later movement interpolations. The 'correct beginning' in terms of movement is made by starting with restricted movements of the torso, arms and head to a set of foot patterns and systematically increasing the upper body's articulations. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH4/E2/V3/Sthayi**)

The composition then shifts into the *anthara* (B), where the notes of the *raag* are elaborated on using higher octaves. The pallavi, therefore, typically begins with a few repetitions of *sthayi* (AAA...), proceeds to the *anthara* (B) which may have its own permutations as B1, B2...etc, before returning to (A). Sometimes musical variations take the form of phrases that speedily play with the notes of the *raag* without the use of sound words *(thajhum, tharijham)*. These are called *sargam* (C). Often a situation of musical 'competition' between the percussive and melodic components is set up called *jugalbandhi* (D), building a climax to the composition. The typical final composition has a musical structure that can read as (AAA)... (B)(AA)... (C)(A)... (B1)(A)... (D)(A) Other similar configurations are also possible. As the piece develops through the (A) (B) (C) (D) sections, percussive patterns generally become more complex, building up an acoustic 'superstructure'. This is, however, often punctuated by brief passages where the drum becomes a simple accompaniment to the melodic elaboration of that moment. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH4/E3/V3/Anthara with repetitions**)

The exploration of movement to this soundscape is based on the ability to give visual form to musical structures. Movement patterns do not necessarily reflect the configuration of their accompanying sound section in the composition. In other words, the sound form of (A) can comprise of completely different movement sequences each time, the same applying for (B)(B1)..., (C) (C1)..., (D) etc. There are no fixed rules about how this is to be done, but certain choreographic choices can be said to have greater popularity and to work better than others, as seen in existing compositions. Transition points between (A) (B) (C) and (D) are used to inject the pallavi with a new dynamic. In some sections (usually the *anthara* (B)) body

movement may be based primarily on the melodic pattern, adopting references to descriptive imagery associated with the 'languorous maiden' motif in temple sculpture. In other sections (usually (C) and (D)) it is more often based on percussive patterns, emphasising footwork instead.

The dance so formed appears as a series of choreutic strands, based on the chowk and tribhanga, displaying repetition, symmetric repetition, reversal, development, augmentation, diminution, variation, addition, subtraction, reiteration, substitution, expansion and integration. Fragmentation, displacement, elongation, disintegration and any 'catabolic processes' that 'destroy' formal spatial structures created, are not used.[6] Artistry lies in the ability to use these choreographic devices and to embody divisions of time as quick and clean changes of effort patterns that are danced with the underlying idea of celebrating *shringaar rasa*.

Even though no text is being interpreted, melodic phrases need to be coloured with different shades of this *rasa,* and this is sometimes done using a string of allegoric images. Such images include the classical, dramatic actions of plucking flowers, wearing ornaments, looking into a mirror, playing on a musical instrument etc., and are juxtaposed with each other as seen on temple sculpture. It is perhaps pertinent to question whether such interpretations of the pallavi's melodic line should be described as nritta or nritya and some Gurus have made a distinction between compositions, calling them *svar* pallavi or *bhava* pallavi, depending on whether they are simply nritta, or a combination of nritta and nritya. If any pallavi is embodied without any clear intent and/or skill in evoking *rasa*, even when dancing non-dramatic sequences, it is usually perceived by the discerning viewer as being unsatisfactory.[7] Pallavi literally means 'to blossom' and differences between pallavi compositions rest in the ingenuity used to develop this idea. To an uninitiated viewer not sensitised to these concepts, or to the nuances of rhythm, one pallavi can look very like another.

4.2.2 Elements of the Abhinaya

Abhinaya compositions fall in the category of nritya, which has its own conventions. Here the interpretation of text in movement requires poetic verse to be

set first to a rhythm *(taal)* and melody *(raag)* appropriate to its mood, after which it is interpreted and embodied using the classical vocabulary of gestures. The *alaap* delineating the *raag* is usually rendered without text and is often used in choreography to describe the context within which the text is to be heard. If, for example, Radha and Krishna, the two most common protagonists in abhinaya compositions, are to be conversing in a bower of flowers in the main text, the *alaap* would typically be used to 'evoke the scene' by describing in movement (using melody without rhythm) the way they might be sitting, or the fragrance of flowers around them etc.. Creating movement images in silence is, by and large, alien to the tradition.

Ideas are represented through repetition as 'shades of emotion' or *sanchaari bhavas*. This applies equally to both music and movement. Each line of the chosen section of the poem is usually sung more then once to 'savour' its meaning and is rendered with different permutations of the "melodic seed". Movement material is accordingly created to reflect this where each repetition of text is distinguished by changes of facial expression, hand gestures and body stance. These may or may not literally translate the exact meaning of the words. Popular abhinayas in the Odissi repertoire are those celebrating the love of Krishna with the milkmaids of Braja, his favourite being Radha.

In the Oriya abhinaya "Path Chaadi De...," Krishna is being addressed by an infatuated milkmaid who has stolen out of her house looking for Him, on the pretext of plucking flowers for the household worship. Refer to: **CD 1 — CH4/E4/V10/Guru Trinath Maharana's demonstration**. The lines being explained and interpreted in the video appear at the end of the piece, after she has had a chance to talk to Him. She is now nervous about getting back home while He, on the other hand, is teasingly blocking her way. She addresses Him by saying and visually demonstrating how: (Refer to: **CD 1 — CH4/E5/V4/Shrotho madhe navo**)

> (When) the milkmaids of Braja set off to sell their yoghurt
> *Brojo bodhu gole dodhi biki*
>
> You lure them into your boat (offering to help them cross the Yamuna river)
> and in the middle of the water, stop the boat (and rock it threateningly),
> demanding they give you their yoghurt

Yamuna re bohi thoroniki
Shrotho madhe navo rokhi thanku kolu
Mother Earth Herself is saddened by your exploits!
Udaasi dharani sahiboki

(Refer to: **CD 1 — CH4/E6/V4/Goru gopalan ku Giridhaari**)
You are the great cowherd who held up the Giridhar mountain (with your little
finger) and protected everyone
Goru gopalan ku Giridhaari
Udhaari ch kele upakaari

I am (holding the end of my sari in my hands and) begging you for a very
small favour (which can fit in this small piece of cloth). Please move from my
path just now and allow me to return home
Panath prosaari manguchi mu ethe
Aad huothore doya bohi

I will definitely come, right to this spot, later (when I won't be missed at
home)
Nische aasi bhi shapath moru
Ehi patha re Nagar boro

Then, what ever you ask of me, I will give you fully.
Jaha bo i lemu niyam koruchhi
Nische koreebi angikaaro

Ideas in text are used to form a changing tableau of sequential images and
actions. These are created using gestures, postures and a rich palette of facial
movements. Movement material is repeated with small changes in its sequencing
and dynamics to form *sanchaaris*. Generally, the longer and more 'drawn out' the
interpretations of the words are, the greater is the performer's command over
technique. Often, the central emotion of the text is further 'coloured' by making
references to other situations that evoke similar feelings. Hence, one dancer's
interpretation and embodiment of any given text is distinguishable from another's
through the specific choice of allegoric references used, their translation into specific
gestures, and their Manner of Materialization.

Abhinaya compositions can often use space in a limited way, usually depending on communicating meaning through subtle 'suggestions of movements'. The meaning of the text is 'tasted' by the initiated viewer through the dancer's use of gestures and expressions as they flow into each other, in exact accord with the sense and pace of the orchestra accompanying the dance. Following the hands as 'word symbols' of 'dance speech' is an important aspect in the appreciation of the dance's meaning and to be fully 'relished', abhinaya needs to be seen in a language that is understood by the viewer.

4.3 Creating Choreography in Traditional Form

Conventional abhinaya, particularly to Orissan devotional poetry, demands an ability to empathise with the mainspring of the tradition. Responding to this challenge successfully is a prerequisite for being accepted within the tradition as having "ownership" of it. Working precisely with *bols* and translating the 'effort qualities' of sound into movement is one of Odissi's identifying choreographic features. It is also a reflection of the dancer's skill. Responding to these criteria by improvising with spatial configurations to the rhythmic and melodic musical patterns of the pallavi, mangalacharan and Moksha, presented an interesting challenge.

One mangalacharan, one pallavi and one Oriya abhinaya were created first, under the critical eye of Guru Trinath Maharana, who both composed the pakhawaj *bols* as I had requested, and sketched the greater portion of movement phrases for the pallavi and abhinaya. Our working process spanned two years of intermittent meetings and was singularly useful in practically understanding the 'fine-tuning' possible between *bols* and movement in the classical dance traditions, making *bols* effectively function as "effort mantras". It also allowed for a space in which to re-experience the *Guru-shishya* equation as a mature student, with the intention of co-authoring the material to be developed. This trespasses with the interpersonal 'relationship expectation' in the *Guru-shishya* equation and was an inbuilt point of

potential conflict that had to be constantly monitored by me; it was only possible because it was a new relationship and I was entering it as an established performer.

In a second set of pieces, the soundscape defining traditional classical works was changed, using instead the *thumri* form of music, spoken English text, and a western contemporary score on film. This was a conscious attempt to focus on Odissi's concern with spirituality and at the same time break away from the Oriya identity. These works also rethink traditional choreographic processes by paying primary attention to what is intended and experienced, instead of to what is conventional. The description presented of these works is essentially "immanent analyses" where the emphasis is on the resultant trace.[8]

4.3.1 Mangalacharan: *Pada Vande* (Refer to: CD 2 - Pada Vande)

The text of the mangalacharan chosen was addressed to the elephant headed God Ganesha, remover of obstacles. This piece had been originally composed in 1958, and was amongst the earliest invocations created for Odissi. The lyrics in Sanskrit were by Kalicharan Patnaik, music by Bhuvaneswar Misra, and choreography by Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra. The sung verse was in five beats. The instruments used to recreate the piece included conch, tanpura, cymbals, pakhawaj, voice and temple bells.

The nritta sections to introduce and conclude the prayer in Guru Kelucharan's mangalacharans generally conform to a 4 beat pattern. These *bols* have become a "*mantra*" for set actions and feet patterns, and are used as a standard form with which to begin and conclude such pieces in Guru Kelucharan's school of Odissi. The ideational content of these two sections described below as (a) and (b) have been traditionally interpreted as:

(a)
- an 'auspicious walk' holding an offering of flowers
- salutations to the Earth Goddess

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(b)

- salutations to the guardians of space and to the assembly present at the performance
- a courteous exit

In this piece, the original nritta *bols* were changed while their basic ideational content was retained. The 4 beat pattern was adapted to a 5 beat cycle conforming to the *taal* of the sung prayer describing Lord Ganesha's attributes. This immediately resulted in a changed "dynamic template" having a direct bearing on the weight and pace used and required experimentation in footwork.

I developed the 'intention' behind the entry sequence (a) as:

- a ceremonial 'walking and climbing temple steps'
- using sharp turns to define 'covering distance'

After getting to the centre of the stage, the symbolic seat of the creator Brahma, the point in space is traditionally defined with a few confined steps described by the *bols*:

1	2	3	4
thari	kita	dhi	dhala
ang	thath	tha	--
thath	tha	thaka	tha
thath	tha	thaka	tha
thatho	omtha	kadathaka	gadhigina
dha			

This was adapted to:

1	2	3	4	5
thari	kita	dhi	dh-la	ang
thath	tha	--	thath	tha
thaka	tha	thath	tha	thaka
tha	tha	thomtha	kadathaka	gadhigina
dha				

And the section used to reach the deity placed on the side of the stage where flowers were offered. Changes in the orientation of the body became the means to distinguish between addressing the deities and the audience. This personalised 'intention' of a standard idea, along with the change in rhythmic pattern represents a re-elaboration of a traditional classical choreographic phrase. Similar five beat patterns of *bols* were also devised for the exit section (b).

(Refer to: **CD 1 – CH4/E7/V2/Entrance**)

The soundtrack preceeding the entry sequence started with a chant to suggest the atmosphere of prayer. The text invoking Ganesha conformed to the choreography of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra. It was embodied however with a keen awareness of the spatial form being created by the dancing body. All linear floor patterns were clearly defined. This was accentuated by making direction changes sharp and articulating upper body movement flows, as an extension of the direction followed in the floor pattern. Using a common traditional choreographic device, some movement phrases from the original composition were repeated to create 'geometric balance' in the use of space. The piece finally presented clear phrases with simple internal changes of structure.

The exercise built on a traditional structure to create a refreshed interpretation of it. This kind of task affirms what Odissi has established as its identity amongst other classical Indian dance styles. While these changes are perceptible only to insiders to the original form, the ability to make such manipulations successfully is an indication of "ownership of tradition". In my personal history, this was the first time I was commissioning a change in sound track and demanding that the 'Guru' I worked with allow me the space to structure the piece as I wished. I was involved in the process here in multiple roles: as subservient student, as patron to the Guru and musicians demanding the freedom to make my own interpretation of the original choreography, and as the 'artist-researcher' concerned with both creating and embodying the material being generated in a way that was both internally nourishing and externally in accord with traditional rules.

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4.3.2 Pallavi: *Mukhaari* (Refer to: **CD 2 - Mukhaari**)

The objective of this piece was to use Odissi's rules of composition to create a new piece of the conventional length of a pallavi (i.e. 9 - 12 minutes) that successfully met the exacting standards of 'classicism' as defined by the tradition for this genre of composition. This entailed playing with *taal* creatively, using improvisation to reflect melodic phrases, and developing an essay in movement, based on my understanding of the pallavi as a traditional structure for the "blossoming forth" of Odissi's vocabulary. A successful composition in this genre required an intuitive sensing of "balance" and "flow" in movement transitions that described exact accord between the effort quality of the pneumonic pattern and the use of weight in its translation into body movement. I also wished to incorporate images of the languorous maiden motif of temple sculpture I held in my mind and make a personal statement of style with the embodiment of Odissi movement. This was characterised by a restrained use of torso, neat articulations of limbs and spatial awareness reflecting the drawing of clean geometric lines in space making every dance an individual *yantra*.

The melody chosen conformed to *raag Mukhaari*, and was set to 4 beats following the *sthayi-anthara* pattern. It was composed by K. Rama Rao with the percussion composition done by Guru Trinath Maharana as the piece developed. The instruments used were tanpura, cymbals, pakhawaj, sitar, flute and voice which were standard fare for Odissi. Mukhaari uses five notes to ascend the scale, and seven to descend. The Hindustani musical scale, unlike the western musical scale, is not fixed and is described by the notes Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni, and Sa' (which is one octave higher then the preceding Sa; for convenience in reading the notation for Mukhaari, these will be referred to as S, R,G, M, P, D, N, S'.[9]

Though set to a 4 beat cycle, the *sthayi* phrase for Mukhaari 'jham tari jham, tari jham tari jham, ta jham ta ri tta jhena, ta jhena tarkita jhena tari khita taka jhena', is spread over 24 beats.

1	2	3	4
jham	-	-	*tari*
S			RG*SR

5	6	7	8
jham	-	-	*tari*
M			RM

9	10	11	12
jham	-	*tari*	*jham*
P		PD	S'

13	14	15	16
ta	*jhamta*	*rita*	*jhena*
G	RS	N*D	MP

17	18	19	20
-ta	*jhena*	*tarikhita*	*jhenatari*
-S	ND	PMPD	NDS'N

21	22	23	24
khita	*taka*	*jhena*	*tajhamtari*
DP	MG	RS	GRND

The pallavi commences with 5 repetitions of the *sthayi*, followed by a section with interspersed variations to it and then returns to the original phrase. The exact sequences finally settled on for the first part of the piece were 5 *sthayis*, 2 variations, 1 *sthayi*, 2 variations, 2 *sthayis*, 1 variation, 3 *sthayis*. This was followed by the *anthara*, and variations to it. An example of one *anthara* using these notes and pallavi syllables is as follows:

-	*-ta*	*jham*	*ta*
-	M	P-	PD

ri	*ta*	*jhe*	*na*
N	D	S'	S'

-	-ta	jhe	nu
-	-S'	SRG	R

ri	ta	jhe	na
ND	PD	S'	S'

The composition then moved into a *Podi,* traditionally described as a 'falling movement'. It is essentially a doubling in tempo.

-tajhenu	taka	jhenu	-
-GRS	ND	S	S

drimita	rita	jhenu	-
RMM	PN	DP	S

Towards the end, there was a lively *sargam* interlude and the piece concluded with a *jugalbandhi.* The mixing of the recorded composition was done allowing separate sections to be dominated by different instruments. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH4/E2/V3/Sthayi**)

In movement terms, the piece begins with the *alaap* where the idea being portrayed is that of a tentative playing with the stringed veena which is 'placed down' before the drums come in. With the percussion and the first strains of the *sthayi,* the body assumes a static tribhanga and starts its 'unfolding' using the traditional device of isolated rhythmic eye movements; added to by torso movements; added to by foot movements, before the first spatial transitions are undertaken. With subsequent *sthayi* lines movements establish clear stage directions of left, right and two diagonals.

The percussion then introduces the variations to the basic *sthayi* form. This begins with the establishing of the 'chorus line' movement, comprising a straight transition from front centre stage to back centre stage. These sections appear as punctuation marks between movements show casing quick changes of feet patterns and permutations in the use of the upper body to define diagonals, chowks, a linear diamond, the centre, the circle and variations between chowk and tribhanga. This section terminates with the *sargam* where the notes of the *raag* are sung accompanied by sudden, free form bursts of movement. The *sargam* concludes by

returning to the orderly shape of clear linear spatial progressions. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH4/E8/V3/Sargam**)

The piece then enters the *anthara* which introduces a change in dynamic and is defined by still moments, descriptive poses from temple sculpture and references to stylised images of 'walking with a veil'. A short chowk sequence is used to accentuate the pace, followed again by languorous references in temple sculpture to 'plucking flowers', 'removing a thorn from the foot', and more stylised walking with a veil. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH4/E3/V3/Anthara**)

The next section uses the *podi* form without showcasing it in any special way. It is used as a transition to build up to the *jugalbandhi*. This *jugalbandhi* is characterised by stillness and bursts of movement which is a natural translation of the 'question-answer' mode of its musical form. The piece concludes with short linear traces, ending finally in a seated position on centre stage. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH4/E9/V3/Podi** and **CH4/E10/V3/Jugalbandhi**)

The working process for this piece was an invaluable learning experience in combining the roles of performer, choreographer and analytic viewer within the context of the *Guru-shishya parampara*. It 'trespassed' with the interpersonal relationship expectation in the *Guru-shishya* equation where the Guru steers the course, due in part to logistics. Guru Trinath Maharana lived in New Delhi while I was based in Bhubaneswar so our meetings would occur after long gaps of a few weeks or even months. Every time we would meet, Trinathji would have forgotten a lot of what had transpired earlier, so choreographic changes I introduced in the interim period of working on the material created together were accepted without too much resistance.

Sometimes this material would have been changed unrecognisably and Trinathji would register this and protest. This usually took the course of him playing on the pakhawaj to demonstrate differences in weight and positioning between the pneumonics as he wanted them, and as how I was doing them. In some sections he had little memory of what the original acoustic phrase had been, so would improvise and produce something different again. This allowed for hands on learning from "a position of embodiment and corporeality", as to the fine tuning possible between sound and movement in the tradition.

How a movement 'felt' when articulated by my body were considered unimportant by Trinathji. No dialogue about what could be 'said' by rhythm and melody in this composition ever developed during our periods together and giving movement a 'meaning' became something that I superimposed on the drum pattern in my own time. I would be able to do this only during periods of independent work and hence found the 'determining / privileged' position of the drums (and drummer) in the creation of dance something I wanted to change in future work.

When performed, the piece was described as "seemingly effortless". It was characterised by an overall gliding, lightness, offset by neat, grounded patterns of the feet made possible by choreographic choices allowing for 'minimal effort' in transitions between sequences. Spatially it remained frontal in its orientation (due to habit and my long hours of facing Trinathji on the studio floor) , establishing a 'central linear spine' that was periodically returned to, after performing simple geometric floor patterns that sought to cover stage space in a balanced way.

While Mukhaari pallavi had not ventured into any new territory, it established competence in working with the classical form and provided a template to embody Odissi movement as I wished, without over writing a well worn traditional composition. My primary problem with this collaboration was that it had been too much of an exercise in creating an 'acoustic collage' of body positions in chowk and tribhanga, according to the classical cannons of 'correct form'. 'Welding' the composition together for performance by giving it personal meaning had been a difficult exercise; it had however achieved the sound and movement connection needed for entering the familiar 'charged space' of a pallavi. I now wanted to make dances where such space was created while also take into account how the process of doing so 'felt', and what it 'meant', through out its choreographic process.

4.3.3 Abhinaya: *Patha Chaadi De* (Refer to: **CD 2 - Patha Chaadi De**)

"Patha Chaadi De" (Leave my path Krishna) was a personal reaching out to the 'vernacular base stratum' of Odissi through abhinaya in the Oriya language. The piece was first choreographed for Odissi in 1966-7 by Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra. It is based on an old folk tune which was adapted for Odissi by Banmalli Das in 1966-7,

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and set to conform to the classical shape of Raag Gauri. Sections of it were then ornamented with pakhawaj variations to create different 'gaits' around the singing. Such treatment was given many Oriya songs to create abhinaya compositions for the repertoire in its earlier stages. The instruments used to remake the piece included tanpura, cymbals, pakhawaj, flute and voice.

I do not think or feel in this language so the piece was a deliberate effort at understanding Guru Trinath Maharana's interpretation of Oriya poetry and embodying it in a form that was consonant with my personal understanding / interpretation of the dramatic text being used. He had vibrant images drawn from rural life to interpret the text, which he was able to demonstrate as short bursts of movement sketches, which were left to me to articulate as sustained movement in dance. In portraying his images, he used his natural body language, which overwrites any classical delivery of movement in abhinaya and is the basis for the creation of *rasa* by the performer. Trinathji's articulation of "spurning the lover", "the heroine playing hard to get" or "pleading with her lover" were alien responses to my body. As this was not theatre where I was becoming somebody else, but a dance space where I was 'experiencing a dialogue' with Krishna, I had to decide to what extent I could use his body movement without losing touch with the person I was. His way was far more coquettish, illustrating the humour of the situation which, for lack of confidence perhaps, I felt unable to fully render. This dilemma is a common one for non-Oriyas from cosmopolitan backgrounds carrying the baggage of urban "sophistication", when learning classical repertory choreographed by traditional gurus. It promotes a situation where the performer cannot but be a "phoney" imitation of the original. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH4/E11/V4/Entry, looking for Krishna**)

In Trinathji's interpretation of the text, the piece began with the idea of the main protagonist, Radha, stealing out of the house (which she shares with her husband and in-laws) on the pretext of plucking flowers for the daily ritual of worship. In actuality however, she was hoping for a chance encounter with her secret love, Krishna. He does not appear immediately, and she is piqued by his lack of interest in her. When she does suddenly see him, she feigns anger and berates him for all his past misdemeanours. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH4/E12/V4/Berating Krishna for "making big eyes at her" (Chandravali)**)

The accusations made in the original text and choreographed by Trinathji

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using hand gestures and postures included: his flirtations with another girl Chandravali, described as the one who makes "big eyes" at him; allegations about him having the "intelligence of someone very small"; of upsetting her basket of plucked flowers; and of "thinking himself to be great". (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH4/E13/V4/"This is how you topple my basket of flowers"**)

These ideas were portrayed interspersed with contrary gestures expressing her actual delight in being in his presence. Musical interludes were used to mime easily recognisable mythological themes like that of Krishna stealing up on the village girls as they bathe in the river to hide their clothes. These he strings up on trees beyond their reach, forcing them to ask for their clothes in a state of nakedness. It is meant to be an allegoric reference to the need to approach God without ego. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH4/E14/V4/Stealing clothes and hanging them on trees**)

In the concluding lines, Radha changes her tack from feigned anger to being shyly loving and admiring of his miraculous exploits (lifting a mountain with his little finger to protect the village from the angry storms of Lord Indra). She beseeches him to "unblock her path for this moment" as it is late, promising to meet him at this very spot later, when she will give him "anything he asks of her".

The making of Patha chaadi de... was a means of theoretically and practically engaging with the semiotic and phenomenological content of Odissi's vocabulary. This provided an excellent learning ground for observing a traditional master celebrate the physical body by unashamedly expressing sensuality within the context of loving devotion to the deity. He would sit and demonstrate movement material which I would learn while I stood watching in front of him. These would imperceptibly be transformed as I attempted to embody them with my whole body to express the sentiments contained within the song. Gestures and nuances would require constant repetition and reinterpretation which I did in front of him, in order for its meaning to be 'felt'; I am very grateful to Trinathji for allowing the space for this. It is here that independence and originality is allowed expression within tradition, but the leeway to do so had not been part of my previous experience with teachers. Every established Guru has his distinctive version of well known texts. Second generation Gurus like Trinathji feel fully entitled to change compositions they have learnt and he was being very generous in giving me the space to improvise in

front of him. The movement material generated was about 18 minutes and was mostly created during a four week period in Bhubaneswar, when Trinathji came from Delhi to stay in my home in Orissa.

Patha chaadi de... was, however, completed in his absence when I further edited and changed it in parts, making the piece approximately 14 minutes. The final composition was hence a result of Trinathji's improvisations on Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra's original choreography, and my subsequent manipulations of it. It retained the basic sequence of events, but with a changed dynamic, and with different *mudras* or hand gestures and postures to describe specific actions. In traditional practice, each line of text is sung a few times to changed percussive accompaniments, allowing for different renderings of the event in movement. This 'colouring' of the song is further heightened by subtle shifts of facial expressions as the event is repeatedly recounted. In this piece, each new phrase was repeated twice with the words in the second repetition cut mid sentence forcing the rest of its content to be said by the musical instrumentation. Some sentences were lengthened by creating long sections of musical instrumentation contained within the sung repetitions. This was a useful device for generating drama.

My not using all Trinathji's material when the piece was performed for the first time at the Nrutya Parva in Bhubaneswar was, rather unfortunately, not read kindly by him. This piece has been subsequently performed on a few occasions in rural areas of Orissa where it has been received very warmly. The piece makes stylised references to mundane movements of bathing, playing in water, stealing and hiding something coveted, teasing village girls carrying pots etc., which are familiar and popular with this audience.

4.3.4 Thumri: *Shyama ke Anga Lagoongi* (Refer to: **CD 2 - Shyama**)

This piece makes a point of departure from tradition in its use of sound. It was created after the Oriya abhinaya with the intention of dealing with the subject matter of Radha and Krishna with a greater degree of restraint and stillness. I felt this direction would be a more personally integrating interpretation of this popular theme.

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Thumris draw their textual content from devotional *(bhakti)* literature, dealing largely with the sensual-spiritual love exemplified in the relationship between Radha and Krishna and in this respect, are similar to the traditional abhinayas of Odissi. The text of Shyama... had been written in Braj Bhasha[10] by Surdas, a well known blind 16th century mystic poet. The piece was sung by Pandit Hari Charan Verma, the pakhawaj percussion was played by Guru Trinath Maharana, and the stringed sarangi by Brij Bhushan Goswami. Other instruments used included tanpura and cymbals.

Thumri compositions are associated with the Kathak dance form and to the best of my knowledge, had not been used for Odissi before. They are essentially spontaneous in nature and employ elements of rhythm and melody that are close to folk music. As nuances are not notated, it was explained to me by the composer/singer that it was extremely difficult to musically render such a piece in exactly the same way twice.[11]

Pandit Hari Charan Verma therefore suggested he would sing for this after I had created some movement material for him to see. He initially sung the first line ' I will embrace Krishna' in *raag* Kafi, using different musical intonations. I then made a choreographic sketch to this. Watching my movements for the first time, he sung additional lines from the poem, which I then worked on in a similar manner. Meanwhile, pakhawaj *bols* were separately worked on with Trinathji based on my improvised footwork in these movements. Finally Hari Charan Verma and Trinathji met in a recording studio, where they played together watching my movement sketches. On the basis of this recording, I edited, changed and adapted movements, to make them work in accord with the rhythmic and melodic phrases of the recording that had been created.

In movement terms, the piece begins with the sung *alaap* and Radha in a state of reverie, sitting on a low stool, enveloped in her loving thoughts of Krishna. She changes positions using sitting modes from temple sculpture, rising imperceptibly to continue her reverie in an extended space. (Refer to: **CD 1 — CH4/E15/V5/Radha in a state of reverie**)

Her thoughts are disturbed by a sudden entry of percussion, accompanied by the idea of her girlfriends teasing her and pulling her hands to come and participate

in their game of Holi (the piece was first presented in March, the month for this festival). (Refer to: **CD 1 — CH4/E16/V5/Her thoughts are disturbed**)

She disengages herself, and returns to her obsession for Krishna as the lines "I will embrace Krishna..." are resung. This is marked by a change from the short-lived free movement of the previous section, to more ordered and contained movement. (Refer to: **CD 1 — CH4/E17/V5/She disengages herself**)

Radha then addresses her friends (and the audience) by saying she does not care if anybody thinks ill of her, but all she wants is to embrace Krishna. The words of the text then say "I cannot wait a moment more (for his embrace)..." This is interpreted as a series of changing poses describing embrace, also from temple sculpture. (Refer to: **CD 1 — CH4/E18/V5/"I cannot wait a moment more (for his embrace)..."**)

To mark the end, the poet Surdas declares these words are his own thoughts, and states that he does not care what befalls him or Braj (where he lives) for having such ideas. In accordance with the text, the dancer assumes the role of narrator, describing the poem as the work of Surdas. The piece finally concludes with Radha returning to her sitting position on the stool. (Refer to: **CD 1 — CH4/E19/V5/Surdas declares these are his own thoughts**)

The movement ideas in this piece conformed to traditional abhinaya. This was however more accessible to the target cosmopolitan Indian audience than the previous piece, as it was restrained in its use of mythological references and presented the Odissi form with a new soundscape. When first performed, it was programmed to follow the Oriya abhinaya and was danced without the traditional ankle bells used previously in the performance. This created a 'silence by absence' when presented as part of a traditional recital that added to the thoughtful reverie of the dance. The use of a low stool and dim lights to begin and end the piece, helped to define a physical point for the beginning and end of the 'dream space' on stage. Dancing while being seated at this slight elevation also allowed for the use of Odissi's repertory of sitting positions in new ways.

This was the first piece created that changed the normal working parameters of the tradition. It was not concerned with affirming Odissi's identity but with

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strengthening its spirituality as experienced by me personally. The text had been 'outsourced' and so had the singer and singing style. It had required a rethinking of the traditional choreographic process and had broken away from any dependence on a 'Guru figure' for conceptual and choreographic inputs. The ability to finalise and record the sound track exactly as I wanted it before the piece was given any real shape allowed for far greater freedom in the process of its choreography. This was because there was no leeway left for the orchestral accompaniment to cause modifications in the sound during the course of its performance, necessitating a reciprocal reflection in my interpretation of the music.

4.3.5 Abhinaya: *Gitanjali*

The next piece attempted was the first radical, though actually simple, departure from traditional form. I wanted to dance to emotion expressed in the English language, which is the language I think in. This desire stemmed from the recognition that I have no Indian language as a mother tongue and hence will always be slightly separated from the vernacular cultural consciousness of the country. The piece was conceived as a still moment of 'stark reality' in the stylised and heavily ornamental atmosphere of the classical performance. The words were to be heard between pieces of traditional music. Gitanjali was deliberately performed retaining the full traditional costume.

The text chosen was an English rendering of excerpts from the Gitanjali by Rabindranath Tagore. Gitanjali was originally written in Bengali, but was translated into English by the poet himself. It is therefore one of the few translations in the English language of devotional sentiments expressed in a vernacular Indian language, that have also retained their poetic lyricism. It comprises of a collection of short poems written in the early part of the 20th century, for which Tagore received the Nobel prize for literature. I believe the Gitanjali has been chosen for experimental work in Indian classical dance before and it does seem to be an obvious choice, but I am not conversant with any details on the matter.

The Gitanjali expresses the *bhakti-shringar* relationship between the poet and God, and in this respect echoes the sentiments of the Gitagovinda. The sections used

had distinctly different moods and were chosen for not making any direct reference to eroticism. The soundscape for the piece was created by Michael Weston and used natural atmospheric sounds.

The first verse was pensive, expressing quiet resignation at the fact that the *"time has not yet come"* for the much awaited meeting with the beloved. (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH4/E20/V6/Verse 1**)

> *"The words have not been rightly set, only there is the agony of waiting in my heart".*

This was translated as very still, deliberate, stylised and mundane movements, accompanied by the night-time sound of crickets.

The second verse began by expressing agitation (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH4/E21/V6/Verse 2**)

> *"My desires are many and my cry is pitiful",*

And continued into an introspective understanding of this

> *"But ever didst Thou save me by Thy hard refusals and this strong mercy has been wrought in my life through and through".*

The soundscape started with a burst of thunder and stylised expressive movements describing momentary unrest and sudden stillness. It continued by juxtaposing elements of mundane and stylised action-for-word interpretations of the rest of the text:

> *"...Day by day,*
> *Thou art making me worthy of Thy full acceptance*
> *by saving me ever and anon, from the perils of weak, uncertain*
> desire."*

Choreographic material for these lines was created in silence, an unusual starting point for Odissi which is hung on either a percussive or a melodic structure.

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This approach allowed for improvisation to the words free of any of the usual dictates of rhythm and melody and constituted the beginnings of a working tool used for later explorations, based on using stylised hand gestures and body positions, to translate word into action at its own natural rhythm.

The third section was playful in content, making references to a time of childhood familiarity with the beloved (Refer to: **CD 1 — CH4/E22/V6/Verse 3**):

> *"When my play was with, I knew not who Thou wert...I knew nor shyness nor fear...my life was boisterous..."*

Rhythm was incorporated with the spoken text here as a means to stylise the narrative.
As a consequence, this was used as a framework for the nritta based movement patterns created. The footwork kept pace with drum patterns, but it did not imitate its exact intonations. This verse concluded with a transition to a state of wonder.

> *"Now that the night time is over, what is this sight that beholds me?...The world with eyes bent upon Thy feet, stands in awe with all the silent stars."*

At this point, a transition was made to using traditional abhinaya and treating it as a nritya interpretation of text where action represented word, but was delivered without melody. This piece was performed without ankle bells.

The Gitanjali used sections of mundane movement with changing dynamics, to describe transitory moods, a common method of illustrating text in contemporary dance. In addition to the usual use of hand gestures and facial expressions, it also used the 'body in space' to create meaning by establishing different points of the stage space as being 'outside' and 'inside'. By eliminating music and allowing movement to relate directly to the poem's meaning, it altered the usual syntax of Odissi, creating new interest. When presented as part of the traditional recital, it provided a period of 'relief' from constant movement to intricate rhythms, abstract *bols* and sung text, allowing the audience to view and appreciate Odissi's stylised movement conventions more fully. As a choreographic and performance experience

it was a revelation. I was experiencing a very 'honest state of being' in a performance situation while addressing myself to the same Krishna of Shyama and Patha chaadi de....

4.3.6 *Moksha* (Refer to: CD 2 - Moksha)

The last piece worked on in this series was Moksha, or 'liberation', a set piece of pneumonic patterns and choreography conforming to a 4 beat cycle, which forms the concluding item of the classical recital. The original choreography for Moksha was created by Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra and borrows major sections of its pneumonic pattern ideas from the *gotipua* repertoire. The Moksha *bol* structure clearly reflects the processes of repetition, addition, and variation of basic sounds like <u>dha, tha, kita, thari</u>, from which all pneumonic structures are built. An example of phrases set to four beats from the first few lines of this composition are as follows: (Refer to: **CD 1 – CH4/E23/V7/Kadathaka thath dhei)**

1	2	3	4
Kadathakagadhigina	*dhaKadathaka*	*gadhiginadha*	*kadathakagadhigina*
dha	*tha*	*tha*	*kadathaka*
thath	*dhei*	*thaththath*	*dhei*
thaththari	*kitathari*	*thathomtha*	*kadathakagadhigina*
dhei	*-*	*-*	*kadathaka*
thath	*dhei*	*thaththath*	*dhei*
thaththari	*kitathari*	*thathomtha*	*kadathakagadhigina*
dhei	*-*	*-*	*kadathaka*

These and other such *bols* translate as simple symmetric movement phrases clearly pivoted on either the chowk or tribhanga, delivered in a reasonably sustained, fast pace. In the version of Moksha I had been taught by Ms. Madhavi Mudgal, drama is initially created by holding some counts still. The dance then proceeds as a systematic unfolding of movements isolating eyes, wrists and feet, and gradually expanding to involve different parts of the body in changing rhythmic sequences. Patterns of feet, spatial progressions of limbs, and even the eyes, follow *bols* like an "effort *mantra*" to an exact degree of force, as described earlier. *Bol* phrases repeat themselves, allowing for movements of different body parts to be symmetrically

performed.

My interest in reworking this piece stemmed from wanting to express the form of a classically composed piece as a tightly knit geometric statement akin to an 'ice crystal', where floor patterns became 'energy pathways' that draw a virtual *yantra* on stage. I was interested in the notion that the classical use of the body for dance in the Indian tradition seemed tailor made for seeing movement as a form of drawing *yantras* in the dancer's kinesphere - a notion that has been explored in detail in the next chapter. (Refer to: **CD 1 — CH4/E24/V7/Drawing of geometric forms**)

I was also interested in testing the hypotheses that *yantras* constituted unconscious images expressing themselves in the recreated tradition of dance in the present century and that positive results would be arrived at very simply, by making this a conscious image. It therefore seemed logical to embody an existing composition that had all the inherent features of a geometrically conceived spatial pattern, with this idea.

This task required a brief degree of editing of the movement material I had been taught to enhance its symmetry, but was otherwise essentially a question of dancing with spatial awareness and the intention to embody the piece as a *yantra*. Viewing the body as 'something separate' to one's self, and visualising the body as 'a form moving in space' which 'I was watching from above', were important personal tasks to be performed for dancing to create the *yantra*. Linear floor patterns needed to be consciously made exactly the same length when symmetrically repeated. All choreutic units and their Manner of Materialisation had to be repeated exactly when transferred onto the opposite side of the body.

The instruments used to recreate the piece included tanpura, cymbals, sitar and pakhawaj. The vocalisation of *bols,* as is traditional practice, was eliminated to highlight its abstract spiritual function, i.e. centring the energies released on stage as a prelude to surrendering the body to the deities addressed in the preceding parts of the performance. The resultant dance was deeply satisfying and was described by many viewers as a particularly "clean" rendering of Moksha; another common comment was that it was very "effective".

This method of embodying Moksha made the dancing of traditional choreographic forms a task that required both physical skill and an understanding of tantric ideas about sacred geometry and form symbolism. The fact that it greatly enhanced the experience of dance by adding new mental tasks to be performed while moving in familiar patterns, led me to the next phase of research. This was an exploration of Odissi's covert structures, based on tantric perceptions of the nature of the body and the purpose of ritual dance.

4.3.7 *Caryatid Rests* (Refer to: **CD 3 – Caryatid Rests**)

Caryatid Rests was a dance film directed by Michael Weston made early in this project, based on an original sound score created by him using piano, oboe and synthesiser. The film helped me view Odissi through "western eyes" as it used images of me in a context that was completely new to me.

The idea for the film developed over a period of time as we were sharing an unusual working space. This was an old empty house in Kensington Palace Gardens with large rooms and windows, conducive to both the playing of music, and to dancing. We found ourselves watching and listening to each other from adjoining rooms, for several months. Michael was watching classical Indian dance for the first time and was interested in its pace and mood. I was hearing his piano playing from the next room and often improvised to these sounds. We finally decided to make work together and chose to do so on film as a means of using the space.

Caryatid Rests is a film about the ethereal spirit of this large house, represented by the dancer dressed in Odissi costume, moving in its empty rooms and corridors. These movement sequences when shot on film also responded to the dramatic shafts of light and shadow that permeated the whole place. Some images in the film were created using time lapse photography, some by blurring and an old 'scratched' film effect given to imply its timelessness. Large empty spaces were filmed on their own, as they were imbued with movement by the moving shadows created by overgrown foliage outside windows. Images of a still mossy pond and a cat licking its paw were also used to suggest the presence of a silent, mysterious force. Momentary transitions into bright colour provided a way of affirming the existence of life.

Caryatid Rests has been screened as part of a classical Odissi performance after the traditional concluding piece, Moksha. It has been a successful element to use, as it keeps the channels of communication between the audience and the performance that has just concluded, still open after the expected conclusion, through the reified medium of film. This gives new life to the dance just seen on stage and reinforces the referential image of the Odissi dancer as an 'ethereal' being.

Endnotes

[1] The use of the body as a "*yantra*" or device to harness energy has been discussed in Chapter 5.

[2] These are mentioned by Valerie Preston-Dunlop as terms used by dancers to describe their process of creating choreography in "The Development of Choreological Discourse", Dance Discourse Conference, Lisbon, February 1991

[3] BC Deva (1974) uses the term "melodic seed" to introduce the essential features of the classical *raag*, tracing its origins to tribal and folk tunes/melodies. Reprint (1990: 6)

[4] In the *gotipua* repertoire some renditions of (A) can become a *bandha* sequence....

[5] These words appear in traditional Oriya folk songs as playful effects between words having meaning.

[6] Ways of manipulating choreutic strands in choreography. Valerie Preston-Dunlop, PhD Thesis, (1981: 51)

[7] Please see section entitled 'Nritta', in 'Choreological Perspectives on *Rasa* in Nritya and Nritta', Chapter 2 of this document.

[8] Immanent analysis is one of six analytic models described by Nattiez (1990: 140)

[9] G is always a minor note.

[10] This language is similar to Hindi and understood in most parts of northern India.

Chapter 5

Odissi's Covert Structures

5.1 The Nature of this Inquiry

In Hindu tantric teachings, which started to acquire their dominant hold over the religious climate of the Indian subcontinent from the 7th century A.D., the ultimate experience of enlightenment was represented by vivid imagery.[1] Potential human energy coiled in the form of a serpent, was located at the base of the spine. This energy was called the Goddess Kundalini. She uncoiled and ascended the subtle *shushumna* channel within the spinal cord. Her ascent occurred when *pingala* and *ida,* etheric embodiments of the psychic impulse for action and for rest, were balanced.[2] Contemporary accounts of the phenomenon state that equilibrium in these subtle body channels allows *ida* and *pingala* energy to fuse in the 'third eye' or *ajna chakra* allowing unconscious areas of the brain to experience an "explosion....which ...fuels and activates a much larger number of circuits within both hemispheres and the limbic system than would normally occur. It is as though our nervous system suddenly becomes charged with a high tension electric line, which yogis have called *sushumna*."[3]
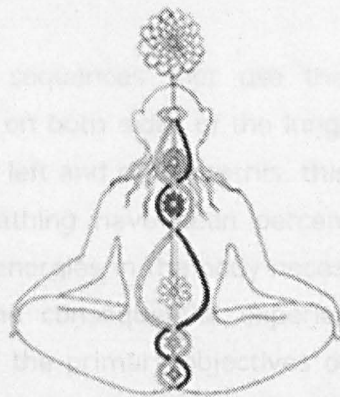
Fig 8: Tantric Body Map

All tantric spiritual techniques, which are a category Orissan temple dance arguably qualified for, strove to create the circumstances for this 'uncoiling' of energy at the base of the spinal cord. If a dance system was to be articulated with the end purpose of Moksha, release of self through union with God, this description of heightened consciousness as experienced by tantric adepts should also have some

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application in dance. The 20th century Gurus of Odissi stress the importance of reverence for traditional values and ideas. Moksha is the term they have given for the concluding item of the present day recital. The direct connection of classical Indian dance with the tantric tradition was however not actively recognised or worked on when Odissi was created because tantra had come to be misunderstood, feared and misrepresented during the course of time.

The practices and features of Odissi dance would however indicate this dance form had an unconscious leaning towards tantra's image of the ascent of Kundalini. The central vertical dimension of the body, passing through the middle of the head through to the space between the feet, is traditionally called the *Brahma sutra* or Creator's meridian, sometimes described as the link between earth and sky. Emphasis is placed on marking rhythms with the lower body held with knees open outwards, while being lowered towards the ground, a device which constantly impacts the base of the spine. Movements of the torso, neck and head are 'powered' by this lower body. Dance occurs through flexibility of joints more than through strength of muscles and the upper body parts are evenly stressed and relaxed. The spine is maintained upright while dancing and the limbs are moved symmetrically in space around this axis reflecting mathematical order and internal harmony.

The effect of dance sequences that use the torso symmetrically is an application of equal pressure on both sides of the lungs.[4] Assuming this encourages balance in breathing between left and right nostrils, this is significant. Equal patterns of left and right nostril breathing have been perceived to be a prerequisite for harmonizing *ida* and *pingala* energies in the body necessary for the flow of energy in the *sushumna naadi* and the consequential experience of heightened states of consciousness. This is one of the primary objectives of breath control or *pranayam* practice in yoga.

These features, by and large, constitute a common approach to dance in the varied Indian dance traditions. The generally believed objective of Orissan temple dance by *devadasis* was that it was a performance to worship and please God. It constituted a 'mortgage offering of self' to the deity by the dancer, on behalf of the community of worshippers. Being a tantric ritual however it would also have been a means of becoming God-like. Bhattacharya (1999) states that "... according to the

very nature of its principles a deity could be adored only by becoming the deity oneself. The idea of a separate farseeing God, the Creator who rules the Heaven, is absent in Tantra ... The unfolding of the self-power (*atmashaki*) is to be brought about by self-realisation (*atmadarshana*) which is the aim of *sadhana*."[5] Hence, in the Shakta tradition which gave form to the *devadasi* ritual in Orissa's medieval temples, the act of dance could well have been perceived as a means of becoming Shakti, at least for the *devadasi*. The possible nature of this process will be explored here.

5.2 Principles of Yoga, the "Witness Self" and the Phenomenon of Dance

Tantra's dynamic practices are part of the tradition of yoga in India and it is important therefore to view them within yoga's philosophical parameters. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, believed to have been composed in the 4th century AD[6] are considered a definitive classical work on the subject of mental disciplines to achieve the end purpose of universal consciousness and outline the central tenets of this philosophy. Deshpande's commentary on Patanjali's Yoga Sutras[7] draws attention to the idea that yoga was a "means of looking" at reality. He describes these sutras as "statements of fact" arrived at by "alert awareness" about our existential situation, on the part of ancient seekers of enlightenment.

The basic premise on which Patanjali builds his arguments and practices is that human consciousness comprises of two distinct parts: 'mundane awareness' and the 'existential seer'. Mundane awareness is centred around awareness of the individual self and what it is able to perceive of the world. This self is a complex of ideas about "I" ness, i.e. I am seeing, I am dancing etc. The individual is built around these structures of consciousness. This self has programmed likes and dislikes. Every time the mind exercises choice, it triggers further ideation.

Memory built on the past hence propels the future, and constitutes an entrapping "matrix of temporality".[8] In this process man is "bonded" and not free as "The action of freedom imprisoned in perpetual choice making" is a state of bondage. He does not have a natural ability to "not choose".[9] Freedom from this constraint achieves the goal of yoga. Hence an important step to yoga is free inquiry, where self-consciousness is recognised for what it is - an incorrect point of inquiry because the basic relationship between man and the world around him is conditioned by the limitations of his ideational mind.

Along with this self, we have a witness self or higher Self. Deshpande introduces this Self as the 'existential seer'.[10] The yogi investigates the nature of reality in meditation by tuning into the Self so that "one's mind remains stationary and only pure perception is allowed to operate on all the impulses emerging out of one's conditioned consciousness".[11] Hence the existential nature between the self and Self is the starting point for meditation on the nature of reality.[12]

Mental alertness to the difference between 'mundane consciousness' and the 'existential seer' required for yoga have parallels in Phenomenology. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone states "The dance comes alive precisely as the dancers are *implicitly* aware of themselves and the form, such that the form moves through them: they are not agents of the form, but its moving centre."[13] ..."It is only as the dancer reflects upon herself apart from the dance that she is no longer with it, and in consequence, destroys the illusion...As soon as she becomes self-conscious, the audience is aware of a separation of the dancer from the dance."[14] In this description, dance "comes alive" when the self is fully engaged in its chosen activity, without the distraction of other self-centred thoughts. This is akin to the state of 'ego-less awareness' in which dance would be performed by the dancer as the 'existential seer'.

It can be suggested therefore that the phenomenological experience of dance performed with full involvement, was a means of transcending 'mundane consciousness' and being centred instead in 'witness awareness'. Hence dance performed with 'implicit awareness' as described by Sheets-Johnstone is essentially yogic in nature and is paradoxically experienced with both ego-detachment and fullness by the performer. From the perspective of the audience, Sheets-Johnstone

states that "Judgements, beliefs, interpretations are suspended: our experience of the dance is free of any manner of reflection. We are spontaneously and wholly intent upon the form which appears before us, thoroughly engrossed in its unfolding".[15] Such audiences are described as being *rasikas* in Indian aesthetic theory.[16] Performing and watching performances with the objective of experiencing such detached states of mind was perceived as being spiritually beneficial in the Indian tradition and would account for the centuries of close association between dance and religion.

5.3 Dance as *Sadhana* and as *Upasana* in the Tantric Tradition

Indian aesthetics have a long history of discussing the subject of the transcendence of body by the creation and tasting of *rasa*.[17] The idea that the *shastric* performing arts were a divine gift for the end objective of God realization, originally taught by the deities themselves, is part of the tradition's myths.[18] A reflection of this cultural legacy is that the founders of Odissi retained the central place of devotion in their articulation of this dance system. Great store was placed on following the *shastras* as they provided both moral authority and a source of genuine inspiration. The underlying premise was that by dancing correctly according to the sacred teachings of tradition, the body becomes divine.

All tantric rituals of which the *devdasis* dance constituted a part, were performed as a means of experiencing divinity and were essentially of two kinds. *Sadhanas* (associated with *yantras, mantras*, secret *mudras* and kriya yoga practices) used by adepts and their initiated disciples; and *upasanas*, perceived as devotional offerings meant to please the deity.[19] As mentioned earlier, the dance ritual was a 'courtesy to please' the deity and had its place with food offered to the deity in the temple. In this context it would seem to have been an *upasana*. The present Odissi tradition has been constructed on the premise that it was so.

Dance performed as *upasana* would be 'yogic' according to Patanjali's description of the term, when performed with *bhakti* (devotion) and full involvement. Through absorption in the act of dance, the dancer disassociated from the sense of "I" ness. In this way a separation of body and consciousness was achieved. This allowed for the recognition of the difference between "mundane consciousness" and the "Witness Self" and the latter's identification with the deity being addressed. This process required sustained effort for mastery over the mind's natural inclinations but resulted finally in the body becoming 'an object of offering' and consciousness becoming 'one with Spirit'.

Despite dance being commonly viewed as an *upasana*, it is likely however that the medieval Orissan temple dance ritual was undertaken as conscious tantric *sadhana*. In Jagannath Temple worship, the dancer was the "wife" of Lord Jagannath and the traditional symbolism of her sexual union with Him, was her dance before the altar. This ritual role makes direct reference to the transmutation of sexual energy into Kundalini energy, a well-known theme in tantric *sadhana*. To those worshippers who viewed it as such, the dance ritual could have served the purpose of a symbolic sexual union between the worshipper and the deity it addressed, understood to represent the internal merging of consciousness with energy. Through the daily performance in the temple of the Gita Govinda, celebrating the mystic-erotic union of Radha and Krishna, this idea was shared with devotees. Sexual intercourse sculpted on temple walls was hence considered auspicious and necessary as it too was an expression of this concept.

The nature of tantric rituals, especially that of *sadhanas,* was affected by the scheme explaining the evolution of the universe, and hence its control through *mantra, yantra* and *mudra*. Everything manifested from sound energy and such sound called *mantra* was considered to have the ability in turn to manifest forms of energy and matter. A central perception was that divine form was harnessed by geometric order. This idea took the form of geometric cosmic diagrams called *yantras. Mantras* and *yantras* were used along with hand gestures or *mudras*, to magnify thoughts and cause the ritual to acquire even greater potency.[20] These together constituted a powerful means of releasing dormant psychic energy and accessing psychologically higher (i.e. more integrated) states of being, which was the essential technique of *sadhana.*
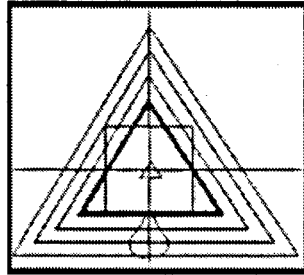
**Fig 9: Yantra - Geometric form used to
harness cosmic energy**

In the language of *yantras,* the triangle defined a taut, dynamic energy field
and signified the element fire The square was recognized as embodying the
attributes of Earth and of representing stability. The iconographic form of Lord
Jagannath, God-King of Orissa,[21] was essentially a painted block of wood considered
to be sitting in a square chowk, with two arms, a head and a body. Water was
represented by the circle. The element Air was represented by the perfect lines of a
crescent moon. Ether, the subtlest element, was signified by the *bindu* or dot. These
geometric forms were used in different combinations as *yantras* and served to bring
the five elements together to represent specific natural forces.

Reverence for geometry plays a significant if unconscious role in Odissi and is
seen in spatial patterns and body designs. The dancing body in chowk, assumed the
square form and embodied stability and grounded power. In the tribhanga stance the
body assumed a shape that resolved different triangular forces. When dancing,
virtual lines are drawn in space by the limbs while retaining the basic body forms of
chowk and tribhanga and maintaining fixed proportions of the limbs to the body. If
these 'virtual spatial progressions' could be remembered, the form created would be
akin to a *yantra,* divisible into squares, circles and triangles. It is possible that the
traditional repertoire was choreographed in geometric patterns because of this
legacy.

In tantric *sadhanas,* 'Vital points' were called *chakras* and associated with
mantras (seed syllables) and a *yantra. Chakras* were seen to directly regulate both

the gross and subtle functions of the body and the most important ones were located in the spinal cord. They were visualised as lotuses with specific colours and numbers of petals and were presided over by a specific deity activated by meditation using *mudras,* and *mantras* and *yantra* specific to that deity. Studies of the ritual performance by male priests at the Jagannath temple for the purification of the physical and subtle body, using *mantra, mudra* and *yantra* have revealed the use of approximately 60 different *mudras,* many of which are not mentioned in the Natya Shastra.[22] These may well have been used by *devadasis* in history as well.

These *mantras, mudras* and *yantras,* and an understanding of the premises of the tantric world view, can be used to create a new vision for Odissi affecting the way it is taught, learnt, choreographed and performed.

5.4 Realising the Divine Body

The living physical form of the human body in the tantric tradition was seen as a map of the universe, and was synonymous with the divine body of God, with *chakras* representing successively higher levels of consciousness within.[23] It was regarded as comprising of five sheaths having successively finer degrees of subtlety. The five bodies comprising the complete anatomy had come into existence through a process of 'fractional crystallisation' commencing from a single divine source, first giving rise to subtle causal principles, which had in turn fused in different proportions to form gross matter as the five elements of Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether.[24] The visible body made from food formed by these natural gross elements, was called the 'food sheath' and the Sanskrit name for this body was *annamaya kosha.*

Breath existed in the body's material substance and permeated it. It was seen as a body in itself and called the *pranamaya kosha.* The instinctive mind permeated all tissue and was known as the *manomaya kosha* or 'mind sheath'. The individual's consciousness with personalised likes and dislikes controlled the instinctive mind and comprised the *vigyanamaya kosha* or 'intellectual body sheath'. 'Bliss' provided a

substratum for all these four bodies and was known as the *anandamaya kosha*. Ritual worship of a deity entailed a process of mentally dissolving the worshipper's gross body into its five elements, and reconstituting them in to a divine form. It was essentially a process of experiencing the body's substratum of bliss.

The five body sheaths were closely linked to each other through the vital points or *chakras* along the length of the central spinal cord and through a network of *naadis,* or subtle channels, extending from the spine right through the anatomy. *Naadis* were concentrated at *chakra* points in the spinal cord. The *ida* and *pingala naadis* on the left and right of the spinal cord were central components of this system and permeated the body's bilaterally symmetrical form with bipolar principles.

The upper and lower ends of the spinal cord were seen as centres of Shiva (Moon) and Shakti (Sun) consciousness. Heat and coolness were regulated by the effects of the sun and moon through a natural alternating of breath between the right and left nostrils. This affected the quality of life force or *prana* flowing through the *naadis.* The right solar breath stimulated digestion and all activities requiring power and action. The left lunar breath stimulated thought and feeling.

The connection between the five bodies could be realised through different techniques, especially the practice of regulated forms of breathing that drew breath consciously up and down the spine, 'piercing' its *chakras.* Hence breath control (or *pranayam*) became central to achieving the integrated functioning of body-mind-consciousness. It was seen as a means to expand conscious awareness and develop mastery over the earth plane.

As a result of such perceptions, God consciousness through worship was a tangible state to be achieved through practicing a charted course of mental and physical disciplines. The tantric tradition maintained that the obstruction in the view of the self as divine was caused by identification with the ego. The ego naturally had desires which if fulfilled caused happiness and if thwarted caused sorrow. This was the basis of *maya,* or illusion. Trapped in the veils of *maya,* the *jiva* was prone to erroneous mental tendencies and repeated wrong action over many lifetimes.

Worship as *sadhana* hence provided a means of removing the limiting tendency towards ego-identification, so that the real nature of the self was perceived.

The composite anatomy of the human body was seen as a multi-layered, changing illusion or *maya*, fashioned from the five elements. The soul or *jiva* used this body as a spiritual tool or *yantra*, discarding bodies through many successive lifetimes of learning and evolution. The *jiva* gradually learned of its divinity through these experiences and, as this occurred, Kundalini naturally ascended the spinal cord of its current body. Tantric *sadhana* encompassed techniques to be practiced along with a moral code of conduct, to achieve a 'speeding-up' in this evolutionary process. This was desired as it resulted in freedom from bondage in *maya*, or the illusion of the world, and joy and fulfilment in the experience of living.

C.G. Jung introduced the concept of psychic energy as libido and its transformation in the human being through the process of "Individuation". These psychological theories are useful in making room for an understanding of Kundalini and tantric perspectives on ritual dance. According to Jung, each individual is naturally driven to actualise his or her real nature through the "instinct of Individuation". Jung elaborates this by stating that "Given a chance to be himself, he (*the individual*) would most certainly grow into his own form, if there were not obstacles and inhibitions" hindering him "from becoming what he is really meant to be."[25]

Tantra's elaborate description of the human body as a microcosmic map of the cosmos, complete with *chakras* and their presiding deities, was essentially a diagrammatic arrangement of spiritual power. The map, when 'realised', can be seen as a blueprint of what this spiritual tradition believed the "individual would most certainly grow into" ..."if there were not obstacles and inhibitions" (primarily that of false ego-identification) hindering him "from becoming what he is really meant to be." The transformation of energy in the psyche required for Individuation, occurred according to Jung through life experiences. His term for this psychic energy was libido, which can be seen to mean 'life force'; in this, libido is similar to tantra's Kundalini.[26]

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If the purpose of tantric *sadhana* were to be understood using Jungian terms, ritual had the same psychic affect as life experiences that transform libido and progress Individuation. Ritual 'compensated' for the need to go through life experiences required for psychic maturity, and the resultant natural liberation of Kundalini.

Repeated psychological impregnation with the image of the deity in ritual dance was similar to holding the 'end product of Individuation' as conceived by the dancer, in the mind. This was an effective means of infusing the dancer with the larger power and personality of the deity and hence achieved a transformation of libido by dropping 'false ego-identification' and embracing 'true identification' of the self with the Self/deity.

5.5 The Practice of Dancing with the Tantric Body Map

It would seem that, according to yoga and tantra, dance is performed when the individual mind is fully absorbed in the specifics of the ritual, the subtle body is brought in harmony with the earth's natural energies, and the dancer transmuted in to an empty vessel moving in perfect accord with sound, filled with divine energy. As has been established above, tantric ideas permeate classical Indian dance as an unconscious structure; the hypothesis here is that these can be made conscious to useful effect.

The crux of the inquiry was to determine the possible effects of a sustained long–term practice of dance movements in chowk and tribhanga when conscious of the premise that the physical body is a microcosmic map permeated by subtle energies concentrated in the spinal cord in symbolic lotuses. Kriya yoga methods, essentially understood to be spiritual practices based on advanced physical techniques in yoga, were learnt and worked with to form an understanding of this

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tantric body map. The system of symbols developed by this tradition were found to be a highly useful and interesting means of focusing attention at points in the body. These provided a much greater depth to my understanding of the body and made the practice of dance technique a mentally and physically integrating body discipline. This also became a useful reference point when experimenting with new forms of choreography within Odissi's classical framework.

The primary resource materials used to study kriya practices and adapt them for dance were publications of the Bihar School of Yoga. This is a well recognised, research and training centre in yoga and tantra founded by Swami Satyananda Saraswati in 1963.[27] This was supplemented by the attendance of classes in hatha yoga and kriya yoga at the Bhubaneswar branch of this *ashram*.

Creating awareness of *chakra* points in the spinal cord initially involves practices that exert a physical pressure on the *chakra*. This can be achieved by performing hatha yoga *asanas*. The second step is to combine the practice of *asanas* with specific breathing patterns, and finally with the additional focus of meditation on *mantras* and/or the visualisation of *yantras* located at the points concerned. It is a common experience with practitioners of yoga that whilst doing *asanas* with these additional devices, the physical benefits of the position are greatly enhanced. Apart from the effect on muscles, joints etc, with sustained practice, there are perceptible long-term effects on the mind and the emotions. Certain combinations of these practices are described as kriyas.[28]

Traditionally, any yogic practice was deemed easier to master when performed with devotion to a deity, and kriyas were no exception. Each spinal *chakra* has been named, seen as a seat of a deity embodying specific colours and powers, riding on different animal mounts, contained within a geometric form and encompassed by a lotus. The body was seen as a temple to these deities[29] who could be worshipped using seed syllables or *beej mantras*.

Lam was the sound used for *mooladhara* "situated in the pelvic floor", **Vam** for *svadhistana* located at the "termination of the spinal cord", **Ram** for *manipur* "situated exactly at the level of the navel" in the spinal cord, **Yam** for *anahat* in "the vertebral column behind the base of the heart", **Ham** for *vishuddhi* "at the level of

the throat pit in the vertebral column". **Om Ham Ksham** for *ajna* corresponding to the pineal gland and **Om** for *bindu* "located at the top back of the head where Hindu Brahmins keep a tuft of hair".[30] The mantras were visualised as written symbols astride their respective animal mounts i.e. an elephant with 7 tusks for *mooladhara*, a crocodile for *svadhisthana,* a ram for *manipur,* a black antelope for *anahat,* and a white elephant with 7 tusks for *vishuddhi.*[31] The *ajna chakra* had no animal and its mantras **Ham** and **Ksham** were inscribed on each of its two lotus petals. These mantras represented Shiva and Shakti, which were seen to merge at the *ajna.*[32]

The tantric tradition states that the *chakra* points are "physical transducers" connecting the physical and psychic planes of the human being. For some *chakra* points, specific endocrinal glands have been seen to be the 'tip of the iceberg' visible to the physical eye which, when stimulated through yogic practices, leads to the vision and access of its 'psychic store house'. Swami Satyananda has explained this relationship in the context of the *ajna chakra* or third eye as follows: "*Ajna chakra* is often directly related to the physical pineal gland...they are often regarded as one and the same thing. This is rather an oversimplification...It seems likely that the pineal gland is part of *ajna chakra*...But *ajna chakra* as a whole goes much deeper. *Ajna* can be compared to a mountain in the sea; the peak, the island that can be seen above the surface of the sea is the pineal gland."[33]

Meditation on the third eye is recommended as a means of developing the Witness Consciousness discussed above. "*Ajna* is the centre whereby one can communicate without speaking; it is the centre of direct mind to mind thought transference...This *chakra* is also the centre where one begins to gain more control of *prana...Ajna* is the distributive centre where one transmits *prana* to specific areas of the body...One becomes the unmoving witness of all events, including those of one's own mind and body...Actions of the mind and body become perfect responses to given situations."[34] It was found through practical explorations undertaken that by accepting such premises and also "impregnating" specific *chakra* points with the psychological qualities traditionally associated with the point, bringing the mind to that point in the body served as a source for the energy it had been impregnated with.

As the image of a deity is meditated on to become an object of power for the

worshipper, awareness of the body as a microcosmic map makes it an object of power for the dancer. In this respect, developing awareness of a *chakra* point is not dissimilar to 'establishing a deity' within the body. This *chakra* symbol is iconic within the tradition, in the sense that the colour and animal/natural form associated with it "resembles" the qualities associated with that colour and form. It is indexical according to the yogic understanding of the human body, in that it has "a direct existential connection" with the part of the brain associated with its properties.[35] During the process of meditation on the *ajna chakra*, the "signifier" (created and held within the mind; in this case the lotus with two petals) is further activated by the use of *mantra* and *mudra*, and hence becomes a highly potent sign for the "signified" (Witness Consciousness) which by definition is also held within the mind.[36]

5.5.1 Preparation for the Practice

As mentioned earlier, kriyas are traditionally learnt by developing *kaya sthairium* (a still body, epitomized by the well recognised lotus posture); acquiring breath awareness; body control skills such as *bandhas* and *mudras*; and simultaneously performing the required visualisation exercises. This process was preceded by a practice of *asanas* to promote flexibility of joints, allow the free flow of energy in the body and promote a natural deepening and fullness of breath. The *asanas* adopted have been outlined in detail in 'Asana Pranayam Mudra Bandha' by Swami Satyananda Saraswati. These included the *Pawanmuktasana* series,[37] *Marjori*,[38] *Vyaghra*,[39] *Setu*,[40] *Paschimottana*,[41] *Supta Vajrasana*,[42] *Yogamudra*,[43] *Ardha Matsyendrasana*[44] and *Surya Namaskar*.[45] These were chosen as they suited my body personally, bent the spinal cord in opposite directions alternately and affected different *chakra* points. As in any hatha yoga practice, the specific combination of *asanas* chosen for any individual would depend on the requirements of the person concerned.

Asanas were followed by *pranayam*, described as the control of *prana*, or vital energy/life force.[46] The *pranayam* techniques adopted included Yogic breathing (encompassing abdominal, thoracic and clavicular breathing)[47] to increase the breathing capacity of the lungs and promote deeper breathing, *Bhastrika* (the bellows breath) to stimulate metabolism,[48] and *Nadi Shodhana* to develop harmony

in the body.[49]

Kundalini is believed to be naturally locked in the spinal cord by three *granthis* or psychic knots. The first *Brahma granthi* is held in place by the psychic urge, need and instinctive knowledge, to survive and procreate. The *mooladhara* and *svadhisthana chakras* serve as 'hyperlinks' to this knot. The second *Vishnu granthi* is "associated with the sustenance of the physical, emotional and mental aspects of human existence". Its 'hyperlinks' are the *manipura* and *anahat chakras*. The final knot is *Rudra granthi*, linked to the *vishuddhi* and *ajna chakras* governing ego awareness and individuality. According to yogic theory, these knots can be released through a sustained practice of *bandhas* which function as "unlocking actions". Four such *bandhas* are used: *jalandhara* performed at the throat; *uddiyana* performed at the navel; *moola* performed at the pelvic floor; and *maha bandha* which is a combination of all three. *Pranayam* is hence followed by these practices which address these knots by concentrating and subsequently releasing vital energy within the spinal cord. [50]

Bandhas were finally followed by practices to establish awareness of the *arohan* and *avrohan* passages running in the torso linking the base of the spine to the top of the head. These are visualised as psychic channels or *naadis* through which breath is mentally drawn around the body.[51] The *arohan* passage is used for inhalation, visualized as an ascending process running along the front of the body from the *mooladhara* to the *vishuddhi* points, which then travels through the head in a straight diagonal line and terminates at the *bindu*. The *avrohan* passage is traversed by visualizing exhaled breath as descending from *bindu* (where it can be retained after the inhalation) to *ajna* to *mooladhara* along the back of the torso. Inhalation and exhalation is performed along these passages with the mental repetition of the names of these *chakras,* or their sound syllables as they are mentally traversed.[52]

"Arohan"

VISHUDDHI

ANAHATA

MANIPURA

SWADHISTHANA

MOOLADHARA

Inhalation

"Avarohan"

BINDU

VISHUDDHI

ANAHATA

MANIPURA

SWADHISTHANA

MOOLADHARA

Exhalation
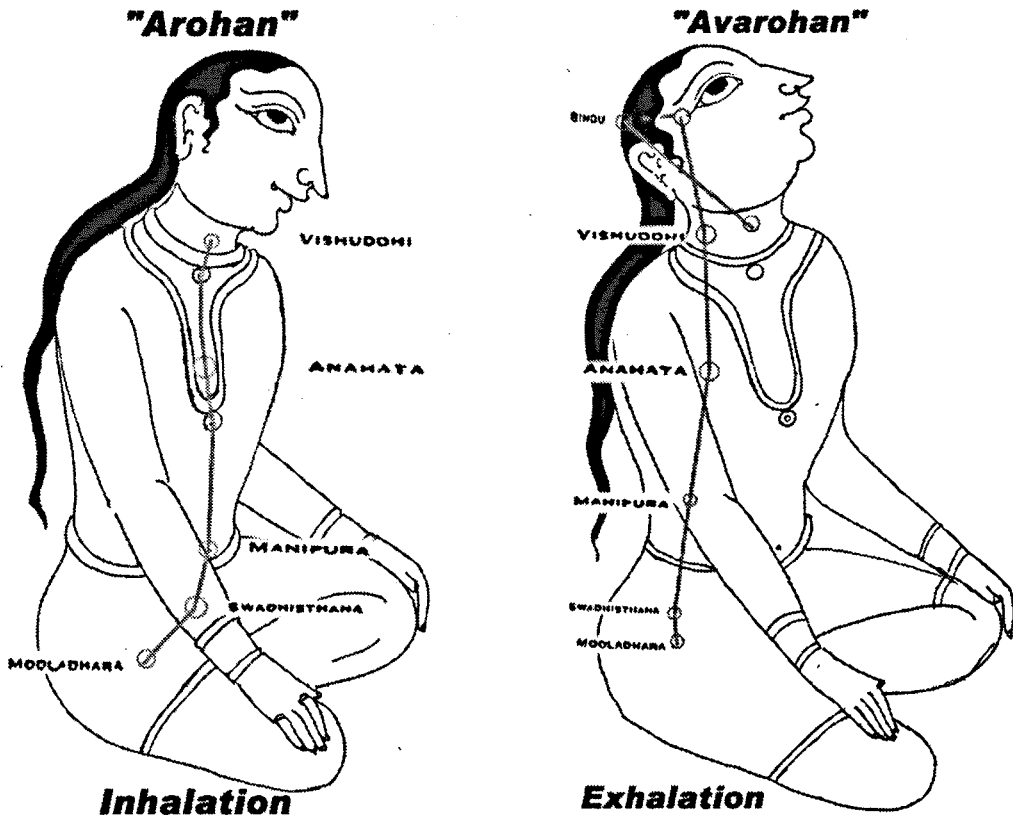
Fig 10: Psychic breath passages developed during pranayam

5.5.2 Kriya in Movement

Kriya yoga exercises require stillness of body to achieve meditative states of mind and are hence normally performed sitting in a meditative asana. Stillness is a means of cutting off stimulation from the body and shifting focus from the environment outside the body, to the environment within. It has been suggested that absolute stillness allows the rhythm of the heart beat to set up "rhythmic waves within the spine, skull and cerebro-spinal fluid"[53] that are important to achieve a meditative state. These issues are not in question, and in fact success in the kriya based tasks performed in a state of movement require the basic practices to be learned in the recommended traditional way first.

There are some yogic practices however, based on the practice of a "rotation of consciousness", which after they are learnt, may be adopted by practitioners as part of their *sadhana* to be performed at all times of the day.[54] This usually takes the form of a constant mental repetition of *mantra.* These practices aid the mind in minimising its natural tendency to jump from thought to thought. This promotes concentration and relaxation in the mind, allowing it to function with greater efficiency in the tasks it is undertaking. Such practices can be easily adapted for movement training.

The 'noise' caused to the mind by physical motion (as opposed to a state of stillness), can be greatly reduced by adopting a single repeating action, while performing preparatory kriya tasks, centred around body awareness. This allows a 'stillness of mind in movement' to be generated, which encourages creative thinking in dance and is a very useful 'mental warm up' for dance. It also promotes focused and clean movement delivery. When internal focus is developed sitting down as in the original kriya practices, the process of standing up and moving immediately disturbs the state of mind that has been developed.

The single repeating action chosen was walking in fixed circles at a constant pace around the dance studio, while performing a series of kriya based exercises with the mind. As a result, the externally visible routine of walking in a circle acquired a body of mental tasks, which could be followed through when dance exercises were commenced. The benefits of working this way with dance are similar to that of working with any yoga practice. These are visible on the body, mind and personality of the practitioner, over a period of time. This adds a fresh dimension to traditional dance workouts by opening a new world of yogic psychological development through body awareness to be undertaken as part of dance training.

Each walking exercise described below has been performed with many variations in the sequence, using different combinations of techniques which were recorded as journal notes.[55] A collation of essential tasks performed while walking are described here as three succeeding series that follow one after another.

Series A: Working with Breath

One

Breath was visualised as a physical substance that constantly traversed the barrier between the physical spaces within and outside the body.

The switch from 'mundane consciousness' to a 'subtler state of attention' was made by following the flow of breath as it entered and left the nostrils while walking. This required maintaining the natural breath without forcing deeper breathing, becoming aware of a slight flaring in the nostrils with each inhalation, and a relaxation of the nostrils with each exhalation.

Two

Ujjayini pranayam was now incorporated into the already established breathing pattern.

Three

Khechari mudra[56] was likewise incorporated while keeping the fingers in *hansasya* or *dhyana mudra*.[57]

Four

Attention was released from breath and the body now visualised as a hollow empty space contained by the outer surface of the body's skin. While continuing to walk in circles, the spinal cord was seen as a 'still location of consciousness' within this body-space. This made the spinal cord an 'unmoving place' in which to hold the mind, while the outer form of the body moved over the floor.

Five

Once a 'stillness in consciousness' of the spine had been experienced, concentration on the spine was consolidated. Inhalation and exhalation were performed along the *arohan* and *avrohan* passages. The walking of the body was a state of 'constant motion' that was experienced as

being 'restful'.

Six

Inhalation and exhalation along the *arohan* and *avrohan* passages were continued while mentally 'touching' the *chakra* points of the spinal cord each time they were passed. This was done using visualisations of their basic geometric forms, colours and the mental repetitions of their *beej mantras*.

Series B: Transition into dance exercises with mooladhara awareness

One

The first exercise involved walking in a circle, stopping at periodic intervals randomly and dropping the body into chowk. This position was held and awareness maintained at the *mooladhara chakra* by mentally repeating the *beej mantra Lam*.

The position was released as soon as discomfort/distraction was experienced and the walk resumed. It was most important that this be performed with a completely relaxed attitude of body

Two

After several rounds of circular walking whilst maintaining awareness at the *mooladhara chakra*, the body was held in one position and the chowk position taken and released through vertical movement in rapid succession.

The action was discontinued as soon as discomfort/distraction was experienced and the walk resumed.

Three

Likewise, after several rounds maintaining awareness at the *mooladhara chakra*, the chowk stance was assumed, *moolbandha* held mentally and jumps performed holding the form.

The action was discontinued as soon as discomfort/distraction was

experienced and the walk resumed.

Four

Likewise, after several rounds holding *moolbandha* mentally and breathing specifically with *ujjayini* and *khechari mudras,* the body was made to descend in chowk. With an inhalation, the ears were plugged and exhalation performed with a "hum" as in *brahmari pranayam.*[58] The position was released at the end of the exhalation and the walk resumed.

Five

The final few rounds were performed visualising a lotus flower at the *ajna chakra,*[59] stem along the spinal cord and roots at *mooladhara.* With inhalation the spinal cord was ascended, with exhalation the spinal cord, descended.

Series C: Shifting focus along the spinal cord.

The task of walking in circles with relaxed awareness of breath, spinal cord, and the 'empty space' within the body was punctuated every few rounds by stopping to perform isolated body movements.

One

Attention was divided between the *moolahara chakra* and the heart centre, or *anahat chakra.* The process of breathing was felt to occur from the front centre of the chest, through the depth of the torso to the *anahat chakra* in the spinal cord. Exhalation was felt to occur back from the *anahat chakra* out to the front of the chest. This breathing pattern is a recommended practice for the purification of the *anahat chakra* and helps focus attention at that point.[60] Whilst maintaining this awareness, the torso was slid from side to side; then front to back; and finally in a circle touching the four cardinal points previously marked.

Two

Attention was divided between the *mooladhara chakra* and the throat centre, or *vishuddhi chakra*. The process of breathing was felt to occur from the front centre of the throat pit, through the depth of the neck to the *vishuddhi chakra* in the spinal cord. Exhalation was felt to occur back from the *vishuddhi chakra* out to the front of the throat pit.[61] This image was greatly helped by humming at every exhalation. Once attention had settled on the *vishuddhi chakra*, neck movements were performed visualising their point of origin as being from that point. The first movement involved a side to side motion. Similarly, a front to back motion was performed. This idea was also repeated when performing neck rolls in both clockwise and anticlockwise directions.

Three

Attention was now divided between the *mooladhara chakra* and the eyebrow centre, or *bhrumadhya,* regarded as the external trigger point for the *ajna chakra*. The process of breathing was then watched intently from the nostrils to the eyebrow centre. This was done by visualising the breath "forming an inverted V-shape" as it moves from the ends of the nose to its bridge.[62]

Once sensitivity to the *bhrumadhya* was established, breath was imagined as passing through this point to the *ajna chakra* in the centre of the head. Exhalation was felt to occur back from the *ajna chakra* out through the point between the eyebrows.

When attention had settled on the *ajna chakra*, all eye movements described in the Abhinaya Darpana were performed visualising their place of origin at this centre point of the head.

5.6 Kriya in Dance

The basis for a recommendation on which *chakra* to concentrate on while performing specific hath yoga exercises is determined by identifying the subtle or 'psychic point of origin of the movement in the body'.[63] In using the tantric body map for dance, certain visualisations had been adopted. The hands, fingers and eyes had been seen as physical extensions of *chakra* points located at the upper levels of the spinal cord, while the lower body was seen as connected to *chakra* points in the lower levels of the spinal cord. These *chakras* of the spinal cord were adopted as points of mental focus for articulating Odissi movement. The specific *chakras* used kept changing, depending on the nature of the movement and the body parts involved.

As mentioned previously, the Odissi technique is characterised by the lower body held open at the hip, the feet striking the floor in rhythmic patterns; and the upper body used fluidly in a successive series of rotations along the door plane, with lateral and diagonal transitions along the table plane. The body always moves therefore as two separate units. The fingers of the body form a series of gestures that serve to create and hold clean virtual lines, extending from the central axis of the body into its kinesphere. This effect is underlined by virtual projections created through eye focus, extending far beyond the lines formed by the hand gestures.

In nritta sequences danced within these parameters, the body is generally held in one geometric shape for several repetitions of a movement phrase. For the exercises described here, attention was always divided between one 'upper spinal *chakra* point' and one 'lower spinal *chakra* point', depending on the nature of the movement phrase. All lower body movements were focused at *mooladhara* or *svadhisthan*, while upper body movements made use of *manipur, anahat vishuddhi* and *ajna* points. Sustained concentration on the *chakras* during dance served to 'fine-tune' the balance of both sides of the body on its 'pivotal' spinal cord. This allowed for cleaner choreutic units being articulated by the body. Greater centredness also induced lightness, allowing dance sequences to seem effortless.

An important rationale for sexual rites in some Shaivite and Shakta cults was that it was a means of establishing self-mastery through control of sexual energy by not allowing/postponing orgasm during intercourse. It is possible that this required an isolation and contraction of the region of the *mooladhara* and *svadhisthan chakras*, combined with inhalation techniques to draw energy from here to higher *chakras*.[64] This principle of both breathing and muscle contraction in the lower pelvis was found to have a greatly beneficial effect on Odissi dance movement as it provided additional strength and clarity in movement delivery.

Each *chakra* is traditionally qualified by different energies, and can be visualised as a usable source of this quality during dance. The *mooladhara* is a repository of raw energy. *Svadhisthana* is a repository of deep unconscious desire and pleasure. *Manipur* is a repository of power. *Anahat* is a repository of love. *Vishuddhi* is a repository of individual self-expression. The *Ajna* is a power centre for intuition and the mental projection of thought forms into the audience. These points can therefore be used as psychological reservoirs for these qualities, to be drawn on whilst dancing, depending on the need of the moment. Conscious projections from these points during nritya sections created an immediately perceived emotional depth to movement.

In improvisations, focus was shifted from movement form to the experience of the form. Odissi's traditional device of making use of sustained, balanced, fluid transitions between still moments in chowk and tribhanga as a choreographic device, were further extended[65] using yogic postures. The sinuous movements of the torso, a hallmark of Odissi, were interpreted as a stylistic interpolation of energy, or 'serpentine force', as described in the tantras. These images were used to create new dance pieces.

5.7 Concluding Remarks

An important objective of this study was to explore new movement possibilities that could be integrated into Odissi's vocabulary. From the tantric tradition it can be surmised that the most important component to dance as yoga is what is done with the mind. The physical practices are an aid to the control of the mind. This is a liberating thought in the exploration of new movement for dance within the context of a tradition that professes to be striving for Moksha. Unlimited freedom is however difficult to use effectively and the tantric body map provides an invaluable reference template while 'flexing muscles' for Moksha.

An additional and vital benefit of working with the tantric body map is that it trains the body for independent "somatic thinking". This can give back the vitally important personal reference point needed by students during training which the *shishya*, in the present *Guru-shishya parampara*, inevitably has to forfeit. Such working processes have the potential of allowing for a natural growth of new ideas from within the tradition.

Dancing using *chakras* as 'points in the spinal cord for mental focus while creating movement', works towards achieving kriya yoga's objective of their 'activation', through the principle of concentrating the mind at these points. This has immense benefits on the psyche of the dancer. The Odissi technique places balanced 'psychic stresses' on the *chakra* points due to its symmetric use of the body. Through repeated practice of simple movements with this awareness, the transformative potential of kriya yoga ideas can be explored as part of dance training. Furthermore, when performing Odissi with this focus, dance comes across to the viewer having enhanced performance energy.

Working with the tantric body map as a mental and physical tool to expand Odissi's parameters allows the dance tradition to understand and consider yoga's vision of the body. This can only serve to deepen understanding about the classical Indian dance systems and renew the challenge of making transcendence an artistic objective. As a working methodology, this can be easily adapted for use by all the Indian performing arts which share common structural principles and cultural

contexts. The essential idea of working with a self-created set of symbols to actualize individual potential should be of use in body-centred disciplines from other cultures as well.

Due to the confusion existing around tantra, suggestions that Odissi has a tantric connection are unfortunately still met with surprise or even hostility. This prevents tantra's invaluable resources from being used. Such prejudices need to be reconsidered. Pursuing an exploration of tantra can arguably be seen as an extension of the process of mining cultural resources to create Odissi initiated in the 1950's.

The work begun during this phase of the study takes Odissi forward by extending its physical practice into the area of organized mental training based on yogic principles, to achieve its spiritual goals alongside its practice. This allows for the 'natural state' of the contemporary dancer to be expressed through the classical framework which is what has the potential for changing the tradition from within, and making it more accessible to contemporary audiences. This is the most significant contribution of the study. I would like to underline however that tantric techniques have merely been adapted for dance in a systematic way here. It is possible that similar approaches to body mind training for dance could have formed part of the oral tradition of 'imparting' knowledge from guru to *shishya* in history, which is now lost knowledge.

Endnotes

[1] The Saradatilaka of Laksmana-desikendra, c. 11th century AD, and the Kularnava Tantra, c. 1000AD, are well known tantric texts that make reference to this imagery..

[2] "The autonomic nervous system has two components of sympathetic and parasympathetic nerves which have a reciprocal relationship, one being active while the other is passive. In yogic terms, this corresponds to the *ida* and *pingala nadis*. The sympathetic nerves (*pingala nadi*) are responsible for excitation and

arousal, while the parasympathetic nerves *(ida nadi)* are responsible for relaxation....the right nostril is linked to *pingala nadi* and the left nostril is linked to *ida nadi.* " Described by Swami Niranjananad in Prana Pranayam Prana Vidya, pp.28-29

[3] Kundalini Tantra p341

[4] If the forearms are crossed on the chest and placed under the armpits in *Padaadhirasana*, breath in the nostrils is equalised. If only one hand is placed under an armpit, the breath will be shifted to the side not being held. Described by Swami Satyananda Saraswati in Asana Pranayam Mudra Bandha, p112

[5] NN Bhattacharya (1999: 40)

[6] Sources of Indian Tradition 2nd edition, Ainslie T Embree editor, Penguin Books India (1991: 298)

[7] Deshpande (1979, 1st Indian edition), pp.1-3

[8] Ibid p30

[9] Ibid p21

[10] Ibid p3

[11] Ibid p7

[12] Ibid p9

[13] M Sheets-Johnstone (1979: 6) 2nd edition

[14] Ibid p39

[15] Ibid p4

[16] A person with the ability to partake of 'essence'; being a *rasika* was a matter of self-cultivation.

[17] See theory of *Rasa* in Chapter 3

[18] The earliest *shastra* (text) on the subject of dance, drama and music, the Natya Shastra (2nd c. BC - 2nd c. AD), begins by saluting Brahma, the Creator. The Abhinaya Darpana (10th century), an important treatise on the art of dance specifically, is presented by its author Nandikeswar, as being the teachings of the deity Shiva, and his consort Parvati. Shiva gave dance its *tandava* (strength and power), and Parvati gave it *lasya* (sweetness). Nandikeswar also states that dance helped fulfill the four essential goals of human birth i.e. *dharma, artha, kama,* and *moksha.*

[19] These included daily worship performed commonly in homes.

[20] "...experience shows that gesture emphasises and intensifies thought... The body is made to move with the thought." Woodroffe in Sakti & Sakta p304

[21] Lord Jagannath's image was ornamented with large circular eyes in black, white and red, signifying the three *gunas (rajas, sattva, tamas)*, causal principles of creation.

[22] CG Tripathi, Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Traditions of Orissa, p289. Similar rituals are performed before images of the Shivalinga in several temples of Bhubaneswar and can be viewed quite easily.

[23] "...according to the Tantric view, the body of the *sadhaka* is the universe which is the abode of the desired (*ista*) and the goal to be sought (*sadhya*)." Ibid p40

[24] A diagrammatic explanation of the Tantric view of the evolution of the physical human body from the principles of Shiva and Shakti, is described by Madhu Khanna (1979: 74)

[25] CG Jung, The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga, p4

[26] Jung explains the term "libido" and its manifestations and transformations in his Collected Works, Vol. 5, Chapters II and III.

[27] Bihar School of Yoga established the Bihar Yoga Bharati for advanced studies in yogic sciences in 1994. It offers Certificate, Diploma and Post Graduate degrees in Yoga Philosophy, Yoga Psychology and Applied Yogic Science. The institution has primarily based its statements and teachings about Kundalini yoga on the experiences and visions of renowned yogis in meditation. It has won acceptance because of the far reaching benefits it has been able to give to people from around the world. It is interested in research studies in collaboration with scientists and scientific institutions on the psychophysiology of the Kundalini phenomenon. I believe it is already engaged in such work. A brief chapter serving as an introduction to some key issues of interest in this regard is contained in Section 4 of Kundalini Tantra by Swami Satyananda Saraswati.

[28] "The very word kriya means activity or movement and in this context activity or movement of awareness or consciousness. The word kriya also means practical or preliminary and in this sense it means the preliminary practice which leads to yoga; yoga here meaning the culmination, the union...kriya yoga does not ask you to curb your mental fluctuations, but asks you to purposely create activity in your consciousness. In this way, mental faculties are harmonized and flower into their fullest potential, and coordination is brought about between the nervous system and brain." Swami Satyananda Saraswati , A Systematic Course in the Ancient Tantric Techniques of Yoga and Kriya, p5

[29] "The body itself is the temple; the *jiva* (soul) is the God Sadashiva (reigning deity of the *ajna chakra* located in the centre of the head)." Kularnava Tantra 9.42. Translated by MP Pandit (1975: 11)
[30] Kundalini Tantra pp.14-17

[31] According to Swami Satsangananda Saraswati (1984) these symbols "can be considered products of subjective experiences that have been verified objectively. They are eternal archetypal symbols which can evoke profound spiritual experiences in man, no matter to which nationality or religion he belongs."

[32] A Systematic Course in the Ancient Tantric Techniques of Yoga and Kriya p582. The physical practices (*pranayam* and *mudras*) associated with the activation of the third eye are described in different publications of the Bihar School of Yoga. See also Kundalini Tantra pp.193-200

[33] A Systematic Course in the Ancient Tantric Techniques of Yoga and Kriya p582

[34] Ibid p583

[35] Definitions of icon and index have been borrowed from Fiske, Introduction to Communication Studies p47

[36] The terms signifier and signified are being used as defined by Saussure, Ibid p44

[37] *Pawan muktasanas* "remove blockages which prevent the free flow of energy in the body and mind". Energy is blocked through "bad posture, disturbed bodily functions, psychological or emotional problems or an imbalanced lifestyle" <u>Asana Pranayam Mudra Bandha</u> by Swami Satyananda Saraswati p21.
Practices adopted included: *Pawanmuktasana* Group 1, pp.23-44. *Pawanmuktasana* Group 2, *Uttanapadasana, Chakrasana, Padasanchalana, Jhulana Lurkhasana* and *Naukasana* pp.47-59 *Pawanmuktasana* Group 3, Rajju Karshanasana p61, *Chakki Chalanasana, Nauka sanchalanasana, Kashta Takshanasana* pp.63-66

[38] *Marjori*, also known as the "cat stretch", is part of the series that controls the major *vajra naadi* which regulates the urino-genital system. It is performed maintaining awareness in the *svadhisthana chakra*. <u>Asana Pranayam Mudra Bandha</u> by Swami Satyananda Saraswati p119.

[39] Awareness is retained in the *svadhisthana chakra*. Ibid p121

[40] *Setu* is part of the backward bending series which prevents neuromuscular imbalances of the vertebral column. Awareness is maintained in the *manipur chakra*. Ibid p219

[41] A forward bending position that stretches the vertebra and increases vitality in the body, particularly in the spinal cord and brain; awareness is maintained in the *svadhisthana chakra*. Ibid p230

[42] Performed to counter the forward bend of the preceding position; awareness is maintained in the *anahat* or *vishuddhi chakras*.

[43] *Yogamudra* is a relaxing practice performed to ease the spine after the extreme bend of the previous position; awareness is maintained in the *manipura chakra*. Ibid p182

[44] This is a spinal twist. It is always recommended to incorporate at least one twisting position into every *asana* programme to regulate health of the whole body-mind system; awareness is maintained on the *Ajna chakra*. Ibid p.254

[45] *Surya Namaskar*, or Salutations to the Sun, is a dynamic series of forward and backward bends that are performed by rotating internal awareness between the *anahat - vishuddhi - svadhisthana – ajna - vishuddhi - manipura – svadhisthana - vishuddhi – ajna - svadhisthana - vishuddhi* and *anahat chakras* in sequence to the accompaniment of appropriate *beej mantras*. Ibid pp.159 – 178

[46] Ibid p363

[47] Ibid p377

[48] Ibid p394

[49] Ibid pp.379-385. This practice is developed in stages and includes the ability to retain inhaled and exhaled breath.

[50] Ibid pp.407-420

[51] Kundalini Tantra p252   Diagrams of these passages are on p265

[52] See Kundalini Tantra pp.265-267. These practices have been explained in different publications of the Bihar School of Yoga.

[53] See Kundalini Tantra pp.355-366. Examples of scientific research on the effect of meditation on the brain including what has been described as the "kindling" phenomenon causing the experience of a rush of energy associated with the "rising of Kundalini" have been mentioned. This occurs when the cerebral cortex is repeatedly pulsated with the heart beat, without other disturbances.

[54] Such practices are described as *japas*. Swami S. Saraswati, Meditations from the Tantras p127

[55] Some early journal entries dealing with creating/establishing *chakra* awareness are reproduced below: Date: 4.11.2000. "Today's work developed around the *anahat charka*; the heart space. The warm up was a slow spiral of the spinal cord, defined by movements of my hands and fingers. It traced clockwise patterns rising upwards and anticlockwise patterns descending downwards, in the region in front of my body along the line of the spinal cord. I felt the energy centre at *mooladhara*; the spiralling up; the spiralling down; small movements that entered within the spinal cord. *Manipura* was energised sitting in *vajra asana*, knees spread and breathing through the navel into the back. I then spread this energy using arm movements. *Anahat* work started with following the breath from the throat into the space in the chest contained by the diaphragm. Awareness of each inhalation; awareness of a white-silver channel between navel and throat; awareness of each inhalation and each exhalation along this channel; then descending

into chowk; pulling away the 'veils' in front of the heart and opening to the heart space; advancing in rhythm with a sliding movement of the feet; taking external space into the heart."

Date: 5.11 2000. "The warm-up today centred around seeing the *sushumna naadi* as a current of light – an elongated candle flame stretching the length of the spinal cord. The *Ida* and *Pingala* were used to cause left and right body movement in chowk."

Date: 7.11. 2000. "Today's warm up: floor rolls, pelvic girdle rolls, navel turns, heart circles, throat circles. One pace; different movements; when I dance and don't smile, it makes the smile surface in the body."

Date: 1.12.2000. "To activate the *chakras* while dancing you need strong Intention + Awareness. Do this by chanting + performing practices to sensitise the mind to *chakra* points. The Mind has to be concentrated; watch the disturbing thought; feel it intensely; dash it off; keep repeating the process."

Date: 2. 10. 2001. "You have two people inside yourself; the Self and the self. Let the Higher Self be your teacher; and your final authority."

Date: 3.12 2001. "A Golden Rule: *Chakra* points are activated by concentrated visualisation: physical contraction; breathing in and out through the point; colours and images; *beej mantras*. Dance exercises in chowk and tribhanga isolate points in the upper and lower torso as 'places of origin' for the movement impulse. These places of origin (when a *chakra* point) get activated by concentration when doing dance exercises. By thinking of the *chakras* instead of the physical body, you are getting to a more subtle part of yourself."

[56] *Ujjayini pranayam* has been described in Asana Pranayam Mudra Bandha p392 *Khechari mudra* has been described on p438.

[57] See alternative to *gyan mudra*, Prana Pranayam Prana Vidya p210.

[58] *Brahmari pranayam* has been described in Asana Pranayam Mudra Bandha p389.

[59] This is an adaptation of the *Shambhavi* practice described in Kundalini Tantra p281.

[60] Based on practice for *Anahat* Purification, Kundalini Tantra p220

[61] Based on *vishuddhi chakra kshetram* location and purification Ibid pp.228-9

[62] Based on *anuloma viloma pranayam* for *ajna chakra* activation, Ibid pp.194-5

[63] See Asana Pranayam Mudra Bandha. *Chakra* points for focusing awareness on are prescribed for almost every single physical practice mentioned.

[64] *Vajroli* and *Sahajoli Mudras*, Asana Pranayam Mudra Bandha, pp.471-2

[65] Odissi's Guru -choreographers often speak of having created their compositions by a 'stringing together of sculptural temple images'. These are primarily standing and sitting images of the languorous maiden motif of temple sculpture.

Chapter 6

A Way Forward

6.1 Discourse on the Criteria for New Choreography in Odissi

6.1.1 Contemporary Needs: 20th and 21st Centuries

Odissi gained its widespread popularity in the first few decades after the country's Independence. Orissa, from where this dance form originated, only became recognized as a separate province by the British in 1936[1] and so Odissi served as an important means of healing the cultural psyche of a people who had lived under colonial rule in a particularly forgotten backwater of India. Its contribution in this respect is still evident at inauguration speeches of dance festivals/seminars in the State where it is always cited as a major cultural achievement.

In the decades since Indian Independence, the country's intelligentsia, the target audience for classical Indian dance, has become less able to access its traditional arts due to changes in its cultural consciousness. Modern educated Indian society is gravitating towards the concerns and preoccupations of a developed world. Classical Indian dance is therefore functioning in a situation where its alleged target audience is, for all practical purposes, severing its connection with roots in myth and religion. Odissi has not come to terms with this fact. Its performances have been predictable for decades now, becoming progressively less interesting for a potentially very large audience.

In the present environment where economic forces decide the success or failure of any activity, Odissi holds a position which seems untenable. Despite being called a professional activity, most artists survive on financial support from sources other than that earned through performance. The majority of 'visible' dancers in fact, for all intents and purposes, play the part of being their own patrons[2]. Along with other recognised classical dance traditions, Odissi has fulfilled its initial task of establishing India's cultural identity in the modern world and now needs to find a new role.

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The interpretation of classicism within Odissi has had far reaching consequences on how the dance is practiced which needs to be reconsidered. It is believed to be an encoded system of movement and dance expounded on in sacred literature that embodies Hindu philosophical ideas. The technique has 'divine origins', having been initially learnt by highly evolved seers through devotion and deep meditation, and represents a time-tested way of achieving transcendence. Such knowledge therefore can only be effectively passed on by reverence and submission to the teacher; God and Guru must be synonymous.[3] The student - teacher relationship is sacrosanct and has to be treated as an externalised form of the individual's relationship with the Higher Self. The art lies in being able to depict "rigidly standardised" themes in "wondrous, ever-novel" ways.[4] Any change made to the codes and conventions of the dance would at best make the dance ineffective, and at worst, invite the wrath of the Gods.[5]

6.1.2 Directions being pursued within the Tradition

As stated earlier in the Introduction to this document, the study commenced in response to an increasing perception that classical Indian dance was unmindful of contemporary thinking and aesthetic requirements and was hence hampered in contributing to mainstream life. A significant reflection that the need for change had been recognised was that in May 2003, the Central Government Sangeet Natak Akademi organised a symposium and workshop entitled 'Performing Art Traditions of Orissa with reference to Odissi Dance'. The purpose of this workshop was to examine important traditions of performing arts of Orissa for their possible application in Odissi dance in the future by facilitating an "intense interaction within a select group of creative persons engaged in serious pursuit of practice and development of Odissi dance."[6] This was the first time such a workshop had been organised and it was hoped that this would both enrich and encourage the folk traditions, saving them from neglect due to lack of patronage and inject fresh thought into Odissi.[7] It was a unique event as a large proportion of well established Odissi dancers present including some who had grown up in Orissa, were seeing these little known traditions for the first time. This provided an understanding of how elements had been borrowed from the rural cultural bedrock of Orissa by the Gurus of Odissi, which

Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra described as having been an imperceptible, unconscious process for himself.

Amongst the second generation of dancers trained by the first Gurus, some experimentation along similar lines had already started. The most popular examples of this work included incorporating movements from the Chhau martial art form from Baripada in the Mayurbhanj District of Orissa, which was a direction that had been pursued by several dancers present. Illeana Citaristi described the Chhau tradition as being complementary to Odissi as it provided a range of vigorous jumps and leg movements that offset Odissi's lyrical vocabulary. Aloka Kanungo had worked with the acrobatic movements of the *gotipuas* to create a tableau composition that juxtaposed Odissi with *bandha nritya*.[8] Sharmila Biswas had worked with a Ghanta Mardala group of folk musicians from the Ganjam District of Orissa modifying their pneumonic patterns to make them usable for her Odissi. Sonal Mansingh and Aruna Mohanty presented excerpts from choreography in the abhinaya idiom using text and musical elements borrowed from the Pala tradition of folk musical theatre.

Some of these presentations were however met with reservation by several senior members of the gathering including Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra more 'faithful' disciples who remained protective of what they described as the 'pure tradition'. The contention was that these experiments were undermining the aesthetics of Odissi. Despite these views however, the general impression created by this initiative of the Sangeet Natak Akademi was that the primary criteria for acceptance of new work in Odissi was that it draw from its 'Orissan identity' and that dancers would be encouraged and supported to pursue experimentation using folk resources, as their teachers had done before them.

In January 2001, a single session seminar entitled "Contemporising Odissi Dance" had been organised in Bhubaneswar by Dr. Ratna Roy, an American based Indian choreographer,[9] where locally eminent Orissan Gurus, performers, musicians and a large body of the staff and students of the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya,[10] some faculty from the Utkal University of Culture and some students from Utkal University (non dancers/musicians), had been asked to define what constituted Odissi. The composite verdict listed on the blackboard by the end of the session read as follows:

1   Odissi dance reflects cultural roots in Orissa; it uses the Oriya language and expresses the sentiments of its people.

2   It is in praise of Lord Jagannath or dedicated to Lord Jagannath.

3   It conforms to Odissi's costume, jewellery and external observances in performance.

4   It adheres to the "lyrical grammar of its style".

Such views expressed three years ago leave scant room for playing with signifiers in the dance medium. In the light of the Sangeet Natak Akademi seminar, these parameters can be considered as having extended themselves to include borrowing dramatic elements from the more vigorous movement vocabulary of the Chhau tradition. The perception that any radical changes of theme, presentation, movement material, language and sound are not acceptable to the fold however continues to remain.

Dr Roy had introduced the discussion by regretfully stating that she had been asked by Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, whom she had just visited (but who could not attend the discussion), not to call the work she was doing Odissi. The video clips of her choreography on American students shown at this seminar addressed social issues of black empowerment and clearly did not conform to the criteria on the board. Ram Hari Das, an eminent musician and teacher at Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya made the statement in response to Dr Roy's presentation that "As long as it is Odissi using new themes and new music, let us see it. If it is not, it is irrelevant". 'New music' referred to new compositions in Odissi's genre of music.[11]

These responses can be explained perhaps by understanding that when new work is made that denies its temple legacy and attempts instead to break ground addressing secular/social issues it can find itself having to work with an inconsistent palette of colours and invites rejection by the tradition. If choreographic subject matter is however solely confined to Hindu myths and devotional literature, cosmopolitan audiences are hard to access. Finding appropriate subject matter that

has relevance to today's audiences becomes an important first task in extending the repertoire.

6.1.3   The Resistance to Change

Significantly, the hesitancy and lack of ability to work with new ideas and independent visions in Odissi, amongst the younger dancers, seemed to be directly proportional to the individual's identification with the *guru-shishya parampara*. As a case in point, Sujata Mahapatra, student and daughter-in-law of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra who lives and teaches in his *gurukul* on his behalf, had said on several occasions in informal interactions with this researcher that till her father-in-law was alive she would not do her own choreography. She however seemed to want to do this if her circumstances would permit it but asserting 'an independent artistic identity' was synonymous to her with undermining her Guru's authority and position.

Another common perception in the tradition seemed to be that Odissi was 'curtailed' in a free exploration of the dance medium by traditional injunctions on how to do and present it, which were non-violable, being rooted in religious tradition. Surrendering these restrictions was tantamount to loosing the identity of the form, and in an amorphous way, totally sacrilegious. This 'psychological legacy' was carried long after dancers left their teachers and started functioning independently in different parts of the world.

A view expressed by some to explain the seeming inability/lack of interest in charting an independent course was that religion based arts when presented in their traditional forms were important to today's world as they provide a 'final bastion' of an emotional and mythic framework to deal with chaos. The Goddess destroying evil, Krishna as the wise friend, confidant and lover etc., served to nourish the soul and urgently needed to be rediscovered by the present world. By remaining steadfast in their present form, the classical arts were therefore performing an invaluable function and needed to present their case as such.

Such deeply ingrained views seem to have been successfully countered by several Indian classical dancers and dance companies working in Bharat Natyam and

Kathak, perhaps due to the significantly larger number of dancers in these disciplines in the Indian diaspora. As is to be naturally expected, they have been exposed to contemporary dance in a concerted way and its ideas have filtered into their work. This change of climate however has yet to acquire a significant momentum in Odissi, either in India or abroad.

6.1.4 Criteria for Experimentation

My personal interest was developing performances as meditative events for the dancer/s in which audiences from different cultural backgrounds could participate and I did not find the traditional practice of Odissi in the way it was taught, performed and choreographed, fulfilling this need. I was in full agreement with the opinion that exploring traditional resources in the creation of new work was a useful direction to pursue but my interest in folk performances was specifically focussed on understanding the consciousness transforming devices used in dances performed as part of ritual worship.

Extending Odissi's range of body movements, instrumentation and literary resources using elements specific to this region were important as they would retain Odissi's distinction and also liberate it from its present choreographic patterns and practices. I did not however empathise with the stipulation that the use of non-Orissan sources would 'diminish' Odissi. Choreographic experimentation using meditative devices borrowed from other disciplines seemed to me an appropriate course of experimentation to pursue even if it deviated from the Orissan traditional vocabulary of movement and from text in Oriya or other Indian languages.

In the *Shabda Nrutya* form seen for the first time by this researcher at the Sangeet Natak Akademi seminar, dance created a meditative, trance space, by simple repetitive patterns of synchronised sound and movement, using the body in tribhanga along with other elements of Odissi's vocabulary.[12] When viewing this dance, its underlying grammar was difficult to discern and it hence remained a 'crude' performing art form in comparison to Odissi. The basic device of using repetitive patterns of sound and movement to make dance a form of ritual worship

was however much clearer here than in Odissi, which had acquired a sophisticated and artificial façade during the course of its decades on the concert stage.

Still movement transitions as used in hatha yoga were also a highly effective means of working through the body to experience states of mental stillness. These transitions were traditionally performed in silence and the yoga practitioner encouraged to hear sounds internally as part of the process of achieving a heightened state of consciousness. Hatha yoga's vocabulary of body postures offered a wide range of body designs to work with. Tantric chants and percussive sounds offered acoustic templates to experiment with. These became challenging avenues to explore. The stated objective of the Indian performing arts was Self realisation and these elements provided useful building blocks in pursuing this direction through dance.

It was apparent however that to do this, an alternative working process incorporating other disciplines and based on self-exploration and self reliance was needed. I was personally indebted to the Gurus of Odissi but I was of the view that the demerits of this centuries old teaching system weighed heavily against its merits. In my understanding of Odissi, it had arrived at a point of discomfort with traditional modes of teaching and learning by being unwisely selective in its allegiance to elements of its tantric legacy.

6.2 Reconsidering the Teaching-Learning Equation

6.2.1 Dynamics of the *Guru-shishya Parampara*

We know that the creation of Odissi as a 'classical dance' that was to be a 'spiritually superior art straight from the temple worship accorded to Lord Jagannath', was possible because of a strong political desire in the State to claim a cultural identity for Orissa. The repertory created by the Gurus with this support

system, was unquestionably a major creative achievement based on personal interpretations and experimentations in movement, text, music and dance. The respect they command within the tradition is therefore absolutely justified.

Gurus however seem to have failed to appreciate the importance of the stages of their own creative journey and to facilitate a similar process in their students. They have demanded instead that this created tradition be continued as a 'final' form. The *paramparas* teach technique in a form rigidly circumscribed by the individual Guru's personal style of embodiment. This applies as much to the use of the body as it does to the form, structure and finer nuances of the choreography in the repertoire. Individual teachers claim variously to have "special knowledge", "real understanding", "refined sensibilities" etc., and to use this as a 'power lever' demanding the student surrender personal artistic integrity and identity. This insular mode of functioning is not gender specific and has been embraced by female second generation performers functioning as Gurus as well. The end result has been a similar sustained suppression of creativity in the body of students they have groomed. As a result of this, an "independence of vision" for the *shishya* is hard to develop and to be appreciated has largely meant to be seen performing a market-tested product.

Authorship of a traditional composition becomes a complex subject when the piece has been taught and re-taught by several teachers. Through time, and through the process of 'transmission', the palette of movement ideas developed by the first Gurus get naturally and inevitably modified. Indian art has had a long history of not recording the names of its artistic creators, and of building its edifices through multiple authorship over many generations. Classical Indian traditions were created in an environment where 'greatness of being' was synonymous with an absence of ego. Contemporary classical Indian dance however does not subscribe to this ideology and compositions are always introduced by mentioning their original choreographer.

A lot of teaching by second generation Gurus is however done cloaked in unfounded personal prejudices about "purity" of form and "sanctity" about the composition as it was first taught to them. Great store is placed on being the 'direct disciple' of a well established Guru, even though the rendering of a composition may

be better in a dancer more distantly related to the primary members of the lineage. Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, a founding Guru of the tradition, insists that the original structure and method of embodiment of the composition be regarded as the 'correct' version; everything else being incorrect. Over the decades he has been teaching however, original structures of his own compositions have also been modified by himself and one generation of students have learnt the composition differently from the next. Older students coming back to his class after many years respond to this situation by modifying what they do to accommodate the 'updated' version. This is done with deference and good humour, even though it might be accompanied by an uncalled for dressing down.

Despite these commonly acknowledged facts, disciples close to their Guru often express displeasure when a familiar composition is performed by anyone in a modified way. It is regarded as a sign of disloyalty as it usually happens when the disciple has broken away from the teacher. This environment of discomfort associated with change, has discouraged successive generations of students from exploring ways of embodying movement that accesses personal creativity. It has arrested the natural process of exploring choreographic forms as part of the learning process in dance. This has contributed significantly to the fact that the main body of the Odissi repertoire has been performed by different dancers for decades, building the present perception that the classical dance forms have nothing fresh to say.

In the light of this, it can be contended that the Odissi tradition has remained tied to its notion of "spiritual art" but is in actuality subverting the process of "self-actualisation", and by doing this is in reality divorced from spirituality as defined and understood by the tradition it claims to represent. Due to the deference accorded to Guru's by *shishyas,* this situation is hardly questioned. In the context of contemporary expectations/requirements from the performing arts, this becomes an obstacle to a fulfilling experience of dance for both the dancer and the audience and the tradition that was so successfully created, is stymied in blossoming further.

It is useful to make a comparison with western requirements of artistic activity at this point, as that is the direction of thought Indian elite audiences in the country's major metropolitan cities have taken and their support is crucial for the future of the tradition. The term 'contemporary' used in the context of western art

can be seen to refer to works that reflect a process of analytic deconstruction of individual/collective experience and an expression/interpretation of this, through the eclectic use of varied signification systems. This approach to art promotes distilling life experiences to underlying themes and demands an abstraction of thought patterns accompanied by a reassembling of signifiers to create self-expressive meaning. From the perspective of the Indian world view concerned with transcendence in art, this can arguably be considered as an "other" means with which to become the "Witness" described by Patanjali's Yoga Sutras in an earlier chapter. In this way it becomes an equally significant "spiritual" act for its practitioners as well. Such considerations provide a window of understanding between contemporary art and the Indian artistic tradition.

The lack of substantial creative growth in the tradition fifty years after its creation is regrettable and an appreciation of contemporary artistic ideas, especially among Odissi's purists with highly developed technical skills, could yield the much-desired 'fresh air' the tradition requires. Given such needs, the Sangeet Natak Academi seminar held in 2003 acquires special significance and represents a first step in encouraging and supporting change within the tradition.

6.2.2 Choreography and 'Transmission' of Repertory in the *Parampara*.

The process through which Odissi is learnt is revealing of the importance of sound in the classical dance system. In a typical classroom situation, the Guru begins to conduct the class using pneumonic syllables which he/she recites while the student performs body movement.[13] Exactitude in the translation of the verbal pattern uttered, into its appropriate use of effort in the lower body and feet, often becomes the whole objective of the class. Dancers vary in their aptitude for music, and the ones that have musical talents are better able to understand pneumonic syllables than those that are not so inclined. Several teachers within the tradition have expressed the view that unless a student can verbally pronounce and correctly articulate the *bols* required of the dance sequence being taught, despite having other desirable qualities as a dancer, they would never be able to render it well. Dance students in the traditional *Guru-shishya paramparas* become victims of insecurity

about their ability to dance on account of this and their ability to articulate *bols* correctly also determines whether they can "take the Gurus place" and conduct a class for younger students. In this sense command over pneumonic syllables is synonymous with traditional authority.

New compositions are created in the Odissi tradition by the guru-choreographer, in collaboration with musicians. Traditionally the Guru speaks or sings the *bols* and demonstrates its accompanying movement which is then imitated by the student. Quite often movements are not demonstrated by the Guru, but indicated or 'described' instead. The dancer/s being used to make the work on function as 'willing bodies' on which the 'master carves a form'. This has been the dominant equation in the tradition, and when operating to the exclusion of other collaborative and improvisational methods of working, curtails creative inputs from the students.[14]

Raags and *taals* are open structures but the pallavi built on them is a set sequence of steps. If its authorship could be acknowledged as lying in the creation of the original idea-sound-movement nexus, it could be looked at as an open field of melodic and rhythmic structures. Subsequent manipulations of this material, which seem to be a natural happening, can then also be acknowledged as such. This would open the tradition to creative growth while continuing to acknowledge its original choreographer - Guru. In the case of narrative abhinaya, myths need to be open to individual hermeneutic interpretation in order to live; indeed that is what constitutes their strength. Here again the transmission process can put emphasis on improvising with meanings and interpretations instead of reproducing a set composition of moves and facial expressions as is the present practice.

Ideas of inter-authorship in the choreographic process, and of the need for a personal embodiment of a traditional movement structure, remain completely alien to the traditional teaching process. This conditioning has taken firm root because of the long historical and psychological associations in the Indian tradition between "dance rules" and religious practice, and the high platform always accorded to the 'spiritual leader' or Guru. It has resulted in a plethora of dancers trained in repertory, but psychologically reduced to believing that only what the Guru does is "right", and whatever they themselves do requires approval by the Guru before it can be deemed

worthy. Such perceptions leaves little space for a creative dialogue in the learning environment and become major obstacles to the student acquiring a sense of ownership of the material being taught. Most dancers who have make a meaningful contribution to the tradition seem to do so after severing of ties with their Gurus which given the ideology of the *gurukul*, is both unnecessary and unfortunate.

6.2.3 The Process of Learning

Right from the beginning of the training process, the dancer is aware that the dance is meant to address a deity and 'spiritually nourishing' the viewer is regarded as the performer's greatest challenge. A technically competent Odissi dancer can access a heightened state of consciousness in performance aided by the mesmeric effect of rhythm and movement, which is a technique learnt from the Guru. Personal beliefs in dance as a path of yoga become assets in working towards this objective. Given the themes being danced in Odissi, this experience is greatly facilitated when the dancer is psychologically ready to experience the act of dancing as a communion with the deity and under such circumstances, discriminating between what is useful and harmful in traditional teachings and practices become complex issues for the student to resolve.

This issue needs to be addressed before a more creative working environment in Odissi is achieved. It can be tackled with initiatives that encourage peer groups of dancers to explore working collaboratively. Work on technique needs to be oriented towards being a self exploratory process, not governed so much by what has been taught by the Guru, but by what feels right in the body. This would empower dancers to make value judgments about what they are doing and create incentives to perform well through peer pressure and audience response and not through the Guru's approval only.

The tradition has different perspectives on what constitutes "purity" in technique for Odissi and the emphasis placed by every Guru on the "purity" of his/her particular style should be recognised as constituting an individual perspective only. These ideas have helped protect the original choreographic compositions of Odissi Gurus (in a system where artistic copyright does not exist), and it has also set

technical standards of excellence in some schools. The heavy price for this has however been the student dancer's lack of artistic freedom resulting in dances being embodied with 'pasted smiles'. While charting a course for an alternative education system is greatly desirable, it is beyond the purview of this study. Recognising these issues has however been an important step to creating new work building on a personal understanding of what is important in tradition.

6.3 Choreography that changes Traditional Practice

Having been a product of the *Guru-shishya parampara*, my first requirement had been to prove competency in working with traditional choreographic structures by making new work that satisfied its requirements. This entailed developing clear personal criteria for evaluating Odissi movement that was consonant with the tradition's religious background; embodying Odissi as a personal interpretation of a spiritual discipline; and forming "collaborative" equations with traditional musicians.

The classical recital did not have general sustained appeal because its audio and visual variations were limited. It had the wherewithal for marrying dance with spirituality but was constrained by its orientation in dealing with other objectives. The criteria identified for making new work was that it expand Odissi's palette of sounds and movement, include wherever desired, resources from different countries and in different languages, provided it was expressive of a personal understanding of spirituality. Three pieces were created to meet these requirements:

The choreographic explorations described below are works in progress in that they contain seed ideas that can be developed into longer pieces. They have focussed on the poietic process of Odissi's creation, charting a course for embodying Odissi movement in a more personally powerful way by using yogic techniques for the integration of the body and mind. These works, Yantra, Saraswati and Phenomenal Woman, expand the parameters of the traditional nexus between sound

and movement by changing both sound and movement. They build on the image of the Odissi dancer as the yogini or female ascetic-seeker in Yantra and Saraswati, and that of an 'accessible' human being in Phenomenal Woman.

6.3.1 Yantra for Three (Refer to: CD 3 – Yantra trio)

Yantra started as solo improvisations derived from movement adaptations to kriya yoga exercises described in Chapter 4, exploring co-ordination between movement and breath, while touching points in space around the body. In so doing the idea explored was of the body having a sheath of breath, interpenetrating the physical body which could be energised by moving attention along its channels or *nadis.* References were made to chowk and tribhanga as points in transition, but these were not governing body pivots as in traditional Odissi. Stillness using hath yoga asana as dance movement were also explored. After a period of such improvisations, the following choreographic objectives were identified for using this material as a dance:

- To separate movements of the upper and lower body and use these as a means of developing both self awareness and changed visual images.

- To take the idea of using the body as a *yantra* when dancing Odissi's geometric forms further, by creating visible geometric forms in space through dance.

- To use movements based on hatha yoga in Odissi's choreography.

- To keep the face, usually highly expressive, deliberately blank as a means to absent the "personality" and make the dance a meditation.

- To use ritual chants as the 'acoustic blueprint' for movement.

- To simplify Odissi's costume.

These objectives were explored using repeating *beej* mantras or seed syllables from the tantric tradition of Devi worship as a 'pulse measure'. The idea for this soundscape crystallised after attending a fire sacrifice (*yajna*) for the Goddess Chandi in Bihar, India, where her chants filled the atmosphere from early morning to evening for five days, having the effect of "bombing the mind" from thinking about much else. Yantra began with a repetition of the seed syllables *Lam, Vam, Ram, Yam, Ham, Om* and then changed to the seed syllables *Aim Hring Kling* which continued till the end sequence of the piece. The end section was short and used the names of the Goddess Durga as commonly chanted in worship. The monotonous, constant refrain *Aim Hring Kling* was hence the dominant sound throughout, coloured by adding voices chanting the same mantra to a doubled pace, punctuated by tribal ritual chants and synthesised sound accents. This use of sound departed from tradition in not using pneumonic patterns *(bols)* or a melodic idea as its starting point for movement.

The difficulty with the dance piece for a long time after the objectives had been defined, and basic movement material developed as a sequence of short sections, was the need to maintain virtual lines in space that would register in time, satisfactorily, as a solo. My intention was to create a 'charged energy field' through changing geometric forms, into which the dancing body could 'integrate itself'. I invited Masako Ono and Dafne Rusam, two dancers interested in this work to join me in Yantra and modified the movement sections for three people. The composition crystallized with three performers as a 'first piece' or prelude to dance. It was experienced as a 'private ritual' that energised the body in preparation for the concentration required for delivering classical dance work.

'Yantra for three' is a spatially self-contained piece that can be placed in different environments as its primary cohesive force is the relationship between the three dancing bodies. The dancers enter the performance space with similar movements from different points on its extremity, facing in three separate directions at all times. The pace of the piece is slow and sustained with instances of stillness. They come together at the centre to form a single tight body facing the audience. This centre then unfolds as a series of synchronised movements of the eyes, head, torso and feet. It then breaks to form an introverted 'power circle' which then scatters into changing linear progressions within the framework of a rigid grid. These

lines are drawn with simple repetitive movements and periodic returns to the centre, developing a geometric energy field. A self-standing section explores slow sustained transitions between positions demanding stillness and balance.

The dancers then adopt the chowk stance simultaneously, establishing a triangular spatial formation with strong, grounded energy. This dissolves into a moving spiral from which individual bodies separate to make a short private address to the Goddess. The piece ends with gestures of *namaskar* performed with sudden and sustained dynamics addressed to three different points of a triangle. One by one, each of the three dancers retreats from the dancing space to take up meditative positions on the periphery while focused on the now empty centre. The chant ends with three repetitions of *Om*, where the arms and eyes draw energy from the empty centre of the dance space, into themselves. Each performer's focus is directed inwards and the repetitive chant promotes entering into a quiet mental space.

The costume for Yantra was designed to create the image of adorned female acolytes, inspired by the sculptural representations of the Yoginis. A white coarse dhoti was worn as a lower garment, and an off shoulder sari blouse created that was covered with a diaphanous material giving the impression of being a casually tied cover over the breasts. The colour of the upper garment was different for each performer and was chosen as stark splashes of single colours in white, red and black. The hair was tied on one side of the head in a tight bun. Jewellery was sparse compared to what is normally worn for Odissi, and each of the three performers had large individual pieces worn on different parts of the body. The red forehead *bindi* was replaced by two white lines.

Yantra conformed to Odissi's stated purpose of being a means of yoga directed at attaining moksha and allowed for an experience of what such a dance practice should feel like, much more than in a traditional piece of nritta for all three of us doing it at that time. It made the idea of yantras and chakras more tangible to both the dancers and the viewer. While the piece was being made, we had other dancers present in Bhubaneshwar from different countries living in the house that served as our studio, who participated in some of these exercises and found them greatly beneficial to their understanding of Odissi.[15]

The piece allowed for an excellent opportunity for introducing embodying Odissi using the tantric body map to other dancers. Work with the dancers initially commenced by leading warm ups described under Kriya in Movement in Chapter 4. These were extended into further tasks where Odissi's linear movement patterns were performed together focusing on the idea of drawing 'energy lines in space' between us. I also introduced movement transitions connecting still points drawn from yoga describing how to embody them by shifting focus along the spinal cord. This allowed separate sections to be developed which were then arranged together to reflect interpretations in dance of some stages of tantric worship performed on a yantra: it included entering the ritual arena, consolidating the centre, unfolding from this centre in linear progressions, individually 'reaching out' to the Goddess from within the jointly energised performance space, and finally emptying this space. The choreography executed the idea of creating a virtual yantra in the dance space using moving bodies as 'lines of energy'. The whole experience validated the approach to working with tantric ideas as a direction to pursue for creating contemporary Odissi and initiated debate amongst us about pursuing this course further by forming a dance company. It remains to be seen whether this will be possible.

From my understanding of Chandralekha and Daksha Seth's choreography which have been referred to in the Introduction to this document, the process of creating choreographic images with the dancing body was driven by their visual effect. Yantra's movements had developed from dance improvisations using kriya yoga techniques. They provided a means of experiencing focus on chakra points during the articulation of body movement in dance, and derived their power from this intention. The primary strength of the piece to my mind lies in the fact that it became a means of experiencing Odissi movement as a meditation by all three of us performing it.

The piece has so far been performed just once, and in Bhubaneswar, for the valedictory function of an international seminar on the theme of "Reframing Gender in the Context of the Culture of India" organised by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (New Delhi) and the Utkal University. The event was attended by the Chief Minister of Orissa and security regulations required entry to be limited to invitees. The audience present was small comprising women delegates primarily from India, the USA and Australia but it was seen by many more people as the

Orissan television flashed excerpts on two occasions. It received a very mixed reception in that it was highly appreciated by the international audience present and not understood by the majority of Orissan viewers. The local organisers were initially concerned that we were not "appropriately dressed" for the dignitaries present but these reservations were forgotten when the piece was warmly received by the international delegates. After the television coverage, we received sceptical inquiries from local dancers and academics as to what kind of dancing it had been. One Professor of Anthropology regretfully stated that we seemed to have missed the central importance of *bhava* (emotional interpretation) in Odissi dance.

Yantra's mixed reception focuses attention again on the differences in aesthetic perceptions between Odissi's original creators and receivers within Orissa, and the larger world the tradition needs to consider for its further growth. Borrowing Jacobson's rationale for understanding the process of communication that occurred between the work and Odissi's traditional viewers in this case[16], the following explanations about what transpired can be suggested. The audiences expected the performance to be Odissi as they knew it, as on such occasions a 'chaste' classical performance would normally have been presented. The movement code was recognizably Odissi but also included yogic postures that were alien to the tradition and hence 'out of place'. Moreover, good art is associated with strong, readable facial expressions, but in this case the emotive function expected of Odissi (and considered its most important feature) seemed to have been deliberately ignored, to the extent that the performers were not even smiling. The referential functions of the piece were religious but used tantric sources that were associated with non-mainstream, dubious practices. All these transgressions were accentuated by the costume which used a one shoulder sleeveless upper garment and was clearly taking impertinent liberties with accepted codes; this could have been read as being disrespectful in a society where being modestly dressed in front of elders is a sign of respect.

The performance however appeared to be successful as it was being viewed by international delegates, the Chief Minister and was featured on television. The piece was also particularly appropriate for the occasion as it was performed by a mixed cultural group of performers, Japanese, Italian and Indian (with a partial foreign status; I have a white, British husband and am a Hindi speaking non-Oriya from New Delhi). The presence of 'foreign' dancers, especially non-Indians, is still a

source of great pride and interest even though they are perceived as never being able to 'match the grace of an Oriya girl'. The subject matter of the piece was also particularly relevant to the conference and was not a presentation of a familiar well-worn theme. This left the viewer with the task of dealing with unfamiliar, disturbing and yet inadvertently interested responses to the event. In the case of the above mentioned Professor who considered himself a responsible and learned audience of the Odissi tradition, these were expressed as negative statements towards the work.

6.3.2 Yantra Solo (Refer to: **CD 3 – Yantra solo**)

Yantra was returned to as a solo because the group had to disperse. Having been developed as a dance for three where our relationship to each other had been of primary importance, it could never be coherent as a solo without a major reorientation. I however continued to work with its soundscape and its basic ideas as it provided a structured sound and movement 'dance space', in which to use yogic principles and focus attention on different *chakra* points on the spinal cord during dance, as a body discipline. As I worked with it, I came to see its potential as an 'open form' for the exploration of dance as yoga for dancers from different backgrounds. Having the spatial template created on three dancers and using it as a solo required 'filling up' the space through strong movement projections, which was also a useful exercise.

After its first performance (see section 6.3.5) the piece was recorded again in January 2005 to an altered, slower pace and a few sections edited. Percussion with the traditional pakhawaj was added towards the end. This revised score provided a new template to work with where the slowed down pace of the chant allowed Odissi movement to be experienced, one body part at a time, in a greatly reified way. Focus was relocated from the idea of forming spatial patterns as yantras, to using the body as an 'antenna', or yantra. Movement was embodied intending the notion of the body projecting itself into a 360 degree virtual energy field. This unfolded as in a pallavi through isolations of the eyes, neck, head, chest and feet, explored while staying in the same point in space. These isolated movements then extended into space through simple linear movement pathways. The section of still, held moments in *asanas* was retained and used to form the 'centre' of the piece. The end was

marked by positions of salutation to different aspects of the Goddess Durga remaining at one central spot.

This piece with its new sound track and changed intention is presently on the drawing board as a solo, but provides an excellent space in which to experience Odissi movement as meditation.

6.3.3 Saraswati (Refer to: **CD 3 – Saraswati**)

Having come from the Indian classical dance tradition where dance uses sound as an 'effort *mantra*' for movement, Laban's contribution to the liberation of dance from its dependence on music was of great interest to me.[17] It challenged Indian dance's perception of movement as the inextricable, corporeal counterpart of music where the 'signifier' was always a composite sound-movement entity and provided freedom to create dance without having to be governed by musicians. The first piece that had explored dissociating Odissi movement from musical sounds altogether had been Gitanjali (described in Chapter 4), where choreographic material had been created in silence. It had allowed for improvisation to the words free of the dictates of rhythm and melody, and as mentioned earlier, served as a working tool for using classical movement to express thought and word in action, at to its own natural rhythm. Saraswati was the second exploration of this kind. It was a translation from Sanskrit of a tantric prayer to Saraswati, Goddess of Wisdom as Devi Kundalini, by Arthur and Ellen Avalon.[18]

Traditionally when invoking a deity through prayer, the powers associated with the God are represented by depicting the objects held in the hands while the deity's character is expressed as a mood on the face. Saraswati set out to invoke the presence of a Hindu deity as in classical choreography, using a spoken prayer in English The text being mystical in content, provided interesting material for interpretation into movement sequences which could be both literal and non-literal. I starting working on the piece after completing Yantra for three, and was hence also interested in continuing the exploration of body images drawn from hatha yoga. While classical hand gestures were used through out the piece, the focus was on working with 'movement projection' from the spinal cord.

Saraswati required first memorising the prayer, getting a sense for its allegoric references and sketching *mudras* to work as a verbatim translation of word into gesture. I started with the body balanced on one leg and the arms held in the form of a *svastika* (a solar symbol in India), from which the idea of a slow sustained "drawing in" of energy was explored. At the end of this short sequence, the interpretation of the text commenced, with a sudden movement of the fingers. It was initially approached without any musical accompaniment. Saraswati's character as an embodiment of 'thought and feeling' combined with elements of 'power and action' was interpreted as a series of sustained body transitions punctuated with subtle sudden moments free of a rhythmic cycle. Interpretations in terms of body design remained almost always within the vocabulary and movement parameters of classical Odissi. The departures from this took the form of more elongated and strait usages of the limbs, especially in body designs that incorporated one leg stances.

After a basic structure of movement phrases had been formed, I worked with an assortment of scores to improvise with different ways of articulating these phrases using the dynamic line provided by the music. I found the "exalted" feeling created by western classical music was closer to the direction I wanted to give the movement, than any Indian classical score I listened to.[19] After a period of time however, I preferred to hear sound accents in my mind and work in silence, colouring the acoustic landscape for the movement material as it continued to evolve, with my own mind. I listened to recordings of live Hindu services from Skanda Vale: The Community of the Many Names of God, in South Wales, and adopted the practice of speaking the words of the prayer while performing movement, over these sounds.

The final version of this study used spoken text by Michael Weston without repeating lines at any point. The movement material was adjusted to the pace of their recitation and hence shortened. This was overlaid with the Prelude of Bach's cello suite No. 1 and a contemporary rendition of an early Christian chant composed in the Middle Eastern tradition by Vox so as to add atmosphere to the words. Phrases alternated between sustained transitions incorporating one leg positions, moments of suspended balance and sudden movement accented by footwork. The chowk position was used in a series of sharp turns as a non literal interpretation of word. Abstract phrases were interspersed with classical postures used to interpret the text. Sections

In times of peril may I never be bewildered
And may my mind work freely without impediment
In shastra, disputation and verse.

Saraswati continued the exploration of embodying movement through focus along the spinal cord, but provided a narrative to work with due to its textual imagery. It borrowed body positions from hatha yoga and blended them harmoniously with Odissi's vocabulary of *chowk-tribhanga-abhanga-samabhanga* and its technique of *abhinaya.* The piece was personally a stronger dance of 'invocation' than the traditional *mangalacharan* as it facilitated mental focus due to its approach to movement and its use of yogic positions. This was further aided by its sparse soundscape compared to its traditional counterpart, and to its powerful imagery in the English language to which I related strongly. It had no percussive structure with which to create 'charged space' as in a traditional composition and hence challenged my ability to dance images with strong intention, to give them power. I found this very rewarding as it forced me to focus on making the image of the Goddess 'real'. The 'stripping of Odissi dance embellishments' to activate 'core ideas rooted in tantric spirituality' was successfully performed as a solo in Saraswati.

6.3.4 Phenomenal Woman (Refer to: CD 3 – Phenomenal Woman)

Phenomenal Woman was a short study made as a sequel to Saraswati with the objective of exploring lighter subject matter using the technique of classical abhinaya. Its primary purpose was to dispel the common perception that this dance language is accessible only to initiated viewers. It was based on the poem "Phenomenal Woman" written in English by Maya Angelou. The text was interesting to me as it described 'a woman sure of herself' who bore resemblance to the *svadheenpatika nayika* of Sanskrit aesthetics.[20] The text was approached as a private, half-chuckled session of 'talking to oneself' in front of a mirror.

Phenomenal Woman made references to the 'alluring qualities of body one had in one's favour' and elements of this text could be literally interpreted through the postures and gestures of Odissi's abhinaya. The tribhanga body position which epitomised feminine grace in classical sculpture provided the dominant body design.

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The run in to the text was created using a tabloid of sculpturesque images in tribhanga borrowing the imagery of the *alasa-kanyas* of Orissan temple sculpture.[21] This sequence was visualised as an appearance at a fashion show, to the sound of flashing cameras simulating the atmosphere of a modelling ramp. The text started after walking off the ramp and 'entering a private dressing room'. The end of each verse was punctuated by the chowk motif to underline the repeating refrain *I'm a woman phenomenally. Phenomenal Woman, That's me.*

The process of memorising the words of the text and saying them while improvising movement, as used in Gitanjali and Saraswati was adopted again. The articulation of the words provided a dynamic template which was used to create textures in the weight, space, time and flow[22] of movement interpreting it. Within the parameters of Odissi's technique, speech determined whether its corresponding movement phrase was strong or light; direct or flexible; quick or sustained, fluent or bound. Andrea Oliver, a London based actress was initially requested to say the piece at a point where I already had a very clear idea how I wanted to embody the movement. Unfortunately I was not present when the recording was done and while it had been made very well, I found it impossible to use as the emphasis on words and consequently the dynamics it dictated, was completely different to the way I had envisaged it. Adapting my movement material to fit her verbal interpretation of the text required giving it a completely different treatment. This drew attention to the fact that when working with abhinaya in this way, the close connection between sound and movement remains, except that it now translates itself from music into speech; and movement. The piece was subsequently re-recorded with my voice and the exact intonations I wanted to give it.

Creating the piece underlined the importance of how a movement is embodied when using Odissi's dance language. A*bhinaya* is inherently adaptable for 'talking' about different things. The process of communication is achieved by distilling ideas in the text to their underlying *rasas* and evoking these through postures, gestures and facial expressions. For this 'language' to be well received, what is needed is clarity of intent and conviction in what is being said, expressed through facial expressions reflecting the mood of words. This essential skill was enhanced using sudden and sustained transitions between different classical Odissi body positions as punctuation marks, along with simple foot work in some places.

The rationale through this and previous experiments was that if the phenomenon of spirituality through art practice could be better understood and actualised in performance situations, it would develop greater interest in the 'feeling content' of a performance, shifting the present weight given to Odissi's conventions. This would free Odissi and enable it to play a more vital role in today's world. This is effectively done by a personal reinterpretation of spirituality in contemporary terms which is what Phenomenal Woman represents to me.[23] The piece has elicited 'delight' in viewers[24] because its tone and mood dispels all 'seriousness' associated with classical Indian dance while faithfully conforming to its vocabulary. Phenomenal Woman along with Saraswati and Gitanjali, demonstrate that Odissi's classical body work and mime can work effectively without its traditional supporting sung verse and percussive structure, encouraging interaction and exchange with other forms of contemporary performance.

6.3.5 "Odissi Mandala"

The solo pieces described above were performed along with some of the earlier more traditional works created as a one hour performance called "Odissi Mandala" , first presented in April 2004 sponsored by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage in New Delhi. The term *mandala* connotes a 'mystic circle' and also suggests the collation of several elements. It therefore is an appropriate name to present a series of individual pieces constituting a redefined classical recital.[25]

The performance was trilingual including text in English, Sanskrit and Braj Bhasha, and had in sequential order Saraswati, Pada Vande, Shyama, Gitanjali, Yantra solo (to sound track created for Yantra for three), Moksha and Phenomenal Woman. Saraswati and Pada Vande were both invocations that lead into each other; the former being spartan and the latter fuller in both sound and movement. Shyama and Gitanjali explored the nature of desire for God; Shyama being more celebratory in character, while Gitanjali portrayed a sharper, starker experience. Yantra provided a meditative space to 'detach the personality' from the dancer and prepared the ground for the 'yogic space' of Moksha, built on the foundation of tight rhythmic

movement and the 'drawing of virtual yantras in space'. Phenomenal Woman constituted the conclusion and provided the space to make 'human', personal contact with the audience, after the preceding sections concerned with deities and chants.

The creation of Odissi Mandala's components have piecemeal, focussed on a practical investigation of the premise maintained by the Indian tradition that dance was designed to provide 'moments of connectivity' between body and spirit which the audience could be part of. A new set of symbols that were mutually accessible to both classical dance and the contemporary audiences I sought to communicate with, were articulated. The soundtrack which constitutes the 'causal blueprint for dance' used traditional sung music and instrumentation, along with spoken English text, natural and synthesised sounds in a seamless, digitally recorded presentation for both nritta and nritya, incorporating elements of hatha yoga. This served to level signifiers from different referential systems which is unusual in the Odissi performance.

The performance assumed and thereby acknowledged that its Indian audience had a pan-national view of itself and that it was at least bilingual. This significantly changed the message of Odissi being 'traditional / regional' to that of it being 'contemporary', and thereby meant for the urban, cosmopolitan viewers I wanted to reach. The use of English against abhinaya as an integral component of the score provided fully comprehensible windows in the performance for English speaking global audiences as well. This facilitated sections danced to Sanskrit and Braj Bhasha to be viewed with greater engagement even when not verbally understood.[26]

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As mentioned in the Introduction to this project, the study commenced with the objective of understanding Odissi more fully and exploring how to dance it better. My use of spoken English stemmed primarily from a personal need to choreograph in a language that I thought and felt in. The physical absence of live musical accompaniment on stage demanded a more concentrated performance from me as the solo body on stage, in a 'charged space' I could modulate as the only performer. The choreography created was a means of arriving at ownership of the tradition (proved through the performance of Pada Vande and Moksha) and then of moulding it (in Shyama, Gitanjali, Yantra and Phenomenal Woman) to allow for a

more integrating and personal engagement with classical rules. In this I did seek to express an individual identity. What happened in fact, was that the process of addressing this task required engagement with the wider tradition of tantra, as it was that that provided the means for a more powerful dance space.

The essential breakthrough made and verified by this series of pieces has been the possibility of creating the psychological split between the 'self' and 'Self' within the dancing body, by intending to do so, aided by yogic techniques. I am responding to the 'hybridity' of myself to create works that are 'honest'. The framework for doing this and not getting lost in self-indulgence has been constant reference to yoga, the stated end purpose of classical Indian dance. I am suggesting that responding to the needs of today with this reference is a viable means for a tradition like Odissi to go forward.

This process also dissolves deep rooted boundaries between the body and mind and provides the basis for a creative, personal articulation of classical Odissi dance. It becomes a means of freeing the mind from its self-conscious limitations of being a 'classical Odissi dancer' and thereby embracing 'expanded parameters' with enhanced performance energy, as most literally expressed by Phenomenal Woman. This performance has prepared the ground for creating a contemporary genre of Odissi retaining its objective of providing a means for dialogue with God. The movement material is however created by the individual dancer, who personally interprets the basic principles of tradition and communicates in a language that is shared by herself/himself and the audience. This will I hope nurture tradition by making Odissi more accessible and relevant to many others who have formerly felt excluded from it.

Endnotes

[1] This was done as an administrative measure to put all major Oriya-speaking land areas under one jurisdiction. They had up to that point been administered through the Bengal and Madras Presidencies.

[2] This phenomenon applies not only to Odissi dancers in Bhubaneswar, but to the majority of classical dancers including those based in large metropolitan centers of the country. In a performance, the dancer is practically always underpaid, and left with no money after paying accompanists and expenses. This becomes a problem if the dancer wants to continue as such after marriage when she is no longer supported by her parents, unless her husband is willing to support her. It is unusual for a woman's in-laws to encourage their daughter-in-law's dance career and also very unusual for women to remain single in contemporary Orissan society. This accounts for the large number of women who give up dancing in their prime. Barbara Curda, PhD research scholar in Sociology at Universite de Toulouse-le-Mirail, has interviewed dancers working in Bhubaneswar who made comments that dance was a "costly profession". Her work examines gender issues in Odissi.

[3] Just as *"ghata"*, *"kalasa"* and *"kumbh"* all have the same meaning (a pot), so too "god" (*deva*), "sacred word" (*mantra*), and "teacher" (guru) are used in describing the same thing. Quote from the Kularnava Tantra, translated by Zimmer, Artistic Form and Yoga in the Sacred Images of India p207

[4] Ibid p187

[5] Ibid p199

[6] Excerpt of the invitation letter No. 4-5/Od.Sym/2003-2004/102 circulated to invited participants by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi.

[7] It is pertinent to quote Vatsyayan's (1997: vi) historical perspective on the history of Indian dance at this point: "whenever sophisticated forms reached a point of baroque ornateness verging on decadence it has been the full-throated primordial folk traditions which have helped resurrection and thus survival".

[8] *Bandh Nritya* or 'bound dance' is a popular item in the *gotipua* repertoire using severe backbends and acrobatic feats of balance to the rhythmic refrain of the pakhawaj and sung pneumonics.

[9] Faculty member at Evergreen College, Washington State, USA. The seminar was held on 15 January at Rotary Bhawan Bhubaneswar and was organised by SPIC-MACAY (Society for the Promotion of Classical Music and Culture Amongst Youth) a well established NGO working in arts education in India.

[10] A well-established Bhubaneswar institution imparting training in Odissi music and dance

[11] Ram Hari Das is a faculty member of Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya, Bhubaneswar where he is engaged in both teaching and researching indigenous music

[12] Audiovisual records of the presentations made at this seminar are available with the Sangeet Natak Akademi in New Delhi.

[13] Usually the Guru is male and the student is female. This gender division magnifies the teacher's authority which is underlined by the orchestra accompanying the dance, usually comprising male musicians. Even in case of some female presence, the orchestra is almost always dominated by men.

[14] When the repertoire was first created by Odissi's Gurus on the first generation of female performers in the tradition, the excitement of experimentation and improvisation to create a classical tradition must have charged the teaching-learning situation. This atmosphere was certainly present in the work Guru Kelucharan was creating on Odissi's foremost female performer, Sanjukta Panigrahi who was accompanied by her husband and eminent vocalist, Raghunath Panigrahi. Smt. Sanjukta Panigrahi is no longer alive to comment on the interaction. This statement is based on this researcher's informal interactions with both Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra and Raghunath Panigrahi.

[15] One of them evinced great interest in filming it for Swedish television and footage of the first two minutes was shot for this purpose.

[16] Fiske p35

[17] Valerie Preston-Dunlop and A. Sanchez-Colberg (2002) pp.92,94. Laban undertook "practical research into the rhythms of the moving human being and thence of the principles of rhythm, timing and dynamics of an autonomous dance art of the twentieth century, freed from music's meter....Rhythm became the felt rhythm of action–not metric, not counted. The inner resolve of the dancer dictated the rhythm through her attitude to timing, to strength and energy, to breathing and continuity...."

[18] Hymns to the Goddess, translated by Arthur and Ellen Avalon pp.67-74

[19] Perhaps this was because of the use of the English language as the starting point for making movements. Improvisations were done using Wieniawski's Legende on the violin played by Anne-Sophie Mutter, JS Bach's Suites Nos. 1, 3 and 6 for cello played by Andre Navarra and Prokofiev's Sonata for cello and piano, Opus No. 119.

[20] The *nayikas* are catagorised in terms of "the situations in which a woman may be placed in relation to her lover". The *svadheenpatika nayika* has her lover "under her subjugation", Rakesagupta (1995: 51). Phenomenal Woman was evocative of a common classical Indian dance theme of the woman adorning and admiring herself simultaneously, as she wears flowers, jewellery and fine clothing, in preparation for a meeting with her beloved.

[21] *Alasa-kanya* is the term used to describe the languorous maiden seen prolifically in Orissan temple sculpture. 16 forms of this motif have been described in the Shilpa Prakash written by Ramachandra Kaulachara, an Orissan text on temple architecture ascribed to the 12th century AD. Phenomenal Woman has borrowed images from her repertoire as *alasa* (languorous), *torana* (standing at a doorway), *mugdha*(a young innocent girl who can not hide her feelings, *manini* (offended), *dalmalika* (garlanding herself with a branch), *padmagandha* (smelling a lotus), *darpana* (looking at herself in the mirror), *ketakibharana* (adorned with flowers in her hair), *nupurpadika* (wearing anklets) and *mardala* (playing the drum)

[22] Laban's motion factors described in Effort (1947)

[23] Allegra Fuller Snyder (1991: 444) has suggested that in the "global, urban world" we now live in, we are far away from "bodily knowing" and to balance our psyches, need to return to an integrated awareness of time and space as in pre-industrialised societies. This need creates a "new aesthetic" for dance where we relate to space "through feeling, not seeing … If one can feel from an inner centre, one can relate to space from that centre".

[24] This piece has been performed on several occasions in informal forums both in India and in the UK along with one/two other traditional pieces. Whenever it has been presented, it has been the first piece commented on after the performance.

[25] The next logical step to this series of works will be to create compositions that retain the challenges and interest provided by working with sparse soundscapes and English text, but that also make forays into melodic refrains and pneumonic patterns to provide richer colour and texture to choreography. A very short beginning was made in this in the choreography of verse three of Gitanjali (see Chapter 4).

[26] It is common place for Indians living in metropolitan cities of the country to be fluent in English and one or more Indian languages.
Janet O'Shea (2003) pp.179-182 critiques works by Hari Krishnan (Canada), Lata Pada (Canada), Subathra Subramanium and Mayuri Boonham (UK), in Bharat Natyam, that explore changing the sound for traditional movement to incorporate spoken English and/or western music; Krishnan "equates the languages " of English and Telugu in the work *When God is a Customer*. These have been successful means by which to treat "bharatnatyam as an entity that responds to the hybridity of its immediate, urban environment... (p182)".

Conclusion

This thesis has examined Odissi's history and reviewed its claims of being an ancient art form performed as part of temple rituals. In the process it has separated facts from myths and used this knowledge in formulating a somatic approach to the practice of its traditional form. Choreographic studies have been created to illustrate ways in which this can be applied to make Odissi more accessible to both contemporary audiences and dancers. The study has also created information about the nature of Odissi's technique using terms and definitions articulated in Choreological Studies. In doing this, the thesis has presented new knowledge in four areas: it has provided an historical overview of Odissi through medieval architecture and sculpture presented on film; an understanding of Odissi's technique and forms of composition which was so far oral knowledge within the tradition only; a new way of embodying dance movement based on yogic principles that enhances performance skills and some choreographic studies using this.

Research commenced with the need to understand the codes of practice operating within Odissi, the objective being to find a more mainstream place for this traditional dance in the present day world. There was also a concern to address the needs of the "global, urban world" described by Allegra Fuller Snyder (1991) and

determine whether Odissi offered anything pertinent to such needs. Alongside this was the equally important concern and personal quest as a contemporary Indian dance artist within the tradition, to examine how the practice of this classical dance could provide a means for an individual dancer to expand conscious awareness, as claimed by the tradition. All of these were considered significant steps and necessary for Odissi to flower further in what is today a multicultural world.

Historical Overview

Odissi's moorings in religion and spirituality required that material evidence of ritual dance in history be reconsidered in the study. The roots of such dance in the tantric movement that swept across India were investigated and the genesis of the *devdasi* ritual, as seen sculpted in medieval architecture as an offering before deities, described. This focussed attention on areas of ambiguity regarding Odissi's continuity with religion and ritual through time, and the study confronted claims about some elements of Odissi's antiquity.

The overview of temple architecture and sculpture has drawn attention to the sources of inspiration for Odissi's creation by the first Gurus of the tradition in the 20th centuy. This information has been presented in the form of a documentary film and provides knowledge about Odissi's background that can serve to inform audiences about this tradition. It can also be used to empower students of the tradition to search for their own sources of inspiration.

Analysis of Technique

Odissi's technique has been viewed using choreological tools. Its movement system has been considered with reference to Valerie Preston-Dunlop's concept of

the Choreutic Unit and its Manner of Materialisation. A fresh perspective on *rasa* in the context of *nritta* has been discussed. Laban's conception of the kinesphere and dynamosphere have been used to describe how space is approached in this technique. The nature of Odissi's vocabulary, its use of energy, its embodiment and the stylistic parameters within which the tradition has been interpreted by different teachers have also been discussed. These perspectives provide a broader window of understanding into the nature of Indian classical dance using terms familiar to international dance scholarship. It is hoped that this will create new audiences who are better equipped to appreciate Odissi.

Practical experimentation in Odissi's traditional forms of *nritta* and *nritya* was undertaken. The pallavi genre of composition has been discussed and its complex structures of sound and movement, following set musical conventions illustrated through the making of Mukhari Pallavi. Abhinaya compositions interpreting text through movement have been described. These traditional forms of composition have been created and their approach to the sound-movement nexus discussed. They require poetic verse to be set first to a rhythm *(taal)* and melody *(raag)* appropriate to their mood, after which they are interpreted and embodied using the classical vocabulary of gestures. The documentation of this process provides an understanding of their particular systems of order, which disseminates information about them outside the traditional environment of the *parampara*.

The processes of teaching, learning and choreographing these compositions have also been described and critiqued. Investigations were made on the transmission of skills within the *Guru-shishya parampara*. A core issue raised was that the tradition had an inbuilt psychological resistance to change, which was an unfortunate fall-out of a malfunctioning *parampara*. The 'immanent structures' of traditional compositions naturally transformed themselves, but only when the disciple 'broke away' form the Guru, which was an unfortunate sequence of events. The study has demonstrated how different teachers made their contribution to the tradition in the 20th century only when they interpreted a set of ideas for themselves. This artistic freedom is an essential requirement for further creative growth.

Embodying Odissi using Yogic Principles

The physical practices used for the transcendence of the body in tantric *sadhana* were investigated. The applicability of tantric principles to dance was explored by making tantric ideas about the body present in Odissi's technique, part of conscious consideration during practice. Patanjali's statements about the 'Witness Self' were considered in the context of dance meant for the purpose of achieving a transformation of consciousness. These studies led to an interpretation of the fundamental purpose of dance according to the tantric world view. An explanation for the use of the pivotal positions of chowk and tribhanga in the technique was presented based on this. The role of hand gestures in affecting breathing patterns was investigated throwing light on the phenomenological nature of *hasta mudras* used in dance.

A practice of Odissi concerned with developing awareness of the vital points of the spinal cord and using them as a conscious reference point for embodying Odissi was developed; such awareness is the traditionally acknowledged, primary purpose of many forms of yoga. This served to 'fine tune' the delivery of movement and constituted a mentally and physically integrating approach to working with the body in dance. In the process of developing this new way of embodying Odissi, the project has taken further the task of 'mining cultural resources' with the objective of reinventing a lost tradition, which was the course of action pursued by Odissi's first creators.

This aspect of the study has been very useful in processing the claim that Odissi is a path to spiritual knowledge. Such knowledge is not obtained merely by being loyal to traditional conventions, which is what Odissi's teaching environment seems to be communicating to its younger generation. Whatever is valuable in a tradition has to be 'rediscovered' by experiencing it as such. Giving importance to an individual point of reference as facilitated by using the tantric 'body map' during the process of embodying traditional taught movement, provides the much needed freedom to explore personally satisfying ways of dancing within a framework that is part of Odissi's spiritual legacy.

The implications of this are significant within the tradition. It places the responsibility of learning on the student and questions the deeply ingrained present notion that what the Guru demonstrates of the movement, is the only right way to dance. While this challenges the present tradition, it can lay the foundation for a revitalisation of the *parampara* in the 21st century.

Choreographic experimentations

Choreographic experimentations have centred on separating and re-synthesising the sound-movement nexus operating in Odissi dance, and on exploring the idea of dance as yoga. These were done in two phases.

In the first phase, the structure and arrangement of the traditional recital and its components of Mangalacharan, Battu, Pallavi, Abhinaya and Moksha was examined, in terms of both their sound and movement components. A recital was created using an early mangalacharan, a new pallavi, an early abhinaya in Oriya and the basic structure of Moksha. The mangalacharan rephrased traditional pneumonics, the pallavi in *raag Mukhaari* worked with Odissi's structures of *sthayi, anthara, podi* and *jugalbandhi* creating its own play of rhythm and melody. The Oriya abhinaya explored the process of embodying traditional movement material as taught by a Guru while giving it a personal resonance as the performer.

Additional abhinaya pieces that deviated from tradition by using the thumri form of north Indian music sung to text in Braja Bhasha, and English text from the Gitanjali were created. The thumri used the language of Odissi abhinaya to create a more personally expressive rendering of the interaction between the chief protagonists in such pieces, Radha and Krishna. Gitanjali was a stark piece in comparison, portraying Odissi's use of gestures to interpret words which were danced to spoken English instead of sung verse.

A recital was presented by this researcher sponsored by the British Council in New Delhi in 1999 that combined these pieces by creating a gradual transition beginning with classical-form compositions, leading into the thumri and Gitanjali. The performance concluded with Moksha, embodied as a yantra and presented with a minimalist approach to the rendering of its traditional sound score, followed by the dance film "Caryatid Rests". "Caryatid Rests" presented Odissi on film in an "ethereal" context, against a western contemporary music score. This composite performance found acceptance as a traditional recital with expanded parameters when presented in New Delhi. It had retained the movement material of Odissi, but broken its conventions of sound.

During the process of creating these pieces, tantric kriya yoga practices had been adapted for movement and dance training. They were found to be a valuable means of focussing the mind and fine tuning the physical delivery of movement. It was argued that movements building concentration and awareness on the vital points of the tantric body map, or subject matter that did the same thing, was in accordance with yogic principles and therefore promoted the end goal of *moksha* or 'liberation' claimed by Odissi dance. This provided a rationale for expanding Odissi's carefully constructed formal parameters of chowk, tribhanga, abhanga and samabhanga used in rendering all the above pieces, to include material that could provide it additional texture.

In the second phase of choreographic exploration, the focus was shifted to using the 'stillness' of hath yoga and elements of tantric ritual in dance. This extended the sound-movement nexus that was being considered, to include non-traditional sound as well as non-traditional movement. It allowed for the use of moments of 'suspended stillness' which added gravity to dance. "Yantra" was created through this process, first for three dancers and later as a solo. These ideas were developed further in "Saraswati" which used nritya or story telling through the traditional gesture language, along with the exploration of yogic ideas in movement. A fourth piece, "Phenomenal Woman" was the last choreographic study created, based primarily on nritya, but in a lighter vein, using secular American literature. A selection of pieces created from both phases of choreography was presented by this researcher as a one hour solo performance entitled "Odissi Mandala" in 2004

sponsored by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage in New Delhi. This performance extended both the sound and movement parameters of Odissi.

The principal impetus for this research has been the need to question what the practice of Odissi satisfied in me, as a contemporary, urban, Indian artist. This dance is traditionally described as a *sadhana* or a path to yoga and I sensed Odissi had inadvertently provided me with such a direction; the question was how had it done so, and how could this be made a more effective process? My personal practice of Odissi has been greatly strengthened by addressing these questions. The pieces created in both phases of choreography have analysed traditional codes of choreographic practice in Odissi and extended them. This has provided a base that can be built on for further experimentations in both nritya and nritta, incorporating other strands of the dance medium that have not been addressed so far. I have earned a freedom to adapt traditional working conventions as given by my Gurus without destroying anything identified as valuable. This has shown the way towards developing alternate ways of communication through Odissi, making it accessible to the contemporary world I live in. As a *sadhaka* within the tradition, that is a step towards the spirit.

The world view within which classical Indian dance forms like Odissi operate, is that the world is *maya* and is experienced in an 'ephemeral mind space' by all concerned. Every human being is an actor participating in a great drama, driven by impulses born of a mind, encapsulated into the limited boundaries of individuality, determined by its accretion memories. The purpose of 'life-time', is to engage with its drama, with the intention of breaking through the veil of *maya* and seeing the reality of it as a game, in which the individual is playing hide and seek with his/her maker. In this construction of life, all artistic endeavour has the dialogue with God as its central theme, and this has been retained through the course of this study in dealing with modernity from the perspective of the Odissi tradition.

Thinking from such premises, the performance space is therefore not approached as a laboratory for exploring and thereby revealing, the nature of human engagement with its body's histories, its future, or its relationship to life/technology, which are some significant directions being pursued in western contemporary dance

and dance theatre. Such works would be comprehensible to the Indian world view explored in this thesis as being fundamentally, an experiential space, for effecting a separation between the self (the individual comprising the matrix of memories and aspirations) and the witness or Higher Self. I believe such 'classical eastern points' of view can only enrich the dialogue about the nature of human engagement with memory, relationships, uncharted futures, technology and other present concerns of contemporary performance works.

This study has brought into focus that the 'intention' behind any task of cultural reappraisal is of crucial importance in deciding what is useful and what is not in a tradition. Countries with old civilisations like India come with inbuilt roadblocks to progress on the material plane in all fields. 'Culture' becomes the impeding factor in seizing opportunities presented by technology and globalisation because it brings with it the 'memory baggage' of tried and tested, time-honoured, traditional approaches to most tasks. The study has suggested that by intending and embodying classical Indian dance as a path of yoga, change can be embraced with confidence as what is useful from within will be reinforced, and what is useful from without can be absorbed. Taking Odissi's cultural practices forward with reference to progressive, contemporary western modes of thought and analysis has been a greatly rejuvenating task.

Glossary

abhinaya	histrionic representation i.e. interpretive dance
Abhinaya Darpana	10th century classical Indian text on the technique of dance
abhanga	vertical body stance with both feet on the ground almost parallel to each other, where weight is held primarily on one leg
ananda	bliss
anandamaya kosha.	Sanskrit term for 'the body of bliss' or soul
annamaya kosha.	Sanskrit term for the 'visible physical body' made from food.
arasas	short sequences of *nritta* conforming to a specific *taal*
arohan	an ascending passage; associated with inhaled breath and with musical scales
asana	seated posture or yoga position
avrohan	a descending passage; associated with exhaled breath and with musical scales
bandha	bound knot
beej mant ras	seed syllables or sounds without any literal meaning used in

	chants for their acoustic power
bhakti	devotion; seeking God through love and surrender
bhitara gaunis	senior temple dancers sanctioned for performing the worship of putting the deities to bed in the Jagannath Temple of Puri.
Brahma sutra	imaginary 'Creator's meridian' or central line passing through any figure
Braj Bhasha	north Indian language similar to the commonly spoken Hindi.
dharma	righteousness; duty according to *karma*
dynamosphere	choreological term devised by Laban to signify the space around the body in which our dynamic actions take place
bhrumadhya	eyebrow centre
Chandi	a fearsome aspect of the Mother Goddess
chowk	pivotal body position in Odissi where the feet are turned outwards maintaining a distance of 'two fist + two thumb' lengths of the dancer's own measurements, between the heels
hatha yoga	an integrated system of spiritual development for the body emphasizing physical postures or *asanas*
kinesphere	choreological term devised by Laban to define "the sphere around the body whose periphery can be reached by easily extended limbs without stepping away from that place which is the point of support ..."
prana	life force
Gita Govinda	a 12th century mystic love poem from eastern India that celebrates the relationship of Krishna and Radha as symbols of God and the human soul
Guru	a teacher who has the connotations of being a spiritual preceptor
guhyadarshan	secret vision of God
gurukuls.	traditional Indian teaching institution which used to also be the Guru's home
mangalacharan	auspicious beginning
individuation	psychological process defined by CG Jung to describe the actualisation of an individual's human potential

japa	repetition of sacred sound
jiva	individual soul
keertana	devotional singing
kriya yoga	advanced physical techniques in yoga used to experience the body's spirituality
mandala	diagram binding several elements; mystic circle
manomaya kosha	mind sheath; the instinctive mind permeating the shape of the whole body
maya	illusion; veil hiding the reality of life
nartaki	dancer
mudra	gesture
moksha	liberation from birth and death through union with God
nattuvanar	person who conducts the Bharat Natyam performance; usually also plays the cymbals and provides verbal pneumonics
namaskar	traditional gesture of greeting using joined palms held in front of the body
nritta	dance based on an abstract interpretation of rhythm and melody.
nritya	interpretive dance
Om	traditional sound used in prayer to invoke and experience 'the beginning of creation'
pakhawaj	a two sided drum
pranamaya kosha	the 'body of breath' existing within the body's material substance
rajsuya yagna	fire sacrifice performed to celebrate the achievement of an objective
rasa	the 'taste' or 'flavour' of a sentiment experienced in a performance situation; the primary 8 expounded in *abhinaya* include *shringaar* (the erotic), *hasya* (the comic), *karuna* (the pathetic), *raudra* (the furious), *vira* (the heroic/brave), *bhayanaka* (the terrible/fearful), *bibhatsa* (the odious), and *adhbhuta* (the wondrous)
raag	an improvisational linear development of a 'melodic seed' based on a minimum of five of the seven basic notes.

pallavi	to blossom forth; abstract elaborations of rhythm and melody
parampara	lineage traceable from a particular Guru
sadhana	spiritual discipline using established techniques
sadhaka	spiritual aspirant
yantra	geometric diagrams used to focus the mind in meditation
mantra	meditative sound chanted as a spiritual discipline
sakala dhupa	morning worship
samabhanga	body stance where weight is balanced equally on both sides of the spinal cord
shastric	according to ancient, recorded teachings
sthayibhava	permanent mood
sthayi	the 'signature' or recurring musical refrain of a composition
shushumna naadi	central subtle channel within the spinal cord
tantra	tried and tested practical techniques for spiritual illumination (not specific to the Indian tradition alone)
tribhanga	lit: three bends; the second pivotal body design used in Odissi
shishya	disciple
upasanas	devotional offerings meant to please the deity
yoga	union
vigyañamaya kosha	intellectual body sheath; the individual's consciousness with personalised likes and dislikes permeating the *manomaya kosha*

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Appendix

Odissi – A Dance of Sculpture

Documentary Video

Film Script

The Script

A performance of Odissi has just begun and the dancer is describing the attributes of Lord Ganesh, an auspicious Hindu god, to whom the piece is dedicated.

By tradition, a performance of Odissi always opens with an invocation to a deity because of its origins in temple worship. Between the 10th and 16th centuries it was a ritual performed in the temples of Orissa by consecrated women called *devdasis*. Then, repeated invasions and the ensuing political turmoil ended royal patronage and the temples could no longer maintain such elaborate worship.

It was in the search for a cultural identity after Indian Independence that this ancient ritual, lost for 400 years, was remade as a classical performing art for theatre audiences.

Surviving evidence of an Orissan classical dance included palm leaf manuscripts with dance illustrations now in the care of the State Museum in Bhubaneswar and the Raghunandan Library in Puri.

Another vital link to this dance was in the living tradition of acrobatic performances by young boys called *gotipuas*, which still exists today. Dressed as girls, they had replaced *devdasi* dancing at religious festivals from the 16th century onwards. Their use of the square body position called chowk, their movement patterns and rhythmic drum syllables became building blocks for creating Odissi.

Then there were the sculptures depicting dance on the walls of Orissa's medieval temples. These provided evocative, three-dimensional images of beautiful movement by women.

Our focus here will be to explore these sculptures, to follow the story of how ritual dance evolved and so get closer to this source of Odissi's inspiration.

In many ways the story of Odissi has come full circle. Today, we are being entertained by it as a spectacle of grace and beauty without the spiritual intensity of a temple environment, but then, that it seems is how it began over two thousand

years ago.

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Udaygiri

In the 2nd century BC, a rock cut inscription issued by King Kharvela at Udaygiri states that he organised performances of dance, music and acrobatics for the entertainment of his subjects.

At the site there are many caves used at that time by Jain monks, with lively images adorning their cell entrances. One such image shows a dance in progress. This is the earliest such representation in India.

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The next centuries provide few archeological clues about the cultural life of the people of this region, although it is generally accepted that Buddhism and Shaivism were prevalent, along with the veneration of nature.

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Shatrughaneswar, Bharateswar and Lakshmaneswar

In the 6th century AD however, a strong ruling power emerged that built the earliest existing stone temples in Orissa.

The Sailodbhava Dynasty were worshippers of Shiva, and the temple was conceived as a symbol of the universe with its exterior a mountain, its interior a cave. It represented cosmic man, and its sections were named after parts of the human body. The heart of the sanctum was regarded as the womb chamber. It housed the Creator-Destroyer Shiva as the Shivalinga, a symbol of the male Cosmic pillar; and Shakti as the female receptacle, in eternal union.

The temple outside was elaborately ornamented with sculpture promoting Shaivite mythology. The marriage of Shiva with Parvati is depicted above the entrance on the door lintel, with female attendants on either side. These were the earliest representations of the female motif in Orissan temple architecture.

Nandi, Shiva's bull, is protecting the entrance with 2 door guardians, and Kartikeya, the son of Shiva, is in a well-defined niche. Shiva himself, as the Cosmic Dancer Nataraj, is located on the temple's front façade, and establishes that dance was perceived as a divine activity. Animals and geometric floral patterns illustrating Creation completed this map of the universe.

The temples are in various states of ruin with many broken sculptural fragments put to one side. Amongst this rubble is a male dancing figure, which could mean that dance as worship was also part of the temple's ornamentation.

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Parasurameswar

By the next century, Shaivism had become more elaborate, as the temple of Parasurameswar clearly shows. A flat roofed hall had now been added to the sanctum to accommodate the growing number of worshippers. Nataraj retained His prominent frontal position, and Shiva's sons, Ganesh and Kartikeya, occupied cardinal niches in the temple walls. Above Ganesh are backward bending figures similar in their use of body to the present day gotipua repertoire.

Upon the walls of the temple are many new religious references. Buddhist imagery has been incorporated, uniting the Hindu Shiva worshippers with the Buddhist subjects in the kingdom. This is reinforced by the presence of Lakulisa, an ascetic born in the 2nd century AD and considered an incarnation of the God Shiva. He is shown with his hands evoking the cosmic wheel, a popular motif in Buddhist iconography.

Near Lakulisa is the figure of Surya, the Sun God, regarded as a form of Vishnu, the Cosmic Preserver. His presence further indicates the diverse philosophies

now prevalent in the cult of the Creator-Destroyer, Shiva.

Close by are a series of mother goddesses with forest origins, known as the 7 Matrikas. They indicate the growing popularity of Shakti, the Supreme female principle. Through them, further sections of society were embraced in a common religious practice.

Flanking the niche where Parvati, the consort of Shiva, would once have been, are two curious reliefs of a male and female figure in the chowk stance. Their placement on either side of Parvati seems to indicate that this body position played an important part in prevailing ceremonies. In the context of Odissi dance, this is significant because chowk is one of the two most important body pivots used in Odissi. Movements in chowk are said to impart the dance form its *tandava*, or power. Perhaps this position was understood to be a means of activating the latent energy in the body of the worshipper.

The increased use of auspicious female motifs is also relevant. These would later evolve into exquisitely carved *alasa kanyas*, or languorous maidens, that inspired Odissi's distinctive character.

Of most importance though are the window grilles on either side of the temple's main entrance. They show exuberant images of dance and music by male worshippers, and their prominence, size and location provide proof of the formal link that had now been made between dance and ritual worship.

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The 7th century was, in fact, a time when a renaissance in mainstream Hinduism began to acquire momentum. It was called Tantra and spread throughout the country, drawing many followers to its fold. In Tantra, the act of worship was a grand theatrical experience, engaging all the senses and incorporating rhythms, movement, gestures and chants. It provided an attractive alternative to the ascetic practices of Buddhism and Jainism, being rather like a religion for the masses.

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Vaital Deul

The temple of Vaital Deul was built a century after Parasurameswar, and marks the formal acceptance of Shakti worship in mainstream religious consciousness. It was dedicated to the principle of Omnipotent Female Energy in the form of the Goddess Chamunda, who brought with her new family deities. These were located on the temple body in accordance with their importance to the cult.

Nataraj remained prominent, and continued to adorn the front façade of the temple. Surya, the Sun God, acquired new importance and represented the creative principle of Shakti.

The West façade now had an image of Ardhanariswar, an aspect of Shiva where he is half-male and half-female, symbolising the bipolar nature of the created world.

Flanking Him are female figures, seen previously as minor motifs that had acquired cult proportions. Halos, signifying their divinity, surround them.

Similarly, the North façade now had the powerful image of Mahishasurmardini, the demon-slaying goddess who can be interpreted as symbolising Shakti's victory over ignorance and social oppression.

There are minor motifs of amorous couples reflecting the changing values of temple worship.

There is also a post by the temple's entrance that was once used for all manner of blood sacrifice.

Chamunda herself was a fearsome goddess and her cult soon offended mainstream religious sensibilities. By the 9th century this had caused Tantric worship to split into left and right hand paths.

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Hirapur

An example of a left path Shakti temple can be found at Hirapur. Such temples were built in remote areas because of their association with extreme practices.

Hirapur is designed as an open to sky circular courtyard with a central sacrificial altar. The worshipper would enter this arena and be surrounded by a ring of powerful forces, the 64 yoginis, an experience that still has an edge of drama to this day.

The Yogini cult acquired momentum when Chamunda was added to the pantheon of Matrikas already existing in Shaivism, to form the cult of the ashtmatrikas, or 8 Mothers. Each of these eight Matrikas in left-hand tantra became causal principles, and expanded into eight more manifestations of themselves, becoming the 64 yoginis.

These Yoginis symbolised the powers of nature and together represented a complete map of the forces of creation. Some were in attitudes of dynamic movement or dance, thereby embodying Shakti as the kinetic principle of creation, like Nataraj seen earlier.

The worshipper now viewed his own body as a temple and would mentally place each of these Yoginis, and the powers they contained, into different parts of himself through rituals and chants. In this way, the act of worship became a consciousness-transforming experience where the worshipper embraced Shakti in all Her forms.

The heart of the temple was the central sacrificial altar. Upon its structure are benign forms of Shiva, representing purified consciousness.

In the Yogini cult, Shiva was known as Bhairava, a guardian protector, who signified the terrific powers of the Vedic gods Agni, or fire, and Rudra, thunder and lightning. One image of Bhairava is the single legged Aja Ekpada who reinforced the idea of the human body, as the cosmic pillar that linked earth and sky.

In the short corridor leading out of the temple, and guarding its entrance, Bhairava is also seen, wearing a garland of skulls.

Outside, the temple is further protected by female figures (standing on decapitated heads and) holding human skulls as their insignia.

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Chaurasi

Another example of left path Shakti worship is the temple at Chaurasi, built in the10[th] century. Its structure imitated that of Vaital Deul. However, this temple was dedicated not to Chamunda but to another of the early Matrikas, the goddess Varahi.

Varahi has a boar's head and through Her, living beings get their food and physical enjoyment.

The temple is liberally ornamented with amorous couples indicating that ritual was sexual in nature. Sexual energy was considered to be the creative essence of the human body and its control was intrinsic to Tantric thought.

This is underlined by the presence of the Sun God, Surya, who embodies the creative principle in Shakti worship. He is seated on the West façade, and, on either side of Him, scenes of ritual are taking place.

Peripheral images of dance and music suggest that they too formed part of the proceedings, but were not given centre stage. That refinement, however, was starting to happen in the more sophisticated metropolitan areas where the mainstream right-hand path of worship had taken its own direction.

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Mukteswar

The Mukteswar temple to Shiva in Bhubaneswar establishes, for the first time, the standard Orissan temple pattern of a curvilinear main sanctum attached to a pyrimidical-roofed hall of worship.

Its size and proportions perfectly express in stone the harmony and balance now achieved between Shiva and Shakti worship in mainstream religion.

On and around the temple are cult deities, female musicians, ascetics, acrobats and travellers - images that one can easily associate as being integral to daily temple life there.

The temple is also distinctive for its proliferation of female imagery. The *alasakanya*, or languorous maiden that first appeared as a minor auspicious motif has now become a major feature of the ornamentation, and would dominate the temple facades during the coming centuries.

The sculpting is in high relief and images now seem liberated from the confines of a niche. Sinuous creepers and stems echo the pronounced lines of their bodies, enhancing their sensuality. Some pursue pleasures of civilised society, like communing with flowering plants, or teaching birds to speak, as described in the Kama Sutra.

The cults of the tantric goddesses had left an important effect on Hindu society because they had established the concept of women as Shakti. It was this idea that paved the way for dance, by women, as a temple ritual within the sanctum.

The under surface of the roof above the hall of worshippers has been richly carved with a central lotus medallion housing the tantric goddesses. Around it is a beautiful dancing Ganesh, the earliest such image in Bhubaneswar.

Also, for the first time, are images of a performance by women musicians and a dancer. The shape and form of this temple dance is something we can only imagine. When Odissi was created after Indian Independence, perhaps unconsciously, it echoed ideas of spacial symmetry and sacred geometry contained in temple architecture. It also retained the idea of dance being performed as an offering of the self to the deity.

Raja Rani

The Raja Rani temple built about 50 years later continues the style of Mukteswar's architecture.

The temple however is now placed on a plinth and, in addition, has subsidiary spires on its curvilinear tower creating a sense of cascading rhythm. Also noticeable is the definite shift towards secular images taking precedence over cult iconography. These have a charged presence and represent Shakti in a multitude of forms.

The use of the plinth and the increased size of the structure give figures a distinctly celestial quality by their elevated position above eye level. Rearing animal motifs imbue the temple with a palpable life force.

The body proportions of the *alasakanyas* are now slender and perfectly articulated, developing further their mood of heightened sensuality. This sensuality found expression in ritual intercourse. Here, a maiden, as the embodiment of Shakti, is being anointed and prepared for a symbolic union with the worshipper, as Shiva.

There are some minor reliefs of dancing figures upon the base mouldings of the temple but, unlike Mukteswar, there is no significant portrayal of a dance performance. Maybe this is because the ornamentation of the second pavilion seems to have never been completed.

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Brahmeswar

It is when you come to Brahmeswar, built a few decades later that this is seen.

Brahmeswar was built by the Kesari Queen, Kolaavati, and adorning the exterior of the second pavilion, dance is vividly portrayed. An inscription by the queen made a statement dedicating "beautiful women with exquisite limbs, and eyes like the fickle wagtail" to the service of the deity enshrined.

These were consecrated dancers or *devdasis,* servant-wives of God, and their dance a 'mortgage offering' from the community of worshippers to the deity.

An interesting feature of the temple is that both the main sanctum and the second pavilion have a number of intact direction guardians, deities that preside over specific quadrants of the temple - universe.

These have origins in Vedic worship, historically the religion of the rulers. Their presence therefore acted as a final seal of approval to tantric rituals in mainstream religion. Alongside them are aspects of Shiva - for instance, as the maker of cosmic music, or as the cosmic pillar, seen earlier as protector of the 64 Yoginis.

The temple is remarkable because of its beauty and sculptural excellence and, in its depiction of the human form, was never bettered. Sadly though, many images have been damaged by both weather and man.

Perhaps because of its location, Brahmeswar has a serenity that is in sharp contrast to the next landmark, Lingaraj, where worship and human affairs went hand in hand on a grand scale.

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Lingaraj

The main pavilions of Lingaraj were constructed in the 11th century and, in the course of time, resembled a temple palace where all activities enjoyed by the king were replicated for the deity.

Lingaraj marked a turning point in the religious sentiments of the time. Since the ninth century, a steady growth in the popularity of Vaishnavism had occurred in different areas of Orissa.

This faith emphasised tolerance and gentle devotion as its path to God. It became important therefore to unite this emerging cult with the prevailing worship of Shiva. For this reason, Lingaraj was dedicated to Hari-Hara, or Vishnu Shiva in syncretic form.

Furthermore, the increasing use of elaborate rituals required more space and

two centuries later, the central axis of the original temple was extended to include two more pavilions that were built specifically for the purposes of a dance ritual accompanying the serving of daily meals to the deity.

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Jagannath

The Jagannath temple of Puri, on the other hand, was a temple palace from its conception. Here, the dancing hall was not an afterthought but very much part of the original structure. The temple employed priests, dancing girls and other servants of the deity on a permanent basis. Areas adjoining the temple were given over to the temple servants as living quarters, and their descendants continue to live there to this day.

The consecration of Lord Jagannath with his brother and sister marked a defining moment in the integration of Oriya culture. Jagannath's trinity brought Vishnu, Shakti and Shiva worship together and effectively united every existing religious group in the kingdom under one umbrella.

It was at about this time that a poet called Jayadev composed a remarkable piece of work. This was a mystic love poem called the Geeta Govinda that celebrated the relationship of Radha with Krishna. Legend has it that Jayadev was inspired by a dancer from the Jagannath temple who later became his wife.

The poem established that Krishna, as Hari, was none other than Jagannath, Lord of the Universe. Soon, the singing and dancing of the Geeta Govinda became an integral part of the daily worship by *devdasis* that continued unbroken till the 16th century.

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Konark

It was at Konark, however, where the ritual of music and dance was showcased in a most breathtaking way.

Konark is an immensely impressive structure even in its present state of ruin. It represented the greatest undertaking of Orissan temple architecture and marks the climax of our story. The temple was built by the Ganga King Narasimhadeva to celebrate his victory against the threat of Islamic invasion that had been looming over his empire for some time. It was dedicated to the all embracing form of Surya and was designed as a magnificent chariot on 24 wheels drawn by 7 horses.

Here, the dancing hall is a free-standing structure on a high platform created to greet the arrival of the Sun king. Upon its walls and columns, dancers and musicians jostle for space and the feeling it conveys is of an orchestrated celebration that has been frozen in time.

The female figure, so prolific at Konark, had evolved over 700 years. In each century, she wore distinctive features of dress and ornament that testified to the changing fashions of her medieval world. At each stage she had acquired further refinement and greater prominence on the temple facade.

By the time Konark was conceived, the *alasakanya* had already acquired full maturity. Here though, her presence is overwhelming. Her sheer numbers give an impression of a living dance in sculpture, and it is this that deeply impressed the minds of Odissi's creators. Today, these vibrant images, with their heightened state of being, continue to both challenge and inspire dancers.

The journey we have taken has given us the chance to reconsider the sacred context of the temple dance form we now call Odissi. The clues we have uncovered suggest that it can offer us deep and profound experiences when danced as an offering to the gods. By fixing in our mind an image of the *alasakanya's* smile of inner joy, we too can be transported, for a moment at least, to a sacred presence

The End

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