CHAPTER 1
Introduction: Learning Kathak

Learning kathak, for the dedicated group of practitioners with whom I worked, is about learning a new way of being-in-the-world. Becoming a kathaka involves a transformation of body and self, one that is rooted in the traditional learning relationship between guru and shishya. It is from within the one-to-one guru-shishya relationship that total education is said to originate. Learning to be a kathaka is thus grounded in the student's subordination to their guru, to the art, and to the discipline of training. It is impossible to pry these elements apart. I focus on training, on the lived reality of learning in a dance form, and the hundreds and thousands of hours that go into those short-lived moments on the stage. For a small group of committed practitioners, the journey of becoming a kathaka has become a consuming way of life. Through careful attention to the longer temporal process of learning we can understand why it is that practitioners devote themselves to their guru, and commit their lives to the pursuit of this art.

The further I progressed in my apprenticeship in kathak, the more the wider parameters for learning became clear. Learning was entirely bound up with and dependent on one's relationship with the guru. This is therefore an ethnography about learning dance under the kathaka, Pandit Chitresh Das, and within the larger community of dancers that had formed around him. I provide a phenomenological, sensual and corporeally grounded account of learning kathak dance under a master, describing the daily grind of training, and the emotionally loaded relationship between the guru and disciple that provides the foundation for the learning of this art form. I describe what it feels like, looks like, sounds like, and means, to take up this new way of being-in-the-world[1]. I describe the experiential nature of learning kathak from this master, as he moves between two sites: Kolkata, India and the San Francisco Bay area in U.S.

Practices such as kathak provide the learner with what is, in effect, their own way of knowing. The perspective of the learner enables the student – and the apprentice-ethnographer – a form of entry into such new ways of knowing the world. It is from my situatedness as an apprentice in this art that I describe this way of being-in-the-world.

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[1] The term 'being-in-the-world' begins with Heidegger's 1962 work, 'Being and Time', but has entered the field of philosophical language and is therefore wide in circulation, including in phenomenological anthropology.

Transnational Flows, Embodied Practice

Pandit Chitresh Das's lineage of kathak existed between two primary sites, Kolkata and San Francisco. Transnationalism is a defining feature of this lineage and of others. It is not unusual for artists, gurus, performers and teachers of the Indian arts to live and work between two worlds. The contemporary field of kathak is defined amidst such transcultural flows of people, goods and ideas, between India and its many diasporic locations. Yet this feature is not in itself a particularly new attribute in kathak's long history. Transcultural flows have long since contributed to shaping this dynamic art form. Mughal Empires, Persian courtesans, Sufi ascetics, Bhakti devotional movements, folk traditions, and British colonial rule have added to the particularity of this transnational form. Although the unique conditions of the current socio-economic epoch we call 'globalisation' certainly adds to the particularity of transnationalism today, intercultural exchange as such has been an enduring characteristic. Arjun Appadurai traces this interconnectedness back to the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, commenting that 'historians and sociologists, especially those concerned with translocal processes and the world systems associated with capitalism have long been aware that the world has been a congeries of large-scale interactions for many centuries' (Appadurai 1996: 27; see also Abu-Lughod 1989; Wallerstein 1974; Wolf 1982). India's long history of shifting empires, trade, religious movements and migrations exemplifies such interconnectedness and overlap. It is a past evident in kathak's distinctive form and repertoire. In a sense, then, the kathak tradition is now doing what it has always done, namely, adapting to the present era. From this perspective, too, the continuities with the past seem as remarkable as the changes.

We can say, then, that it is not change per se which is new, but the nature and magnitude of transcultural flows. Such a phenomenon has certainly been magnified in the last historical epoch of globalisation,

> [T]he problems of distance and the confines of technology have generally restricted the interactions of the past, so that is has been very difficult to sustain dealings between culturally and spatially separate groups…It is really over the course of the last century with the advent of modern technology – particularly with the innovations in transportation and communication…that we have entered into a more profound condition of neighbourliness. (Inda and Rosaldo 2008: 37)

Kathak's recent history highlights the particularity of this new global order of large-scale interaction. Increases in the flow of people between India and the west, the rapidly growing diasporic populations in the U.S., Canada, Britain and Australia, have facilitated the growing transnational dynamic evident in many Indian arts. New forms of social media, like Face book, YouTube, and Twitter, now figure centrally in disseminating information to an even wider audience. All have been central in Chhandam's representation and definition of itself in the larger field of kathak. The availability of images, videos and the new ease of dialogue across geographic locations, have all provided a stronger sense of the field in which Das's dancers strive to make their mark.

Transnational flows, as the literature recognises, are not equal flows in all directions. They follow pathways of power, although these are themselves not uni-directional. Peripheries, as locations on the margins of a central power, are capable of generating their own counter flows and reformulating what is handed to them (Hannerz 1989: 69; see also Hannerz 1996). Equally, 'as the peripheries develop their own definitions, centres of power co-opt, reformulate and again disseminate these definitions in order to continue their hegemony' (Basch et al. 1994: 27). The 'centre' has tended to be equated in the literature on development with western and European metropoles. But for the many large Indian diasporic communities throughout the world, that centre may well be India. Immigrants seek ways to remember and participate in the culture of their homelands. In this sense, the remembered 'India' provides a powerful pull, a centre for the definition of true Indian culture abroad (see also Ram 2000a, 2002, 2005). Yet the communities outside of India are not homogeneous. Some of the more wealthy and powerful of these diasporic communities, such as Chhandam now teaches in the San Francisco Bay area (hereafter SF Bay area), may have themselves operated as a locus of power in their own right[2]. An affluent U.S. based Indian diasporic community has emerged in the SF Bay area, in large part, through the phenomenal growth of the information technology (IT) industry in the Silicon valley (Radhakrishnan 2008: 7)[3]. The story of Indians in the Bay area 'is now frequently told in terms of the dominant narrative of "Indian success" in the Bay area, most notably the Silicon valley' (Mankekar 2002: 79). A social group with such a profile is

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[2]Chhandam has a number of students from what could be loosely referred to as upper class and wealthy Indian families, but it also caters to a wider demographic of Indian families, including those referred to as middle class. Purnima Mankekar explains that while Indian immigrants to the SF Bay area have been constituted in high numbers by computer related professionals, 'the number of Indians working in blue collar occupations, the service industry, and in small businesses has increased' (2002: 79).

[3] Radhakrishnan further explores how affluent US Indian communities, emerging from the India's flourishing IT sector in the Silicon valley, co-construct a new India alongside a growing number of transnational professionals in India, many of whom are returning immigrants (2008: 7).

capable, as this one has been, of figuring prominently in establishing a centre of power outside of India. Its influence has been particularly prominent in establishing the success of the Indian arts in recent years[4]. In turn, we may represent the matter as one in which the arts have figured prominently in allowing diasporic communities to establish themselves as important sources of authority, not only economically but culturally. Within this larger framework, Chhandam is becoming increasingly successful at defining its own particular brand of legitimate Indian culture. Das and his dancers are able to help redefine this diasporic 'periphery' as its own centre of knowledge and understanding, at once distinctive and similar to the site of origin in India (see chapter 5).

I am therefore drawing attention, at the very outset, to the complexities of the flows of transnational knowledge, as what once were peripheral centres of knowledge-making become significant players in the construction of knowledge at the centre. Artists like Das, and his community of dancers, have become authorities on kathak from outside of India. A striking feature of the transnationalism of this lineage is that it has produced an Americanised guru and a group of American pupils who lecture to students in India about 'their culture' and its inherent value. For mobile figures such as Das, a privileged mode of moving between worlds enables easy adjudications on culture. Das acknowledges that he has selectively incorporated aspects of Indian and American culture in the creation of an idealised lifeworld for the art form.

Although I have suggested that 'centre' and 'periphery' are not necessarily fixed in their geographical location – the U.S. diaspora can also re-constitute itself as a 'centre' of cultural flows with India – I will continue to draw on older insights in the paradigm of uneven development to examine the flow of knowledge and ideas. As Inda and Rosaldo put it, '… not everyone and everyplace participates equally in the circuits of interconnection that traverse the globe. For the very processes that produce movement and linkages also promote immobility, exclusion and disconnection' (2008: 6). These are, in the words of Anna Tsing (2005), 'awkward connections'. Practitioners of the art form on either side of the divide between India and the U.S are affected by the particularities of connections in ways that I hope to bring out in the thesis. The form taken by inequality is shaped by the specifics of pedagogy and performance, revolving around the presence and absence of the guru himself. For the main part of the year Das resides, teaches and

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[4] In Das's early years in the U.S., many of his first students and supporters were not of Indian ancestry (see chapter 2).

performs in California. During the winter performing months in India, between December and February, and then again in July, Das travels to teach and perform in India, for variable periods, from several weeks to two months. His pattern of presence and absence has become a feature that can be anticipated, and students, whether mobile or not, also have come to expect these periods. But long absences of the guru from Kolkata make it difficult for students there to sustain themselves as dancers. The temporal flows of the guru's presence and absence in both sites matter greatly to the size and depth of the school and extended community that has emerged. In a system where the guru himself is the central constituent for learning and practice, his absence plays a prominent feature in the lives of the practitioners. For students in India, their experience has been marked by Das's absence, interspersed, for a select few, by periods of intensive training during his biannual visits. During my period of fieldwork, Das's time in Kolkata, provided intense immersive experiences for the fortunate local and foreign students who took up residence with the guru (see chapter 4). For students in the U.S., their experience was constituted by Das's ongoing presence dotted with his short absences while in India.

Despite my initial desire to conduct further fieldwork in India, it quickly became obvious that a project on learning had to follow the cues provided by the guru's location. Authority resides with the guru, and where he is, so too is the centre of knowledge and power. In this dissertation, I focus predominantly on the U.S., since this was where Das spent much of his time. American students form the bulk of Das's students. India still figures in the daily experiences of dancers in the U.S. in prominent ways. India is continually present in our experience of the dance, although imagined and lived in new ways. India therefore figures in this thesis through the experiences of Das and several dancers, including myself, who travelled to India, to teach and perform. I focus less on the experiences of the local Indian dancers in this dissertation (but see Dalidowicz 2006, 2009), however the experience of India remains integral to this dissertation. Although Das's work has made the U.S. the 'centre' of Chhandam's kathak in many ways, Das remains cognisant that, in the end, some aspect of authority continues to reside in the place that is called 'India'. When I first decided to go to India to study kathak, a tabla musician in Toronto, Ritesh Das, (brother to Chitresh Das), said to me, 'Why would you go to India to study kathak? You should just go to California'. In some ways, this dissertation is a response to that very question.

Place and Place-Making in the Age of the Transnational

The lived body not only feels but knows the places to which it is so intimately attached.
(Casey 1997: 232)

Transnational flows of people, goods and ideas have had a significant impact on the way in which we understand the places we inhabit. Traversing the globe has become – but only for a privileged few - a common occurrence. Even for those who remain in place, the interconnectedness of the world is indirectly experienced through interactions with people, media, or ideas from other sites. Not all dancers travelled to and fro, but all dancers had a sense of the other sites and an awareness of the larger transnational community that constituted the lineage[5]. The proliferating nature of such transcultural movements in the global epoch has challenged notions of geographically bounded cultures. Transnationalism, in its emphasis on movement, on interconnectedness and in its condition of neighbourliness, supersedes the idea of cultures as so many discrete, spatially bounded entities or geographical locations. Practices such as kathak are no longer limited to singular nations, or cultures, but exist in the furthest reaches of the globe. The transportability of practices, and the ease with which flows traverse the globe continue to de-emphasise the importance of place for such practices. The fact that I could be socialised into the north Indian dance of kathak in San Francisco, itself speaks for the significance of the shift that has occurred.

Responding to empirical shifts of this scale and order, earlier theorists of globalisation argued against the view of cultures as occupants of discontinuous spaces (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 6), or as entirely local dimensions of human behaviour (Appadurai 1986: 356; see also Kearney 1995). In criticising earlier concepts of culture and space for their failure to incorporate regional, national and global processes in explaining the local, what emerged was a refutation of locality. Gupta and Ferguson expressed the sharp edge of this view when they stated that 'something like a transnational public sphere has certainly rendered any strictly bounded sense of community or locality obsolete' (1992: 9). What was not made clear was whether transnationalism actually renders 'obsolete', *all* sense of

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[5] Flows of dancers were certainly unequal. It was mainly the American dancers who travelled to India, reflecting the larger discrepancy and inequalities of the global condition. This trend was also accentuated by the fact that the dancers in Kolkata were much smaller in number and represented a different class demographic. Many of the Kolkata students were from lower income families, while the large community of dancers in America included a diversity of class backgrounds, with many coming from middle and upper class families, with much larger expendable incomes. There were also dancers in Chhandam America who struggled to pay tuition, and Das typically made exceptions for them (see chapter 6).

'place'. For I wish to suggest that the micro-social process by which kathak reproduces and produces new lifeworlds[6] is at once transnational, but also something more – that, in fact, one of the most critical elements in the reproduction of such bodily knowledge in a transnational lineage, is a sense of place.

Bodies exist in place. We inhabit places through inhabiting a body; we inhabit our body through being in place. In this sense, place exerts a force on our bodies. In the flows of transnationalism, as bodies and bodily knowledge travels between places, a sense of 'place', both materially and in virtual terms, continues to remain integral in the constitution of bodies and forms of knowledge. I argue that transnationalism has not simply abolished 'place', but rather that we need a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the intersection of the local and the global, but in which 'place' continues to play a central role[7]. I pursue this argument through the writing of this ethnography, attending to the role of place in the cultural reproduction of bodily knowledge. Given the pervasive nature of the critique, I wish to clarify once again that this return to place does not entail a return to a bounded notion of place, or culture[8]. The usefulness of the notion of 'place' to discussions of transnationalism depends on being able to incorporate both the quality of grounded-ness in location as well as a form of transcendence from an entirely physical idea of location. 'Place', in this version, is necessarily grounded in a lived world – even cyber-communities experience cyber-space through a body that is also grounded in a material site. My method puts to work Merleau-Ponty's central insight that 'the [lived] body is our general medium for having a world' (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 146). That is, it is through our bodies that we have access to the world (Casey 1997: 229). But places also have the power to evoke multiple sites and times beyond the here and now (see also Marcus 1995). We draw on experiences acquired through a multitude of means, at different periods of our lives, even in the way we inhabit the present. Access to a virtual space and time is a necessary element of all that seems entirely material. Any account of transnational movements must necessarily account for both dimensions of place, the material *and* the virtual.

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[6] Drawing on phenomenology, I use the notion of 'lifeworld' (lebenswelten) throughout this dissertation to refer to 'that domain of everyday, immediate social existence and practical activity, with all its habituality, its crises, its vernacular and idiomatic character, its biographical particularities, its decisive events and indecisive strategies' (Jackson 1996: 9; see also Heidegger 1962; Habermas 1981; Husserl 1970).
[7] Anthropologists continue to seek new ways to account for the intersection of the global and local, which has included an emphasis on place-making (see Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Inda and Rosaldo 2008).
[8] For further critique on the representation of 'cultures' as bounded and coherent see Clifford and Marcus (1986) and Clifford (1988).

Drawing on such philosophical understandings of 'place', I engage with an understanding that is distinct from the more universalising abstract notion of 'space', as defined by distinct, homogeneous and impermeable boundaries. 'Place', in this sense, is a location with permeable boundaries, internally differentiated, but where some shared understandings, practices and meanings exist in forms that may be recognised, either in explicit, but more often in implicit forms. Our definition need not entail permanence – such forms of shared understanding may only be temporary crystallisations. Places for learning kathak can be created in a variety of differing local lifeworlds, but in each case, the process contains the power to transform them into potent theatrical arenas for the experience of the art. The 'gathering' power of place here resides in a combination of practices[9]. It connects dancers to something beyond the geographical area or even the local lifeworld in which they dance. As dancers gather in a studio, whether in Berkeley, or in Bhawanipore, there is an evocation of places beyond. In the ways we move, dance and inhabit these spaces, we experience an access to a wider field of kathak. In this thesis, I have felt impelled to explore the fact that kathak invokes not only the wider sense of our lineage, or even the performing arts in India, but also the virtual world of the wider cosmos to which our dance is inextricably bound (see chapter 5, see also Chakravorty 2008). Through the body, and the embodiment of knowledge in dance training, we come to be familiar with such seemingly other-worldly places as well, giving us a form of access to a new way of knowing the world. But what kind of knowledge is this?

> It is knowledge by acquaintance in the form of familiarity. Precisely because my body is a 'means of ingress into a familiar setting', (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 104), it possesses knowledge of places by direct (and continuing) acquaintance with them. In this connection, Merleau-Ponty stresses the 'customary' body, a body that is 'the matrix of habitual action' (1962: 82). By virtue of this aspect of the lived body, I can be said to know, at a pre-objective and yet fully efficacious level, the places that populate my ongoing experience. A place is my familiaris (literally, a 'familiar spirit'). As I know my way around my own house, so I know my way around all the familiar places of my 'habitat': habitual body memory (which underlies an entire set of accustomed and skilful actions) combines with awareness of place to bring about a circumstance in which being is synonymous with being situated. (Casey 1997: 232-3)

Merleau Ponty's 'customary body' is in fact a 'matrix'. It is a virtual, not a physical entity. Yet it is only ever experienced in and through a fleshly medium. It is this mix I wish to

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[9] Heidegger refers to place, or rather 'regions', as having a unique 'gathering' power. 'Gathering (versammeln) is an action that draws things together within a bounded space' (Casey 1997: 279). It is this idea of places as 'drawing near' that I engage. In dance, the body itself is a gathering place.

bring to the account of dance as place-making in this thesis. The argument has particular force for diasporic communities. Diasporic communities continually display an astonishing ability to re-create lifeworlds much like that of their homeland, to provide an experience of the 'culture' of that distant imagined place. The arts have played a key role for many diasporas in this re-creation of lifeworlds precisely because of their powerful ability to re-create forms of place through their constellation of sensory practices.   Kalpana Ram has described the richly synaesthetic features of Indian dance and music, as they bring together the senses, providing the opportunity 'to learn if not 'Indian culture' in some generic sense, then certainly far more of the culture's particular aesthetic 'feel'' (Ram 2005: 122; see also Ram 2000a, 2000b, 2002). A sense of place is evoked and experienced in the ways we learn to move, to enter the dance space, to bow to the guru as part of choreographed movement, to show patterns of respect, and through other sensorial transformations in the immediate space, such as burning incense and hearing and singing familiar *lehras* or melodies. Learning kathak reveals the potency of sensory practices in connecting dispersed sites, particularly when the affective and emotional dimensions of relationships are taken into consideration. In this thesis I pay particular attention to the charisma of influential figures such as Das, who exert a powerful affective pull on places and practitioners. The effectiveness of re-constructing the diaspora as the new centre of authority relies very heavily on the strategies of place-making, and the charismatic efficacy of leaders.

On the other hand, learning in transnational practices also reveals the *limits* of such flows, and redirects our attention back to the authority of place as a more durable entity. I wish to utilise, in this thesis, the insights to be gained by recognising that not all aspects of kathak can be transported to the U.S. The background environment functions both as the tangible and the invisible support of daily life. This background ranges from the emotional textures of relationships, to the clothes we wear, to the texture of the floors we walk on. All of these are central to dancers experience and understanding. The subtle and passive pedagogies of place disrupt the smooth transnational flow of knowledge and emerge in the form of pedagogical 'problems' in the teaching, learning and performing of kathak.

Learning and the Limits of Translation

It is through the perspective of the learner, and using the method of learning in apprenticeship, that I tackle these larger questions around place, as well as some of the older anthropological problems of the translatability of ideas, concepts and meanings

between different lifeworlds. In exploring the relational meanings that sustain the practice of kathak, I hope to show how it is that kathak is able to enact a certain detachment from purely geographical definitions of place, as the relational framework can be re-established anywhere. I wish to show just how rich the world of the learner is – with its strong sense of community and powerful emotional relations – in order to describe a form of place-making that is not tied to geography, but simply travels with the guru, that mobile nucleus of authority who reconstitutes the necessary ambience almost anywhere. Yet the arduous apprenticeship is also a journey precisely in learning the error of assuming too quickly that translation is accurate. Learners come to understand that a guru is not just a 'teacher', that a shishya is not just a 'student'. They learn that 'doing *abhinaya*' is not simply 'acting', nor is *riya*z just 'practice'. Yet in each case, this is exactly what an immediate and common set of English translations would suggest. In each case, the terms on the right of the ledger come to us from a lifeworld where dominant ideologies are secularised and to some extent rationalised. The terms on the left come from a lifeworld – or at least, from *one* important sphere of practices[10] – in which the body and its movements connect the dancer to a deeply meaningful set of relations to the guru and to a wider cosmological dimension that underlies many forms of dance in India. Learning kathak, for the long-term practitioner, is not merely a matter of a more correct translation of terms such as *guru, shishya, riyaz* or *abhinaya*. For the immigrant, foreigner – and for an increasing number of would-be students of dance in India – learning kathak requires nothing less than a reconfiguration of one's own world, in order to grasp, at a bodily level, the wider set of meanings and affects which these concepts entail.

The question of translation is also a question of values. I have long wrestled with the question: how does one explore guru-shishya relations (even in an anthropology thesis) when we are predominantly socialised into a modernity in which rationalism, secularism, egalitarianism and individualism are dominant discourses? Viewed from these dominant perspectives, the hierarchical world of guru and shishya necessarily appears as patriarchal, static and non-agential. Religious authority itself is enough to make us suspect fraudulence (see chapter 3). There is no easy answer to such deeply held moral frameworks that enjoy long genealogies of their own. Moreover, certain critical perspectives generated by

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[10] I do not suggest that all of India inhabits this kind of 'lifeworld', for the terms on the right are also present in the world of modern India. What I refer to as a 'life world' no longer is able to refer to a whole 'culture' and 'way of life' as previously was assumed. I refer more specifically to a lifeworld that supports the sphere of aesthetics, and as the historian Janaki Bhakle has noted, the sphere of aesthetics has been remarkably preserved by the middle classes precisely as a sphere that is not rationalised (2005; see also Ram 2011).

modernity remain indispensable for the work undertaken in this thesis. For instance, it is extremely pertinent to remain aware that a narrowing of tradition has occurred as a result of colonial and postcolonial history (see chapter 2), that the models of gender comportment utilised in choreography exercise a selectivity based on class and caste (see chapter 9), and that many of the elements of Muslim cosmology and Sufi heritage that still suffuse different parts of India, tend to be suppressed.   I have chosen to approach the question ethnographically, that is, by showing what practitioners themselves do, how *they* talk about such issues (see chapter 10). For Das and his dancers have certainly encountered such scepticism. The question I have posed is one that dancers themselves confront. The world I describe exists in a contested space, and this contestation is not external to the dancers. They themselves encounter the tension between the patriarchal currents and their own experiences, confronting accusations of cultish behaviour, and implied judgments that they all must suffer from a loss of agency. Nor do I refer simply to the American students. Conceptions of 'the teacher', 'the student', of what it is to be a female agent, are contested in India, creating tensions between the ideals of the art and contemporary India. In the thesis I examine a number of occasions in which such tensions emerged in the course of learning and teaching, as the gulf between the gender norms being enacted on stage and what is observable on the streets of Kolkata became an issue for pedagogy. Moreover, the guru-shishya is not the only model for learning kathak, or for other performing arts in India. Universities, academies, commercial and private dance schools are slowly replacing this traditional model, both in India and abroad. Even within the lineage in which I apprenticed, training for beginners was more diffuse, less one-to-one, as study involved training under a hierarchy of teachers, all of whom were also apprentices themselves. The larger network of dancers formed a critical base from which this tradition could be sustained, temporally and spatially.

But certain problems of translation have remained unavoidable if I was to remain true to the perspective of the learner. The charismatic authority of the guru remains central to the experience of dancers. For this community of practitioners, the guru model is not a spent force; it exerts a vital force on the learners of this form, and with a charismatic guru such as ours, even those unfamiliar with the model find it engages their subjectivity. Remaining true to the perspective of the learner has also required me to challenge the common equation of 'eastern spirituality' with exploitation and misguided religiosity, or with a completely ungrounded spirituality – and, closely related to this perception, with the loss of agency. The experience of learners does not allow me to separate the way I represent the

metaphysics of the art from the way I represent the grounded experience of bodily movement; nor does it allow me to separate hierarchy and agency. I wish to show that it was precisely within the experience of disciplined – and hierarchical – learning that experiences of agency, creativity and new emergent forms of subjectivity also arose.

The perspective of the learner also points to a way in which we might envisage the possibility of movement between different lifeworlds in a way that goes beyond the conventional debates on translation. It indicates that distances between lifeworlds *can* be crossed, but provided there is dedication, time and commitment, as well as skill and imagination, on the part of the person who wishes to cross the gulf. It is possible, but it is not a 'given'. Some gaps are more difficult to bridge and move across. Through using the perspective of the learner as a methodological stand point, it is possible to see how the difficulties in learning reveal a hierarchy of a different sort - a hierarchy based on what is more basic and taken-for granted in a culture, and therefore may never quite be crossed. My exploration of the emotional texture of intimate relations and the learning of gendered comportment seems to indicate that these might potentially form two very basic components of cultural learning that occur at a very young age. I ethnographically demonstrate how these differences figure at the practical level for the learner, while at the same time, exploring the dynamism that enables a crossing of sorts.

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Theoretical Review: Practice, the Everyday World, and the Body

Since the seventies, there have been calls within the discipline of anthropology for a practice that focuses more on the lived world, the domain of the everyday, and the practical reality of the social actors that anthropologists write about. In the late seventies, and into the eighties, anthropologists began to shift their attention away from symbolic or interpretive anthropology towards practice-oriented approaches to study culture (Ortner 1984). Inspired by the works of Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1990a), de Certeau (1984) and even Foucault (1977), social scientists have turned toward everyday knowledge and practice as an object of study.

Bourdieu's work and his notion of habitus provided a way to theorise the existence of culture in the body, suggesting that bodily practices existed in the habitus. The habitus was this assemblage of disposition, sensibilities and techniques that mediated between the individual and society (see Bourdieu 1990a). The term 'habitus' was itself drawn from Marcel Mauss's (1973) influential work, 'Techniques of the body'. Mauss drew attention to the ways in which our bodies are socialised, right down to the very simple embodied modes of walking, sleeping and standing. Marcel Mauss discussed 'techniques of the body' as the unique 'habits' of each society, including the cultural differences in movement patterns such as sleeping, swimming, walking, and running[11]. He presented the term 'habitus' to designate the social nature of this collection of habits, an 'ensemble of techniques of the body' (Mauss 1973: 76).

Pierre Bourdieu elaborated the notion of habitus as a set of incorporated dispositions that create certain sensibilities inclining agents to act in certain ways. Bourdieu's revised formulation in 'Le Sens Pratique' ('The logic of practice') describes the habitus as

> [S]ystems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (Bourdieu 1990a: 53)

Bourdieu treats the habitus as the embodied conceptual schema in which the underlying organisational principles of society are manifest. By moving through the social world in which this schema exists, we come to embody these principles that continue to orient our thoughts and action. Every action in itself embodies the fundamental principles of the field, and thus, through enacting these principles in the routine activities of daily life, individuals endorse their own bodily schema while objectifying and reproducing the schema in the lived world. As Sherry Ortner describes:

> [B]ourdieu also pays close attention to the little routines people enact, again and again, in working, eating, sleeping, and relaxing, as well as the little scenarios of etiquette they play out again and again in social interaction. All of these routines and scenarios are predicated upon, and embody within themselves, the fundamental notions of temporal, spatial, and social ordering that underlie and organise the system as a whole. In enacting

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[11] Although earlier precedents in related disciplines suggested this connection between bodily techniques and habits, Marcel Mauss was the first to present habitus as an ensemble of techniques in a way that was tailored to ethnography.

these routines, actors not only continue to be shaped by the underlying organisational principles involved, but continually re-endorse those principles in the world of public observation and discourse. (Ortner 1984: 154)

The question of how culture shaped the individual came to the forefront of researchers agenda. One of the principle questions of Bourdieu's theory, and many other theorisations of practice during the same period was on the relationship between structure and agency. Anthony Giddens had referred to this as 'one of the central problems of modern social theory' (Giddens 1979 cited in Ortner 1984: 145). Bourdieu's original formulation of the habitus exhibited a tendency to treat the habitus as homogeneous, monolithic, unconscious that saw individuals as merely reproducing the principles of the system. I work with the idea of the body as a more heterogeneous site and dynamic assemblage of accumulated techniques, sensibilities and dispositions. Such a theory shares with Bourdieu an emphasis on embodied learning. Mauss's original formulation of the habitus as heterogeneous is perhaps more in line with this notion of an assemblage, than Bourdieu's envisioning of a consistently coherent habitus (Downey 1998: 47). It is not a mere unreflective reproduction of the principles of our social world, but an on-going non-discursive and reflexive process compelling an experiencing agent who can successfully mediate the lived world, negotiating alternative modes of existence and experience[12].

While many practice theorists have a strong sense of the shaping power of culture, Sherry Ortner explains that this 'this shaping power is viewed rather darkly, as a matter of "constraint," "hegemony," and "symbolic domination" ' (Ortner 1984: 147). In Chapter ten, I incorporate a brief discussion of the works on Foucault (1973, 1977, 1987), Butler (1997) and Bourdieu (1990a) as they grapple with the constraint of discipline and power over the body. Bourdieu and Foucault also described the body as a site of control, and discipline as a force of power to control (see chapter ten). Butler's discussion of power in relation to a subject's attachment to those on whom he or she is fundamentally dependent is one that speaks of subordination and exploitation, even in the case of the parent-child relationship (Butler 1997). For Butler and many others, discipline, as a socialising force, is often thought to exert control, or a prohibitive force on neophytes or new members of any society. In this dissertation, I investigate this intersection between agency and power. However, I examine the enabling effects of disciplined training in apprenticeship, rather

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[12] See Dalidowicz (2006) for an extensive discussion of the problematic nature of Bourdieu's original version of habitus.

than viewing such limits as constraining. I will try to show that hierachies of power and knowledge still leave room for creativity and agency. Thus, an ethnography of learning counters this view of culture as constraining and dominating, as it details the ways in which the supposed constraining powers of the system actually enable a new agent, one who experiences their body in new ways. This theme is one that Foucault himself identifies in his later works on aesthetics and the technologies of the self (Foucault 1988; see also chapter ten).

I use the idea of the 'paramparic body' to refer to the body, shaped through years of apprenticeship in one parampara or tradition of kathak dance. I follow Matt Rahaim's use of the term in the Indian musical tradition as he describes 'each paramparic body [as] a way of musically being formed out of corporeal dispositions passed down tacitly through teaching lineages' (Rahaim 2008: 340). In this view, our body is one of our family traditions (see Young 2002; see chapter eight). By participation in a lineage of dancers, each with its own family history, dancers adopt the embodied knowledge of the lineage, from the more obvious repertoire of choreographies and compositions, to the more subtle underlying aesthetic preferences in movement, sound and sight. Enskilment into this or any lineage also involves the imparting of moral and ethical principles (see also Bryant 2005; Marchand 2008) that are intended to craft a new kind of social actor, a kathaka. In a dance lineage, the family body, or the paramparic body is actively shaped, and provides the basis for the new way of being in the world. As I will discuss, it is this well trained body that is the site for the live creation of tradition. This notion of the paramparic body becomes important to demonstrating that even the seemingly opposed ideas of subordination and agency coalesce in the body of the learner and contribute to the emergence of a new self. For these aspiring kathakas, the act of disciplined learning of a tradition both ensures kathak's continuity at the same time that it opens a space for creativity and improvisation. I return to a discussion of 'tradition' later in this section.

My discussion of embodied ways of knowing and learning is further informed by a branch of philosophy, phenomenology, that deals with the nature of experience. Phenomenology's interest with the world as it is lived and experienced (Csordas 1994a, 1994b; Jackson 1996; Merleau-Ponty 1962) have further contributed to the anthropological interest in the body, practice and the everyday world (see also Csordas 1990, 1993 1999; Desjarlais 1992, 1997; Desjarlais and Throop 2010; Ingold 2000; Jackson 1983a, 1983b; Stoller 1995, 1997). I

draw on Heidegger's idea of 'being-in-the-world' (1962) and Merleau-Ponty's idea of the 'lived body' as medium for having a world (1962) as discussed earlier in the chapter (see also Casey 1993, 1997). Both provide a frame for studying 'being' in relationship to the total environment (see also Ingold 2000). Other literature on perception, the environment, sensory experience and more generally, the anthropology of the senses (Classen 1993, 2005; Feld and Basso 1996; Howes 1991, 2003; Geurts 2002; Stoller 1989) has also attended to the body as the grounding for culture, sensation, and experience. The increasing attention to the multitude of ways in which we have, feel and experience our bodies in relation to the environment serves as a backdrop from which this dissertation has emerged. I ground my theorising, description and analysis in a detailed examination of learning kathak dance – a practice and process in which the body remains at the forefront of practitioner's experience.

Kathak's practical emphasis on the embodied learning of set skills and techniques and the implicit bodily conditioning that occurs through participation in the quotidian world require a theorisation grounded in the body. Throughout the dissertation, I will draw on many of the above theorists, in ways that support a theorisation of embodiment that prioritises embodied experience, bodily intelligence and ways of knowing that are beyond discursive reflection. However, I provide a fresh look at some of the now well-worn ideas on embodiment and practical knowledge. The emphasis on migration and the limits of learning as practices are removed from one context and recontextualised in another, provide a rich context to look anew at embodiment and what being-in-place means to people who move between places. Learning dance, especially in a lineage that is a product of migration and movement between nations, also provides a rich context in which to investigate the relationship between different ways of knowing and explaining the world. Critical to this phenomenology of learning is the importance of the background lived world or environment within which we were learning. I will show that ways of knowing are bound up with our being in the world, with the 'place' or 'total environment' within which we live.

Education, Skill, and Transmission of Knowledge

Educational theorists have long since theorised about learning, skill acquisition and transmission of knowledge. Many anthropologists, including myself, have also drawn on the work of educational theorists. Much of this research on everyday learning draws on the work of educational theorist, Lev Vygotsky (1962, 1978). One of the central concepts of Vygotsky's theory that is used extensively is the concept of the zone of proximal development. Vygotsky defined this as 'the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more able peers' (Vygotsky 1978: 85; see also Cole 1985; Cole and Engestrom 1993; Engestrom 1993, 1996; Lave 1996; Lave and Wenger 1991). The way in which neophytes are guided by those with greater expertise has been referred to as 'scaffolding' (see Bruner 1986; Downey 2008; Greenfield and Bruner 1969). The latter half of this dissertation carefully considers the scaffolding processes engaged by teachers to further develop students' abilities and assist them on the path to becoming a kathaka. Others, like Kay Milton (2002; see also Gieser 2008; Izard 1991), have argued that emotions play a key part in the learning process, a point I take up in later chapters where I explore the role of emotion in skill acquisition and how emotion can be engaged in the process of scaffolding (see also Leavitt 1996 and Rosaldo 1984 on anthropology and emotion).

While an examination of skill acquisition is integral to an ethnography of learning, educational theorists have also argued for a theory of learning as participation, rather than merely acquisition of skills. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) offered a theory of learning as participation. Part of enskilment and education is the process of joining a particular 'community of practice' – a process that they called 'legitimate peripheral participation' (LPP). By this they 'mean to draw attention to the point that learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community' (Lave and Wenger 1991: 29). The idea of LPP has been important to understanding how people become full participants, how they participate in and reproduce communities of practice, and how they learn an identity – all of which have been integral ideas in ethnographies of learning and apprenticeship. As Pelissier describes, 'in this framework, learning is not so much acquiring particular skills as it is increasing

participation in a community of practitioners' (Pelissier 1991: 90). Others have investigated the role of communities of practice in learning, such as Cristina Grasseni's work on skilled vision. Grasseni describes how communities of practice are important in 'producing collective and active belonging to aesthetic ideals, moral order and standards of accomplishment' (Grasseni 2007: 7; see also Hughes-Freeland 2008; Kohn 2011; Palsson 1994; Strauss 2005). My own work highlights this point; learning kathak has as much to do with participation in the community as it does with the actual hours of dancing. Contributions to the community, understanding one's position in the hierarchy, spending time with the guru are as important to one's identity as a dancer as are the actual skills and techniques of kathak.

The theory of learning as participation also advances Lave's argument against the cultural transmission model, which characterises learning as a passive reaction to teaching (1982: 185) and has enabled a discussion of the shared production of knowledge that occurs within the dialogic process of learning and teaching. More recent anthropological works have interrogated the kinds of knowledge produced through learning, such as Mark Harris's (2007) edited contribution on *Ways of Knowing*, which builds on discussion of the anthropology of knowledge (see Barth 2002; Boyer 2005; Crick 1982). A recent special issue of JRAI on *Making knowledge* (see Marchand 2010; see also Downy 2010; Portisch 2010) deals with skill learning and transmission of knowledge. Many of the authors build on the work of educational theorist and anthropologist Jean Lave, discussing the 'making' of knowledge, fostering 'thinking about knowledge as dialogical and constructive engagement between people, and between people things and the environment' (Marchand 2010: iv; see also Guile and Young 1999). Theorists examining scaffolding and proximal development as part of the social process of learning also have written on the ways in which new understandings, and hence new knowledge, is created in practice (see Cole and Engestrom 1993; Engestrom 1993, 1996). My research considers how new knowledge is created in the shared dialogic process of teaching and learning within the hierarchical model of guru-shishya; I will show that even in a model idealised on surrender and submission to the authority of the master, there still exists a dynamic back and forth multi-directional flow in which new kinds of knowledge is produced. I consider the wider community of practice, as they become integral in the shared production of knowledge in an idealised one-to-one learning model. I will also provide a clear account of the learning process that differs from the stereotype of imitative learning that was often assumed in

earlier studies of training in South Asian modes of performance (see for example Chatterjea 1996; Spies and de Zote 2002).

Dance and Movement Studies

Other reflexive works on learning, transmission, and the body have emerged from fields such as ethnomusicology, dance studies, sociology and anthropology. The early writing in the anthropology of dance was critical in bringing dance forward as a topic of serious scholarly research. Social theorists had begun to consider movement as culture (Birdwhistell 1970; Blacking 1977; Hall 1969; Mauss 1973), but it was later dance theorists, influenced by their approaches, that began to seriously study dance and its meaning. A growing body of anthropological work on dance emerged (Blacking and Kealiinohomoku 1979; Boas 1944; Hanna 1979, 1988; Lomax 1968; Royce 1977; Spencer 1985; Williams 1991) and dance writers began looking at dance as culture (Foster 1986, 1992, 1995; Kaeppler 1985; Kealiinohomoku 1969, 1976; Novack 1990, 1995). Scholars working on dance began to highlight the absence of the moving body in academic scholarship (Farnell 1994, 1995, 1999; Reed 1998).

Much anthropological, sociological, and historical research on dance has focused on the creation of meaning and identity through dance. An expanse of work has looked at the way gender, ethnic, national and class identities have been expressed, negotiated and contested within the context of dance (on gender see Cowan 1990; Heath 1994; Grau 1993; Reed 2009; on ethnicity and nationalism see Buckland 2006; Daniel 1991, 1995; Mendoza 2000; Ramsay 1997; Reed 2002, 2010; Shay 2002; Wulff 2007; in sociology and cultural studies see Desmond 1997; Thomas, H. 1993, 1995, 2003). Numerous studies have discussed the appropriation of dance traditions of the lower classes by elites or the state (Daniel 1995; Mendoza 2000; Reed 2002; Savigliano 1995; Thomas, D. 2002), a theme that has also been prevalent in literature on Indian dance, a point I return to shortly. While much earlier writing on dance exhibited a tendency to treat the body as representation, as a locus of identity and site for creation of meaning, dance scholars have also looked at dance as embodied practice.

Dance research has been important in ushering in an attention to the body that not only sees the body as a representation, but describes the lived experience of being a body.

Much dance writing has come from scholar-practitioners who are also dancers and bring to scholarship a heightened attention to the body and movement. Many have used their own experiences of learning and feeling in dance practice to write their ethnographies (Browning 1995; Downey 2005b; Hahn 2007; Kisliuk 1998; Ness 1992; Novack 1990; Sklar 2001). More recently, dance scholarship has started attending to dancers' experience, feeling and the senses. Cynthia Novack's (1990) ethnography of contact improvisation exemplifies how engaging in ways of moving shaped people's feelings about their lives. Tomie Hahn's auto-ethnographic work on learning the Japanese art of nihon buyo pays close attention to the sensorial experience of dance, describing the way in which culture shapes our attendance to various sensoria (2007; see also Bull 1997; Geurts 2002; and on senses see Classen 1993 and Howes 1991, 2005).

Dance, as an activity requiring an active, multi-sensorial engagement of the practitioners' bodies, had inspired those engaged in dance practice to become particularly aware of their bodies' intelligence and capacity for thinking in a way that was beyond discursive thought. Dance scholars vigorously took up the project of situated intelligence, knowing and thinking squarely within the moving and dancing body. Dance scholars and social scientists more generally became increasingly critical of the Cartesian dualistic schema of mind and body that perpetuated western scholarly writing. As Barbara Browning describes of her experience of samba, 'there are things I learned in Brazil with my body, and some of these things it has taken me years to learn to articulate in writing. But that is not to say that they were without meaning when I could only speak them through dance' (Browning 1995: xi). Corporeal intelligence, thinking through the body, and non-verbal communication emerged as an area worthy of study. Dance scholars continue to argue that 'the body does not intellectualise theory before it learns – rather, theory arises from engagement in body practices' (Hahn 2007: 2; see also Bull 1997; Foster 1995) – a theme that echoes the ideas of theorists who began focusing on practice and everyday knowledge. It is through an ethnography of learning - from the perspective of an apprentice - that I will describe the ways in which we can apprehend the world through movement, the movements of the dancing kathak body as well as the larger movements of migrating bodies.

Indian Dance Literature

The field of Indian dance studies has grown in the last decades, although its trajectory followed one that was intimately affected by the colonialist and nationalist project in India.

Much early literature set about describing, illustrating and classifying the dances of India (see for example Gopal and Dadachanji 1951; La Meri 1964; also see Massey 1999, 2004; Samson 1987; Singha and Massey 1967). Many have argued that such dance literature intended to demonstrate the spiritual and ancient Hindu past of Indian classical dance, connecting the dance to the divinely inspired Natya Sastra (Walker 2004: 34; see chapter two). Indian dance scholars such as Vatsyasan (1968, 1974, 1982), Khokar (1963, 1984, 1987), Kothari (1989) and Massey (2004) were integral in building a significant body of literature on Indian dance that linked it to the construction of an Indian national identity (see Chakravorty and Gupta 2010: xiii). Scholars have since critically examined the refashioning of India's classical dances during the colonial and post-colonial period (Erdman 1995, 1998; Kersenboom-Story 1987; Meduri 1996; O'Shea 1998; Vatsyasan 1989). In the spectrum of dance studies in the western world, one of the most frequently cited examples of transformations in dance under colonialism is the south Indian dance form of Bharata Natyam. As Susan Reed explains, 'the most sustained, historically and theoretically rich research on dance under colonial rule has been done on bharatanatyam and the dances of the devadasis of India' (Reed 1998: 507; see also Allen 1997; Gaston 1996; Marglin 1985; Srinivasan 1983, 1984, 1985, 1988). The narrative of the female temple dancers in India, the banning of their dance during the Anti-nautch social reform movement, and then its later revitalisation (see chapter two) have become a familiar example to scholars working in dance. Research on the role of women and courtesans and devadasi continues to emerge (Maciszewski 1997, 2001a and 2001b; Oldenburg 1984, 1990) – much of which attempts to give a space for the voice of previously marginalised performers. Joan Erdman has also written extensively on Indian dance, providing critical analysis of the affect of nationalism on Indian dance, the use of categories like 'folk' and 'classical', and studies of well-known Indian dancer Uday Shankar (Erdman 1987, 1991, 1995, 1998). Numerous others have documented the history of 'intercultural' choreographies between east and west (Coorlawala 1992; Kothari 1988).

There has been a growing body of literature specific to kathak, for example, Saxena's more technical discussion on the aesthetics of kathak (Saxena 1977, 1981, 1990, 1991) and Sunil Kothari's book (1989) *Kathak: Indian Classical Dance Art* (see also Massey 1999). Of more importance to this dissertation is the growing research that critically examines kathak dance. In Mekhala Natavar's Phd dissertation (1997), she uses her own personal experience as the wife of a hereditary Rajasthani kathak to interrogate the role of gharanas offering a critique of the historical bias toward the Lucknow gharana, a point which many

other have since endorsed (see also Chakravorty 2008). Margaret Walker (2004) provides an extensive and well-documented critical history of kathak that deals with many of the disparities of kathak history. Her work serves as a strong foundation for the kind of ethnography of present day communities of dancers that I have written (see chapter two). Pallabi Chakravorty has done extensive ethnography on female dancers in Kolkata (2000a, 2000b, 2008). My writing draws on Chakravorty's work on how kathak dancers negotiate the asymmetrical structure of gender and power in Indian classical culture (2008: 3). I too incorporate this argument, but I do so by focusing more on the micro-social processes of learning. I build on Chakravorty's work on 'innovation' and 'new directions' under transnationalism and globalisation by incorporating a fresh discussion on the limits of translation as dancers and knowledge moves between worlds. Ethnomusicologist and student of Pandit Das, Sarah Morelli, has extensively documented the shifts in meaning and movement that occurred with Das's migration to America (2007). While I draw extensively on Morelli's thorough documentation of Das's lineage, my own research complements and builds on Morelli's work by focusing on actual learning, exploring how this occurs within guru-shishya and also within the wider community of apprentices and students. Whilst Morelli extensively details shifts in the form itself, in the movement and meaning, my focus has been on describing the pedagogical strategies and the process of skill acquisition. I also incorporate an examination of the return flows to India and its implications for dancers in the U.S.

Other work on Indian performance genres, has also been relevant to a project such as this, for example Daniel Neuman's work on North Indian musicians (1990), Susan Seizer's work on lower class special drama actresses in south India (2000, 2005), Joseph Alter's work on the body of the Indian wrestler (1992, 1993), and Phillip Zarilli's extensive work on Kathakali dance and the Indian martial art of kalarippayattu (1984, 1987, 1998, 2000). Anthropologist Felicia Hughes-Freeland (2008) has also written extensively on Javanese dance practices as sets of embodied practices, drawing parallels with the classical Indian dance of bharata natyam (2008: 18). Scholarly work from the field of ethnomusicology (see Kippen 1988; Wade 1979, 1988) has also infused my discussion of the arts in India and I draw on these authors throughout the dissertation.

Objectifying Tradition

Within dance literature, dance has become an important symbol of ethnic, national and gender identity. A process of reification often occurs as dance practices come to represent cultures and distant homelands. Many, in dance and the larger field of social science, have become critical of the objectification of traditional practices, particularly in relation to nationalist discourse (see aforementioned dance literature on nationalism). Questions on the constructed-ness and authenticity of tradition are especially relevant to a post-colonial India, where essentialist constructions of Indian culture found a foothold in the reconstruction of artistic practice (see chapter two). The ideas and images of valorised national dances have been further propagated through migration, and through the transnational flow of people, goods and ideas between India and other nations, as discussed earlier in this chapter (see also chapter five).

A critical view of tradition has been in part inspired by the work of theorists like Benedict Andersen (1983) on *Imagined Communities*, which made it clear that nation-states are relatively new inventions. Nation-states popularised memories of a shared past and used this historical narrative to authenticate a commonality of purpose and national interests (Andersen 1983). Creating a collective memory and a shared history was integral to defining a representing a bounded and coherent national culture (see Clifford and Marcus 1986 and Clifford 1988), and 'traditional' practices became critical in laying claims to a shared historic past. Social scientists have since devoted much time to studying the 'inventions' of culture and tradition (see Handler 1988; Handler and Linnekin 1984; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992; Wagner 1975). Scholars now agree that 'there is no unchanging "essence" or "character" to particular cultures' (Handler 1994: 29). By now, it is also widely accepted amongst scholars and many laypeople that 'there is no essential, bounded tradition; tradition is a model of the past and is inseparable from the interpretation of tradition in the present…The ongoing reconstruction of tradition is a facet of all social life' (Handler and Linnekin 1984: 276). Like culture, traditions are not bounded objects or entities, but are dynamic forces, reconstituted in the present moment.

Pandit Das and his dancers are aware of this discourse on tradition and are similarly critical of any fixed notion of tradition. In 2010, Chhandam hosted 'Traditions Engaged', a festival and symposium that broached the topic of evolving tradition. Pandit Chitresh Das openly questioned the notion of 'tradition' in a interview posted on the festivals webpage:

Indian classical dance is referred to in different ways – 'traditional dance' or 'ethnic dance'. But, what do these labels really mean and why is this medium different from 'Western dance' or just 'dance'? For many, the label of 'traditional' conjures up images of things stale, static, archaic on one hand or of things foreign and exotic on the other. These characterisations are one-dimensional and in the end obscure the depth, nuance and dynamism inherent in Indian classical dance…Traditions are evolving. They must. And they must have a central place in our cultural and artistic milieu. Traditional art, precisely because of its inherent link to history provides us with a unique means for cross-cultural dialogue, exchange and deep understanding. (Das 2010)

Later in the dissertation I look at the construction of what Das refers to as his role as a 'modern-guru-in-training'. I highlight the tradition of guru-shishya and will show that the guru-shishya parampara in this context is in many ways an artefact of migration. The world of guru-shishya that I describe can be interpreted as a unique immigrant phenomenon. In the process of migration, elements can be discarded and others amplified, however, the present form is still continuous with the past (see also Ram 2000a, 2005). Dance traditions like kathak, are neither wholly invented nor wholly authentic. I consider the migration experience as a part of the making of this particular interpretation of the guru-shishya parampara in the 21st century. The role of the guru as performed by Pandit Chitresh Das bears striking resemblance to earlier narratives and ideals (see chapter three) at the same time that it demonstrates freshness in the live and ongoing creation of this traditional figure. Das and his dancers remain aware that they are creating tradition anew in the present moment, but that even live creation of tradition must bear some continuity with the past. The question of how much continuity with the past is necessary is one that many dancers struggle to answer. How much innovation is allowed? What is authentic, and who has the authority to evaluate authentic practice. In the second half of this dissertation, I will use the discussion of the paramparic body to address how one guru and the larger community of dancers are grappling with these questions.

Methodology: Apprenticeship as Field Method

Ethnography helps us place practical and social imperatives on par with scholastic rules and abstract understanding. (Jackson 1996: 4)

Ethnographic fieldwork, with its practical involvement and participation, has contributed to a privileging of the everyday knowledge with which people make sense of the world.

Rather than emphasising abstract concepts and rules created in an intellectual world far removed from the one we are writing about, participation in ethnographic field research emphasises practical knowledge. Jackson tells us that many of his:

> [M]ost valued insights into Kuranko social life have followed from comparable cultivation and imitation of practical skills: hoeing on a farm, dancing (as one body), lighting a kerosene lamp properly, weaving a mat, consulting a diviner. To break the habit of using a linear communicational model for understanding bodily praxis, it is necessary to adopt a methodological strategy of joining in without ulterior motive and literally putting oneself in the place of other persons: inhabiting their world. (Jackson 1989: 135)

Engagements with cultural practices teach orientations that allow us to experience the world in new ways and remain as embodied knowledge that cannot be entirely reduced to theory. Anthropologists, in the last decades, have begun to prioritise these kinds of embodied ways of knowing that are integral to the everyday lived world.

Apprenticeship ethnography, whereby the ethnographer becomes practically involved with the field by apprenticing and ultimately learning the skills of a specific cultural practice, is a method that addresses these issues head on. While apprenticeship of some kinds occurs in all fieldwork settings, apprenticeship as a method highlights the opportunities generated by participation. Apprenticeship-style fieldwork offers a useful method to examine the process of embodying cultural knowledge that gives authority to the body and to the practitioners we write about. Throughout my fieldwork I have used an apprentice-style method (see Coy 1989). I trained and danced with one community of kathak dancers. I spent many hours in the classroom, dancing, and perspiring, along side my peers. I also spent many hours outside of the classroom participating in the myriad of activities involved in running the dance school: organising dance events, preparing for performance, building sets, coordinating costumes, attending meetings, generating ideas for promoting the schools, promoting for events, and so on. While we trained heavily, I spent just as many hours, if not more, involved in peripheral activities with my peers. Of primary importance to this apprenticeship was spending time near the guru, something that was amplified at certain times of the year, for example, travelling to India with Pandit Das (see chapter four). Participation in all of these activities was part of the apprenticeship and formed the basis for my fieldwork. My commitment to training and my involvement with Pandit Das, the students and the dance community at large, provided me with numerous things: not only did I learn the skills associated with the art, but it also offered me

'privileged access to my co-workers' practices and their expertise' (Marchand 2008: 248). In many cases, a practical apprenticeship is the only means by which anthropologists who seek to study practitioners of arts and other disciplines can gain access and participate in these communities. All of this is integral to the ethnography I present.

Others have certainly suggested apprenticeship as a useful field method. Edited collections such as Michael Coy's (1989) *Apprenticeship: From Theory to Method and Back Again*, discuss apprenticeship in a wide variety of cultural contexts and contributes to the idea of apprenticeship as field method. Coy describes, 'anthropologists and others who use this technique are turning their object of study back upon itself; using what they know to behave in a way that will enable the acquisition of more information and better understanding' (Coy 1989: xii). Many ethnographers in anthropology and other related disciplines have also used their own apprenticeships as basis for ethnography (John Miller Chernoff on West African drumming, 1979; Desjarlais on his apprenticeship in shamanic practice in Nepal, 1992; Downey on the Afro-Brazilian martial art of capoeira, 2005b; Grasseni on apprenticeship in cattle-breeding, 2004; Marchand on carpentry and minaret building, 2001, 2008; Stoller and Olkes on sorcery among the Songhay, 1987; Loïc Wacquant on apprenticeship in boxing, 2004). Other edited collections by Barz and Cooley (1997) and Ainley and Rainbird (1999) discuss and analyse apprenticeship as a serious mode of education. Jean Lave was one of the first to take seriously the learning process that occurs in the more 'informal' contexts of apprenticeship, especially in her work on Liberian tailors (1977, 1982, 1988)[13]. Cristina Grasseni's (2007) *Skilled Visions*, an edited volume on apprenticeship and the training of vision reflects the growing interest in the anthropology of the senses (Classen 1993, 2005; Feld and Basso 1996; Geurts 2002; Howes 1991, 2003; Stoller 1989, 1997) which has inspired a 'more sensual phenomenology of everyday practice, and the way this is lined in the construction of knowledge and the positioning of persons in their worlds' (Grasseni 2007: 2). Apprenticeship as method provides the researcher with a practical approach to study transmission, learning and pedagogical processes. In the rest of the chapter, I describe my own apprenticeship, the benefits of apprenticeship as a method, as well as the tensions inherent in this dual role of being both an apprentice and a researcher.

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[13] Much of Lave's work seeks to do away with this distinction between 'formal' and 'informal' educational contexts (see Lave 1982 and Lave and Wenger 1991).

A Fieldworker's Apprenticeship

I first met Pandit Chitresh Das in 2004 while studying kathak in Kolkata as a part of my fieldwork for my MA in anthropology. For the years leading up to this encounter, I had embarked upon my study of kathak dance from my Canadian home. However, my earlier studies of kathak had predisposed me for my eventual study with Pandit Das – I had been studying within Das's lineage since my beginnings in kathak without much awareness of its implications for my future study. In 2001, I had begun my studies with the only kathak teacher in Regina, Canada, a woman named Rosa Mirijello-Haynes. Subsequently I trained, in 2003, with her teacher, Joanna DeSouza in Toronto. DeSouza was one of the first shishyas of Pandit Chitresh Das[14]. Shortly before my departure for India in 2004, through a serendipitous turn of events, I learned of the recent opening of Das's school, Chhandam Nritya Bharati in Kolkata, and set my sites on Kolkata[15]. Between 2004-05, I travelled to Kolkata to undertake my first six-month period of fieldwork research for my Masters thesis. I still had not met Pandit Das, was still relatively unaware of the importance of lineage in kathak, and had therefore, crafted a research project quite different than the one that I ended up producing.

I initially intended to do apprentice-style ethnography, but had planned for a study of wider scope, and had contacted a number of Kolkata institutions at which I planned to do research. Ignorant of the pre-eminence of lineage or the significance it would play in determining the next few years of my life, I initially attempted to conduct fieldwork in a range of contexts; I attended several workshops and classes at many schools, including Das's school of Nritya Bharati, but also Rabindra Bharati University dance program, Padatik Dance School, Nurpur Dance Academy, and a number of smaller academies.

The student body of Das's Kolkata branch, Nritya Bharati, was small by comparison to other Kolkata schools, with a fluctuating attendance of ten to twenty students. But Das's

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[14]DeSouza had been part of the first generation of 'blondes and brunettes' who trained intensively under Das in his early years in America. In 1988, she established a school in Toronto. However, although DeSouza was one of Das's earliest students and had formally taken the role of a shishya, they were not in contact at the time I met him. The reasons for their decision to remain at a distance are not, and have never been entirely clear to me, although I soon accepted that this was not a matter I needed to probe. In the early stages, my affiliation with DeSouza was a constant source of friction in my encounters with Das, but over the months, and years, this has completely disappeared as a problem.

[15] Through a fortuitous encounter with DeSouza's guru-sister, Gretchen Hayden shortly before my departure, I learned of the re-opening of Nritya Bharati in Kolkata. This contact would give shape to my fieldwork for years to come.

students in Kolkata warmly welcomed me into their community and began preparing me for eventual study with the master. Through our shared connection to Das's lineage, I found myself taken in as one of the family. I would soon learn that loyalty to one lineage was highly valued, and study at multiple schools was discouraged. I redirected my involvement to participation within the lineage, and continued additional research when possible. I would later discover that while the guru was present in Kolkata, busy schedules and the norms of respect to the guru made it almost impossible to study with other institutions. As my own apprenticeship and experiences became more and more reliant on Das's lineage, such research endeavours that I had as a methodology of 'surveying' the field, gradually and necessarily fell by the wayside. On subsequent trips, I realised the futility in surveying the larger field if what I sought was immersion in the field. Participation required a more exclusive mode of interacting not facilitated by the demands of a larger survey. As I spent most of my time with our guru, there was also less time to go elsewhere. Whilst Das did not object to my independent excursions, and encouraged me to do what I needed, I was also aware of the strangeness of the situation. My actions contradicted 'old school' ways of behaving, such as the loyalty and obedience to only one guru, and felt inappropriate. Das's use of humour regarding students' behaviour was strategic in highlighting the inappropriateness of the situation, reminding me that my persistence in attending performances and conducting interviews outside Chhandam was tolerated but was not desirable. I reflect on these and other tensions with a purely academic methodology in the following section.

Over the next years, and in my return to Canada, I remained in contact with Das and made a couple shorter trips to California, meeting him and his students in America. As a student and participant in the community, involvement does not cease with the end of fieldwork, although the practical restrictions of geography minimised the level of involvement. It was not until the beginning of my PhD fieldwork in January 2008 that I resumed intensive study under Das. For the duration of my two years of PhD fieldwork, I would remain in California and follow Das's established pattern of seasonal migration between Kolkata and the Bay area, travelling to Kolkata for several months during each winter in 2008 and 2009. The most enduring contact I would have with him would be on these trips to India, and during my stays with him in Kolkata[16].

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[16] My first six-month period of fieldwork culminated in an intense two-month immersion with Das, during his winter stay in India. I came and went from his house in Salt-Lake daily, culminating with the last two weeks in which I was invited to stay in the house with Das and other students, two local students and several

During my fieldwork in America, which spanned the better part of 2008 and 2009, much of the time was spent within the context of the highly developed school of Chhandam in the Bay area, learning from and training with other senior dancers[17]. Although I would still attend several weekly classes under Das's instruction, direct study under Das no longer constituted the bulk of my time. Rather, I spent more time with the senior dancers and shishyas, who had come to bear a large responsibility in training the junior dancers. I attended regular classes at many of the branches throughout the Bay area, and became involved with the organisation at almost every level, from student, to assistant teacher, to performer, to a member of the production team for numerous performances[18]. Whilst this dissertation focuses largely on the 2008-09 fieldwork, I also draw on my earlier 2004-05 fieldwork.

My relationship with the shishyas, senior disciples, instructors and other dancers formed an important part of my fieldwork and the dissertation is heavily informed by these relationships. As I will discuss in chapter six, Chhandam today is constituted by tiers of students at different stages in their development, with differing relationships with Pandit Das and with each other. At the time of research, the Chhandam branches in North America had approximately 500 students enrolled, the majority of which were of South Asian ancestry. The demographic of students had changed dramatically from the early beginnings of the school, when all the students were of non-Asian descent. In 2009-10, the instructors in the school were comprised of a tight core of devoted students, some of whom were shishyas, and many who were aspiring to be. Most of the teachers were also performers in the Chitresh Das Dance Company (CDDC), the professional company. The demographic of this tight group was more varied, with several of the senior most students being of non-Indian origin. It was members of this core group of dancers and disciples that would accompany dance on his biannual trips to India. As many of these dancers had

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students from America. On my subsequent trips to India, I would spend most of my time staying in the house with Pandit-ji. It is this immersion in India that is idealised as the closest experience we students would have of the traditional gurukul, in which the student takes up residence with the teacher, a theme I turn to in chapter four.

[17] I do not use pseudonyms for the senior dancers of Chhandam. As dancers and artists in the public eye, all preferred to be recognised by their proper names, a request that runs counter to the anthropological tradition of anonymity. I use pseudonyms only within field note excerpts, especially in reference to junior students.

[18] I was fortunate to be included in the activities of the senior group of dancers, referred to as the 'consortium'. I was junior in skill level, as well as in years of study with Das, but I had formed a special bond with Das through my earlier time in India. Also, because I had moved to San Francisco specifically to take up study with him, I was given special privileges, a fact that several students pointed out to me. He had opened up access to me, allowed me to attend most classes, meetings, and participate with greater freedom than most.

other jobs, families, and additional commitments (including teaching kathak and assisting in the managing of Chhandam), extended absence was difficult to arrange and the number of dancers that could accompany Das to India was always highly varied. The composition of the core group of disciples, some of whom had been around for many years, reflected the early history of the school and company. I return to a discussion of the history, organisation and hierarchies of students in chapters two and six.

The Subjectivity of Apprenticeship

The requirements of participating in a relationship such as the guru-shishya parampara, has important implications for the nature of apprenticeship style research. As I will describe in chapter three, the guru-shishya parampara is a hierarchical relationship embedded with the ideals of loyalty, devotion and surrender. In a field that required a certain degree of subordination we might well ask – how did this affect the nature of fieldwork, and my role as an anthropologist? How did it affect my ability to analyse and critique the practices in which I participated? My role as a dancer and student required me to conform to the 'rules' of the field, to gain a bodily understanding and know-how to participate, and to subordinate myself to the act of learning. In many ways, the objectives of being a fieldworker who is trying to gain a deep and empathetic understanding of the practice and its practitioners, relies on the same method. Both require subordination, and the same child-like surrender to being re-socialised. And both produce new kinds of knowledge and an expanded sense of self through this process. The empathetic response of the ethnographer, I argue, shares many qualities with the response of the devoted disciple. The empathetic response I generated in the field was on many levels, one and the same with the kind of empathetic response expected of me as a student, seriously pursuing the study of kathak under a master. My attention as anthropologist to the taken-for granted aspects of daily life shared a particular mode of being with the foreign learner, who struggled to understand why her body just does not move in certain ways. The perspective of the learner in cross-cultural practices shares many of the principles of fieldwork, and bridges a seemingly impassable gap. My own empathetic responses to the guru and the community were unmistakable ingredients in my learning and my fieldwork. A necessary component of success in both fields, my inter-subjective entanglements with this social world formed the basis for this ethnography in very real emotional and visceral ways (see also Throop 2010). This deep entanglement did not come without its obstacles.

As a student, I was to learn kathak dance. The same standards applied to me as applied to the rest. My role as an anthropologist accorded me relatively little privilege in the community; I was subject to the same cultural criteria as the rest. The great advantage of this was that as a student, we are constantly subject to the scrutiny of our teachers and peers, reminded whether we are correct, guided to competency, and steered back on the right path. Apprenticeship necessitated adherence to the rules of the field, to the wider values and encouraged a belief in the practice. 'After all, its [apprenticeship's] function is to instruct not only in technical skills, but also in the appropriate deportment, shared assumptions, behaviours and values (ie. the culture) of one's future fellow workers' (Cooper 1989: 37; see also Coy 1989). The authorities in these contexts monitor our anthropological understandings of culture, as they make explicit the cultural criteria we are trying to understand, facilitating our very research. My peers, teachers and guru monitored my understanding of the prescribed morals and aesthetic values of the tradition. By so doing, they were also monitoring my advancement and understandings as a fieldworker. This dependency and hierarchical relationship between teacher and students also neutralises and reverses any potential for unequal power relations that can emerge between fieldworker and subject. As an apprentice, I am a student, and as such, I occupy an inferior position in the hierarchy.

Embodying the field in some sense, we begin to see, hear and feel in specialised ways, ways that highlight our membership in the community (see also Grasseni 2004, 2007). Our training shapes our own perceptions, sensibilities and attitude. In the process, our subjective biases are deeply ingrained in the way we see, hear, and move. For example, our heavy training in footwork and *chakkars* has certainly disposed all of us to harsh criticism of the lack of this in other styles. The adherence to traditional etiquette has also rendered us highly critical of its lack in others. I studied with Das, and took up his style of kathak because I liked it. Those biases were sedimented even deeper in my repertoire the more I studied. I do not, however, understand these body based beliefs and preferences as undetectable to the student, or to the anthropologist. If embodiment presupposes a belief in the body that is undetectable to consciousness, then this project would have failed miserably. Such instances of re-socialisation bring such processes to the surface in revealing ways. Apprenticeship and anthropology prove to be highly compatible methods into new ways of knowing and being in the world. However, there comes a point where the goals might prove to be incommensurable.

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The necessary commitment and conformity clearly marks out my position in the ethnography as that of a student. The obviousness of my allegiance makes it readily available for scrutiny. Apprenticeship ethnography thus provides the ideal conditions to investigate the wider issues of subjectivity, bias and accountability that surely emerge in any fieldworker's experience. But as an anthropologist, my duties to the discipline of anthropology occasionally ran up against the strictures on representation in our dance lineage. Implicit in the relationship of guru and student is a deep loyalty and respect. The idea that one should never question one's guru, but should have complete faith and surrender to the guru certainly challenges the position of an analytical fieldworker searching for answers. As inheritors of the traditional knowledge, it was our duty to work to represent the art, and the teachings of the guru to the best of our ability, and ideally, upholding the guru's vision. The critical and analytical nature of anthropology has required me to make statements that may be viewed as inappropriate if expressed elsewhere. So long as they remain connected to the anthropological agenda, and expressed within that context their inappropriateness is contained up to a point. As a guru, Das encouraged independent and critical thought. While expression of criticism and questioning were not without limits, this did not preclude their possibility. As I was the second of fieldworkers, and part of a long line of other researchers to study the community, Das and the community were already familiarised with the requisites of scholarship. And because of my dual role, I was afforded considerable freedom in manoeuvring and allowed greater access to resources and classes. For the most part, what was important when 'in the field' was how I danced, something I was constantly reminded of by Das[19].

At times, the inherent contradiction between subscribing wholly to the ideology of two disciplines has at times seemed like an insurmountable challenge. It poses as many mental and emotional challenges as logistical ones. Committed fully to two disciplines, both with their own internal logic, created some stress. Periods of my fieldwork were fraught with a great deal of inner turmoil over these two seemingly separate goals, to become an anthropologist and to become a dancer. Coopers' discussion (1989) of apprenticeship as inducing an 'enforced schizophrenia' certainly rang true. In later stages of development, it became evident to any student at the cusp, that to go deeper into the art would require an

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[19] While I often refer to Pandit Chitresh Das as 'Das' throughout this dissertation, even this writing convention is inappropriate in representing my relationship to him – further evidence of the tension between being an academic and an apprentice. For the most part, within field notes excerpts I refer to him as Dada, Dada-ji, or Guru-ji, as this is how he was addressed by his students. In other contexts, I refer to him as Das, and occasionally as Pandit-ji, a title of respect for one's master.

even larger commitment. Many students lingered at this cusp, uncertain and unwilling to take the plunge. As obligations to the lineage grew, I became aware that the completion of one path did not facilitate completion of the other. Nor did my fast approaching return to Australia or my departure from the field facilitate ongoing study in the guru's presence. While my peers were moving forward at high speed, performing, and touring, I had to gradually begin my withdrawal, extracting myself from the dance. Cooper noted that 'since one's commitments and concerns ultimately stretch beyond the world of apprenticeship to one's role as a neophyte cosmopolitan intellectual, it is often difficult keeping one's roles in their proper perspective' (1989: 138). This indeed was the case. For a time, it seemed that the two agendas of becoming a kathaka and an anthropologist were one and the same. And throughout they intersected in ways that shed illumination on matters. But at a point, the two agendas ran up against one another. Leaving the field proved a significant disruption to the regular trajectory of a kathak dancer. I have since questioned how much analytical distance is necessary to acquire the right kind of critical perspective. I do not have an answer, as both goals, at the time of writing, remained still in the future.

Accountability remains an issue for every ethnographer, but the sense of responsibility and duty cultivated within the learning relationship with a guru has certainly made my sense of being accountable to the community stronger than I had anticipated. Indeed, it may be difficult to speak critically about one's guru as this goes against the ideals of the system. I have tried to mediate the conflicting ideals of guru *bhakti* and critical social science by availing myself of internal dissonances within each model. Viewed without due awareness of such internal diversity they are indeed irreconcilable. But anthropology has within it the ideal of ethnography – as an ethic of attention and empathy to lifeworlds not necessarily compatible with that of the enquirer. I therefore commit myself to describe the things that people in this community do and say, and to explore why the guru-shishya parampara continues to exert such a powerful force for this group of practitioners. Equally, I have availed myself to the dissonances within the world I seek to describe and the reflexivity that was built in by a guru who viewed himself explicitly as a modern guru in the making, agent of an evolving framework. I respond here, in part, to the familiar critique that having a guru is in direct conflict with the objectives of academia in research since the necessity for complete surrender forfeits a students' ability to think or analyse for oneself. Much of this thesis argues precisely against this view, showing that subordination and agency are not necessarily opposites, that they can afford the experience of creativity, even if the version of creativity is not synonymous with western notions of the term (see chapter 7-

10). This is true for the fieldworker, as it is for the student. My own formulations are intimately tied to the relationship from which they have sprung, but they are not confined to that context. It is only from within that we can begin to understand the workings of these relationships.

I believe that what I present offers a representation that the community would endorse, although I am certain there would be ample objections to smaller points. In other words, the larger narrative I construct is one I hope the guru and community would agree with, for at some point, if what we as anthropologists say is too out of line with our informants opinions, than we must reconsider what we write. However, I retain the analytical rigour of the academic tradition in which I was trained, a skill set that has been as equally ingrained and developed in the course of writing this thesis. My selection and analysis of anecdotes, narratives, and quotes certainly reflects the responsibility I have to both traditions, and this bias cannot be divorced from the process. It can however be accounted for wherever possible. We can never rid ourselves of own subjective stance but we can, however, train ourselves to remain cognisant of it. I owe this insight to the training of anthropology. It is by engaging these intersecting skill sets that I now proceed further.

Outline of the Dissertation

In the following chapter, I introduce Pandit Chitresh Das, situating him within the larger field of kathak, and attending to the relevant history of our lineage. In chapters three through six, I discuss the guru-shishya parampara, as it is lived and experienced by dancers. In chapter three, I explain the ways in which guru-ness, and its counterpart, being a shishya, are translated and understood by practitioners. In chapter four, I focus on the experiences of studying within a re-created *gurukul* in India, as students take up residency with their guru during his bi-annual visits to Kolkata. Here I highlight the salience of place as a materialised site of practice for learning kathak. In chapter five, I describe the ways in which the guru-shishya relationship is sustained within its American context, giving priority to the affective and emotional dimension of the guru-shishya relationship as a form of place-making in itself, especially for the Indian diaspora. Here my focus on the specificities of Pandit Das is not only because of his charisma, but because the reliance on the guru has become even more pronounced by the circumstances of existence in the diaspora. In chapter six, I describe the larger community of dancers and the complex hierarchical web of practitioners that have formed around Das, constituting and sustaining

the lineage.   In chapters seven, eight and nine I focus on developing an ethnographic account of learning the skills, techniques and dispositions of this lineage of kathak. In chapter seven, I emphasise the shared production of knowledge that occurs even within an asymmetrical learning relationship. I highlight the responsiveness and creativity of teachers as they aid the learning of students. In chapter eight, I discuss the ways in which creativity and agency emerge from within the disciplinary regimes of training in the traditional arts. In chapter nine, I describe some of the gaps in learning the dramatic elements of storytelling when kathak is taught within a world where there are few everyday practices to support it. Here I discuss the way problems encountered in pedagogy provide an insight into those aspects of the background world of India which are missing from dancer's experience in the U.S. The final chapter concludes with a discussion of emerging kathakas, and the peculiar intersection of agency and subordination that comes out of a relationship where love and learning are so intertwined.

CHAPTER 2

History of a Kathaka: A Transnational Lineage

First Encounters

I remember quite vividly the first day I met Pandit Chitresh Das. I had already been in Kolkata for four months, studying and training in his small kathak school, Nritya Bharati. He was in California. During his absence, students' talked about their dada-ji, told stories and expressed eagerness – with hints of anxiety - for his return. Finally, after much anticipation, we all stood in the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose airport in Kolkata awaiting his arrival. And when he finally appeared, he charged ahead with such intensity after his 20-hour flight from the U.S. that I stood dumbfounded. The other local students ran toward him, before he could even exit security, in order to perform the ritual of touching feet. I had anticipated this moment, but stood, dazed, uncertain about what to do. Eventually I too followed the example of my peers in Kolkata, and proceeded to touch his feet, however awkwardly. He paused, and said to me, 'you must be Monica'.

That was the only time I ever touched his feet. Later he explained to me that it was not necessary, and in fact, he preferred if we touched the floor in front of him, or performed *namaskar* to him. Some students insisted on performing this ritual gesture of touching feet, especially those in India, but I was relieved to not have to perform what felt like a very unnatural gesture. My introduction to Das itself conveys, in retrospect, his own transnational past. Das was able to fluidly move between two cultural worlds, not only in the geographical sense, but in the ease with which he fluently interacted with both his Indian and American students. The conditions that brought me here, a Canadian meeting an Americanised Indian kathak guru in India for the first time, further conveys the curious transnationality that has come to define our lives in dance in the 21st century.

The other striking feature of this first encounter with Das was the charisma that he exuded, and the way in which this enlisted a group of followers committed to learning kathak through his particular vision. The build-up to his arrival alerted me to the force field of his charismatic authority, as students anxiously prepared for his arrival. His magnetism was initially peculiar to me – students hung on his every word, interacted with great reverence, and devoted incredible time and energy to this man. I had never imagined that Pandit Das would become such a central figure in my dissertation. Yet, as the head of the lineage and an embodiment of charismatic authority for those students with whom I had studied, life in the community centred on him. Upon my first encounter with him, I began to see the centrality of this guru to the community of dancers that now constituted the lineage.

In the present chapter, I introduce the reader to Pandit Chitresh Das, as he plays the main role in the narrative I present. Yet, this story is not simply about one man or his dance lineage. His story contains all the central elements in the historical transformations of dance in the 20th century. Kathak dance, like Das, is the carrier of a history shaped in nationalist and post-colonial India, as much as by its new re-territorialisations in the Indian diaspora. Das's early studies in kathak in India reflect the emergent nationalism of a pre-Independence India. Das's migration to America and his movements between India and America reflect wider transnational trends in migration and the ensuing questions of diasporic identity. His own pedagogic and performative shifts reflect the adaptations to contemporary San Francisco while his returns to a modern India provide a site to investigate the re-exporting of tradition in the interconnected world in which we live. In this chapter I describe Das's lineage as a reflection of larger historical shifts that have shaped this artist and the broader field of kathak. These details form the background to the story of Pandit Chitresh Das and kathak dance in the 21st century. In what follows, I combine the official narrative Das teaches his students, in the form of oral narratives, interviews, written pamphlets and Chhandam school dance materials, with the wider sources provided by postcolonial historiography and critical dance scholarship.

Transcultural Roots: From Kathakas to Courtesans

Kathak comes from the word katha, meaning to tell stories. A kathaka is a storyteller.
(Pandit Chitresh Das)

Kathak is an oral tradition. From the first day of classes, students are taught to repeat the above phrase, as a part of our oral history. It is an introduction to the dance, to our lineage of kathak, and to the oral bardic tradition. We, as students and performers, come to rely on this phrase as an introduction to the dance when speaking to a variety of audiences. It is how we have learned, and how we learn to teach and educate others. We are taught that the kathak tradition 'dates back over 2000 years to kathakas, wandering minstrels and bards, who travelled from village to village preaching and bringing to life the meanings and messages of the great mythologies and scriptures through song, dance and commentary' (Das et al. 2001: 11). The kathakas are, however, one of many groups who have strongly shaped the present day form of kathak.
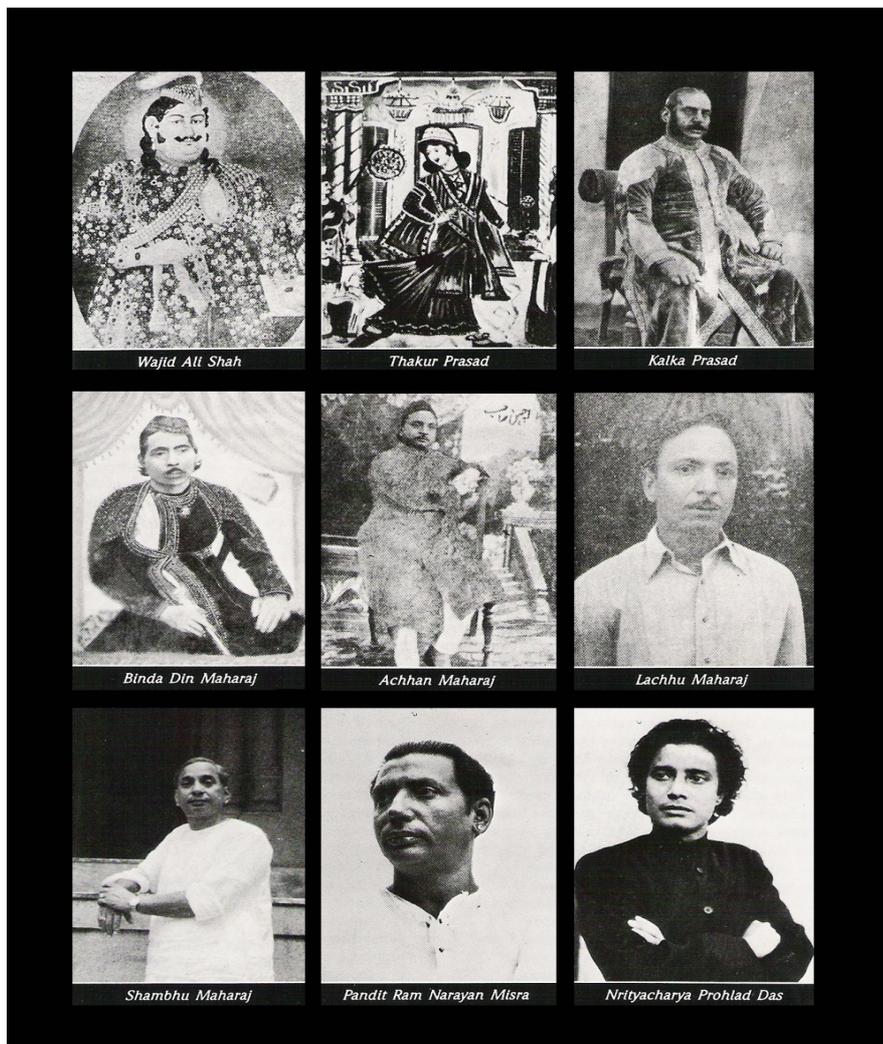
Figure 1: Photos of the Great Gurus. This photo was placed upon the altar at the front of every Chhandam dance room.

The narration of kathak's history in our lineage typically includes references to this hereditary lineage of kathakas in Rajasthan, the descendents of the Jaipur *gharana* or family of kathak. Das's own training and penchant for rigorous footwork reflect the style of the Jaipur gharana. Das's definition of himself as a 'Bengali Rajput Californian' reveal not only his hybrid past, but his personal identification with the strength and vigour of the idealised Rajput warrior. The historical roots of Das's lineage are actually linked more closely with the other major gharana, the Lucknow gharana. The roots of Das's lineage are formally traced back to the Lucknow gharana; Das's guru and father were trained by the descendents of the Lucknow gharana. The Lucknow gharana has its early beginnings in the courts of Wajid Ali Shah in Lucknow, who is often recognised as one of the greatest patrons of Indian music and dance[1].

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[1]With the fall of the Mughal empire, the famous Nawab resettled in Kolkata, and with his move, he brought many artists, establishing Kolkata as centre for the arts.

In his artistic pursuits, he [Wajid Ali Shah] employed over three hundred actors, vocalists, dancers and musicians. One of these, Thakur Prasad, was Wajid Ali Shah's court dancer and guru and the Lucknow gharana is said to have originated with him….Two of Thakur Prasadji's nephews, Binda Din Maharaj and Kalka Prasad, excelled in the study of kathak and also danced for the court of Wajid Ali Shah. Binda Din's three nephews, Acchan, Lachhu and Shambhu Maharaj helped carry the kathak tradition into the twentieth century. Acchan Maharaj – and upon his death, Shambhu Maharaj – had among his many disciples Ram Narayan Misra, and Prohlad Das, respectively guru and father of Chitresh Das, who are responsible for having firmly re-established Kathak dance in modern day Calcutta through formalised dance-study (Das, J. 1986: 4).

These gurus of the Lucknow gharana are taken to be our direct link to the art. They were responsible for the transmission and survival of the art, and as such, are accorded a position of great respect and honour in the lineage's memory. Photos of the 'great gurus' are placed upon an altar at the front of every classroom, and students learn to ritually *namaskar* to the photo at the beginning and end of every class. The tradition of 'touching the ears' at mention of the names of the great gurus in another form of ritually remembering the ancestors through movement[2]. While the historical narrative of the lineage privileges the male kathakas as well as the male gurus who emerged in the Mughal courts, Das's own practice and writing keeps alive the connection to a figure who has been marginalised – the courtesan, also referred to as *bai* or *tawaif*.

Connections to *Bai* culture

On one occasion my guru-ji took me to a mujra to see a young bai, one of his disciples, give her first professional performance. I vividly remember as we walked into the bai-ji home everybody stood up, even the rais (rich men). They greeted guru-ji and sat only after he did on a gadi (mattress)….My guru 'sister', the young bai-ji, entered the room accompanied by other bai-jis. I thought it funny to see her like this. When I would see her come to guru-ji's to practice, she would be dressed very simply, and was always accompanied by an uncle. Here she was now wearing a full-skirted dress with large borders of spangled work. She wore a slight velvet vest in traditional Muslim style...As she danced, the rais began to give rupees to the musicians and constantly expressed gratitude to the bai-ji's mother. They praised guru-ji for his teaching and finally at the end of the performance the patrons gave money to the young dancer. She proceeded toward her mother who gave her a stern look and directed her to her guru. Embarrassed, she approached guru-ji offering the crisp notes correctly with her right hand – in keeping with the custom that all money from a disciple's first performance should go to the guru. Guru-ji accepted the rupees, and said to me abruptly, 'Son, lets'

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[2]Das's own critique of routinised behaviour for the frequent detachment from the original meaning has meant that we are discouraged from performing gestures like touching ears or touching feets unless we 'understand' what it means.

go'. The patrons then offered more rupees to guru-ji, which he accepted at their persistence. Saying Namaste, we left. I asked guru-ji what was going to happen now. He replied that as guru his duty for the evening was completed, and that now she would begin to fulfil her duties as bai-ji. (Das 1986b: 27-8)[3]

Pandit Das still retains connections to his guru sister, Maduri Devi Singh[4], a *bai-ji* who continues to live in Bowbazar in Kolkata. *Bais*, or *tawaifs* were female court dancers of the Mughal empire, thought to have come from Persia and beyond. They were, in fact, said to be a well-educated and respected class of female entertainers, despite a later stigmatisation and association with prostitution. 'Available literature indicates that the *tawaifs* of the royal courts (later known as nautch dancers) were women of high social status in the pre-colonial period by the fact that they owned and inherited land and property though the female line, a right not enjoyed by women in general.' (Chakravorty 2008: 33; see also Kippen 1988; Walker 2004). The *tawaifs* or courtesans that had travelled from Persia are said to have interacted with the kathakas within the Mughal courts (see Walker 2004). Their styles intermingled, blending Muslim and Hindu influence in the art of kathak[5]. Less is known about the interactions between the courtesans and the kathakas. Ethnomusicologist Margaret Walker suggests that gaps in the historical records seem to function as a conscious effort to distance kathak from the Muslim courts and dancing girls (2004: 20).

Despite the earlier position that female performers held, they were soon to become stigmatised, impoverished and almost disappear from the historical record. During the British colonial period, the 'Anti-Nautch movement', part of a wider movement for social reform in colonial India, condemned dance performances claiming that dancing girls were prostitutes (Chakravorty 2000a: 62; see also Chakravorty 2000b, 2008; Meduri 1996,

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[3] While such performances or mujras are considered to be based around song and dance, it is generally assumed that outside of the mujra, most performers participate in the sex trade. The practice continues today. For the most part, in public opinion, the remaining dancers are viewed as being involved in the sex trade, and the baiji quarters are viewed by the public as a destination for customers to find mujras (intimate performances) as well as the sale of sex.

[4] The documentary film 'Anwesha' (n.d) depicts the lives of such present day Bai's, focusing on Maduri-Bai, resident of Bowbazar in Kolkata, and coincidentally, guru-sister of Pandit Das. At the time of filming, Mujras, or dance performances for small gatherings, were held at specific times throughout the day

[5] The Muslim-Hindu syncretism in kathak is a point that is often picked up in retellings in our lineage, especially to America audiences. 'Kathak is the only art form which is an outcome of Hindu and Muslim culture', Das explained to a local San Francisco journalist, as I had heard him say so many times before (Das 2008). Despite the fact that many of us would narrate the spoken history of kathak in such a way, highlighting its syncretic blend of Muslim and Hindu influence, it was less obvious in daily practice. A narrowing of the tradition had occurred, making the Hindu cosmologies more evident in our daily practice and orientations to the dance. This is inevitably reflected in my rendition of the cosmology as I imbibed it in daily practice.

2001; O'Shea 1998, 2007; Shah 2002; Walker 2004)[6]. A senior shishya of our lineage described the situation with similar recognition of *bai's* earlier role,

> When the British raj came, they didn't understand the courtesans - who were compared to the Geisha - the courtesans were the most learned and enlightened women in society at that time, but the British saw them as mere prostitutes as they came with their staunch Victorian morals – they didn't understand that art was sensuality to spirituality. (Moraga, unpublished interview 2008)

With a drastic decrease in patron support, these female dancers lost their status in the courts and were forced to take up other options. The most musically talented became musicians and actresses, some may have married, and other slipped further into prostitution (Walker 2004: 172). The newer wave of postcolonial scholarship now considers the elimination of women entertainers from the historical record to be a part of a purifying process that aimed to rid the dance of its ill reputation and possibly elevate the status of the dance back to its former glory, a sanitisation process that is later linked to rising nationalism in India. However, *bais* retain an important role in kathak's history. Walker (2004) and Chakravorty (2008) have challenged the dominant historical perspective that privileges the role of the kathakas by highlighting the importance of marginalised female performers in the history of kathak[7]. For women like Maduri-di, Das's guru-sister, who are seen as the last in a long line of *bai-jis*, this history is still being lived. In 2003, Pandit Das and several of his disciples began teaching kathak to children of sex workers in Kolkata's Bowbazar, through the New Light Foundation of Kolkata, an organisation that has been established to care for the children of sex workers and to provide options for the outside of the sex trade[8]. The New Light Foundation had established a safe house of sorts, especially for teenage girls, removing them from their mothers' homes, and thus, from the grasps of the sex trade. The intention of the program was to provide the girls education, skills and training in other areas. Although there may be a hint of irony in the endeavour, a small group of these teenage girls took up study with Pandit Das. As a part of his 'service to society', Das began teaching these girls the art of

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[6] The anti-nautch movement was officially launched at an open meeting in Madras in 1893. Initially focusing on the devadasi system in South India and culminating in the Devadasi Abolition Bill of 1947, it rapidly gathered support throughout the country (Walker 2004:170).

[7] Chakravorty focuses on kathak as the practice of courtesans (tawaifs, baij-is, and the nautch), which she identifies as a departure from the typical approach which focuses on men and their lineages (2008, 15). 'It is possible to argue that the Kathak we are familiar with today belongs more to the nautch than to the brahman kathakas who are hailed as the original source (Chakravorty 2008: 39, see Walker 2004: 172-6). On the opposite end of the spectrum, Mekhala Natavar's work (1997) discusses the current feminisation of kathak and marginalisation of the Rajasthani kathaks.

[8] For a short clip of Das's work with the children of the New Light foundation see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDXLq8Ii868&feature=player_embedded

kathak, much as his guru-ji taught the *bai-jis* of his time. However, his intention was not to teach them in order to sustain the *bai* culture, but rather to teach them dance as a form of 'self-empowerment'. Recently, his guru-sister, Maduri Devi Singh began teaching kathak to the New Light girls. 'Now my guru-sister teaches to them, not for a career for these girls, but to empower them' (Das, unpublished interview 2008a). It was his contribution and commemoration, at a practical level, of the *bai-ji* culture and the history of the courtesans. *Bai-jis* continue to play a distinctive role, at least in the social memory of Das's lineage.

Bhakti Devotion in Kathak

> *Pandit-ji began as he so often did at the end of everyone of his performances and many of his classes by singing the first line of the song,*
> 'shri krishno chaitano, prabhu nityanando
> hori krishno hori ramo, shri radhe gobindo...'[9]
> *The song went on, and we, all the students gathered there, joined in, with wide smiles, to sing one of the most well-known devotional songs in our school.*
> *(field notes 2008)*

The historical importance of Vaisnavism and Bhakti religious movements that were particularly popular in West Bengal are in evidence in several features of Das's practice, such as our ritual singing of 'Sri Krishno Chaitano'[10]. Das would often sing this song at the end of class and would always close his solo performances with it, creating an unforgettable feeling that was articulated as *bhakti*. Dance scholar Mekhala Natavar also noted that kathak was highly influenced by the *bhakti* devotional movement, if not developed from *bhakti* traditions (Natavar 1997: 7). The creation of *bhakti* or devotional fervour through the dance became one of Das's primary goals in teaching and performing kathak (see chapter 9).

Vaisnavites, formally worshippers of Vishnu, are closely associated with the figure of Krishna in certain religious cults, lineages and regions of India. It is particularly pronounced in kathak. The link between kathak and the Vaisnavite tradition of *bhakti* is evident in the dominance of Krishna-based songs, *kavitas* or poems, and *gat bhao* or

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[9] Shri Krishna, omniscient, eternal child-god,
Lord Krishna, Lord Rama, Radha's cowherd Lord;
Never-obeying child of Yashoda,
Beautiful Shyam, captivating flute player (Bengali transl. Das et al. 2001: 11)
[10] The Bhakti movement is a movement of religious devotionalism that first took shape in Tamil country in the sixth century and then gradually spread northward (Stein 1998:123; see also Kinsley 1993).

storytelling, as well as the use of *brajbhasha* in songs[11]. We are taught 'another name for kathak dance is Natawari Nritya, the dance of Lord Krishna'. In the storytelling aspect of kathak, stories of Krishna form a large part of the repertoire of stories that we learn, for example, Krishna's encounters with Radha and the *gopis* or milkmaids, his mischievous behaviours as a toddler, Krishna's battle with the serpent demon Kaliya, or Krishna's saving the people of Vrindavan from the floods. All of these and more are dramatically danced in our lineage, and more widely throughout the genre of kathak.

The ideals of the Bhakti movement, embodied in figures like Caitanaya, the Bengali saint, and most famous of Krishna devotees, have particular pertinence for a generation of Kolkata youths, of which Chitresh Das was one. Das's philosophy draws on many egalitarian themes in *bhakti*. Caitanya, the sixteenth century Bengali saint, usually said to be the founder of Bengal Vaishanvism, 'preached to all castes, and believed that all castes had the right to worship Krishna. He approved positively of breaking down caste barriers' (Dimock 1963: 119). The Vaishnava religion ran up against some opposition because of its progressive anti-caste and anti-brahman position and its emphasis on 'the equality of the sexes [that] provided room for women from all segments of society' (Chakravorty 2008: 37). Others, such as Swami Vivekananda, a Bengali socialist reformer in the late 19th century, later suggested that lower castes should be allowed to engage in Hindu rituals. 'Vivekananda's activist ideology rekindled the desire for political change among many western-educated young Bengalis' (Stein 1998: 277)[12]. Das's philosophy today echoes the ideas of these early Bengali figures. His own ideals for 'empowering women' as well as his attempts to make dance equally accessible to student's from all backgrounds echo the ideals of some of these early social reformers.

The Renaissance and the rise of Nationalism in Kolkata

> *I was born and raised in pre-Independence India, at a time when the nation was experiencing a cultural renaissance. My parents, Nrityacharya Prohlad Das & Srimati Nilima Das founded and directed one of the country's oldest and most prestigious Indian classical dance & music institutions – Nritya Bharati in Kolkata. My father produced one of India's first revolutionary dance dramas, Aubudhoyo (Dawn), presented to the Indian National Congress. (Das Interview, Traditions Engaged 2010)*

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[11] Brajbhasha is a dialect that is often used in devotional poetry and songs in India.
[12] Swami Vivekananda is considered a key figure for the introduction of Hindu philosophy in the Western world and 'became famous for his addresses on Hindu devotional philosophy at the 1893 World Congress of Religions in Chicago' (Stein 1998: 277).

The early 1900s in Indian history, and especially in Bengali history, is remembered fondly as a time the arts and culture flourished. It was into this environment that Pandit Das was born in 1944. Nationalist sentiment had been gaining momentum in the pre-Independence era of the early 1900s, and the arts would come to play a key role in the nationalist project of an Independent India. The arts would continue to figure in the construction of the newly independent nation of India, coming to stand as a symbol of an essential Indian culture. The arts, and dance, had the potential to facilitate the imagining of a 'pure', 'sacred', 'authentic' and 'spiritual' cultural practice that could quite evocatively represent India. Indian nationalist sentiment provided a new meaning for the arts, taken to be symbolic of the values, morals and the essence of Indian culture, a significance that is still celebrated today by leading dance critics such as Sunil Kothari[13],

> During the freedom movement, with the rise of the spirit of nationalism, in order to establish our own identity, the leaders and the savants of the freedom movement revived the arts as an expression of our culture. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, Poet Vallathol, Uday Shankar, E. Krishna Iyer, Rukmini Devi, Madame Menaka and others created an awareness amongst the intelligentsia about the art of dance. People realised that the arts were the epitome of what our speculative thoughts and philosophical views underlined. They were the conduits for communications of the Indian worldview. If these arts were not understood in the right context, it was time they were once again re-established, revived, examined, evaluated and restored with their intrinsic vitality. (Kothari 1995: 131)

Essentialist constructions of Indian culture were utilised in the freedom movement, and found an effective purchase in the arts. Arts revitalisation movements throughout India, growing in popularity alongside the necessity to define a distinctive Indian culture, resurrected a sanitised version of dance for the consuming classes of India's new nation. The dances of India were reconfigured, re-imagined, and gentrified for the elites, who saw training in the arts as refinement, elegance and evidence of an esteemed education (see also Kersenboom 1987; Kersenboom-Story 1995; Meduri 1996). The revivalist movements sought to restore the classical traditions from their glorious Hindu past. With the re-discovery of the Natya Sastra in 1865, 'the divine Hindu origin of dance in India was irrevocably established by the ancient text of Natyasastra' (Chakravorty 2008: 48)[14], a point that has been stressed in post-Independence India. Dance is said to have been

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[13] Janet O'Shea has also discussed how this cultural renaissance arose out of colonial and post-colonial pressures (1998: 54).
[14] Chakravorty explains that the new impetus for the resurrection of a pan-Indian classical dance came from the 'discovery of the Natya Sastra in 1865 by Edward Hall, followed by several other discoveries of its chapters in France, England and Germany' (2008: 47).

Figure 2: Pandit Das at age nine performing with the tabla master Pandit Samta Prasad. Seated in front is Chitresh Das's guru, Pandit Ram Narayan Misra

recuperated from a position of receding importance by means of several key figures. By the 1930s, Rukmini Devi was presenting a stylised version of bharata natyam (O'Shea 2007), Madame Menaka was pioneering the reconstruction of classical kathak (Chakravorty 2000a) and Uday Shankar was already presenting his own interpretation of 'Indian modern dance' to local Indian audience (Erdman 1987)[15].   It was a fertile context for the development of the arts.

It was in this political climate that Das's parents, Nrityacharya Prohlad Das and Smt. Nilima Das founded 'Nritya Bharati,' one of India's first institutions for dance that housed teachers of several classical and folk styles. Pandit Das grew up surrounded by great literary artists, poets, dancers, and gurus of the times. At the age of 9, Das began his study of kathak under kathak guru, Pandit Ram Narayan Misra. Das would study directly under Pandit Ram Narayan Misra in the guru-shishya parampara for his youth and early adult years. I turn now to an elaboration of the nationalist agenda as it specifically pertains to kathak.

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[15] In the 1930s, the pioneers Ruth St. Denis and Madame Menaka played a role in reinventing the south Indian dance form of bharata natyam. Madame Menaka is said to have pioneered the reconstruction of classical kathak from marginalised nautch practices in the 1930s, refashioning the dance and making it acceptable to middle classes (Chakravorty 2000a: 73). Other artists like Uday Shankar were instrumental in popularising the arts through his dance-dramas.

Figure 3: Nritya Bharati in Kolkata, the school of Chitresh Das's parents

Figure 4: The dance room at Nritya Bharati in Kolkata. Third from the top left is Chitresh-ji's mother, Srimati Nilima Das. Third from top right is nine-year old Chitresh Das, and to his left is Rukmini Devi Arundale

Refashioning Kathak: the Post-Independence Nationalist agenda

> *I was not getting anywhere because male dancers were not given that importance, and I was very young, so I did not have that recognition. My parents had a very big dance school and they were situated in Calcutta, but things were happening in Delhi. So anything that came through Delhi was marked, acknowledged and approved with the government of India seal. (Das 2004 cited in Morelli 2007: 53)*

The project of nation-building in independent India had definite consequences for the art of kathak in the decades that followed. The emergence of the nation state saw the creation of syllabi, standardised exams, certification, and the institutionalisation of the classical dance traditions in newly sponsored government institutions. With the establishment of national centre of training for kathak, such as Kathak Kendra in New Delhi, and the instalment of key figures at the head of these organisations, a dominant model for kathak started emerging. The codification of kathak at the government sponsored Kathak Kendra meant that the dance was being dictated by one man, Birju Maharaj, as his style set the code, de-legitimated other styles (Natavar 1997: 151). Nepotism within the government bureaucracy stacked the tables in favour of one image of the art, one that was stylistically based on the Lucknow gharana and the artistry of Pandit Birju Maharaj (see Chakravorty 2000a, 2008). Cultural Academies, such as the Sangeet Natak Akademy, intended to preserve and promote heritage became the official patron of Indian cultural heritage substituting for disappearing private patronage. Such institutions served to homogenise the style[16]. The hegemonic forces of kathak Kendra in Delhi, and the dominance of Mahraj-ji's style would be felt by Das, and would add considerable fuel to his fire, contributing to his desire to leave India. In later years, Pandit Birju Maharaj would continue to drive Das's competitive spirit and Maharaj-ji would become an archrival to Das. At the same time, increasing connections with America began to provide alternate options for privileged artists. In 1970, Das would make his first trip to America. He followed in a long line of Indian artists who would eventually migrate to America.

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[16] As Chakravroty details (2000a), the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) was formed to promote artists and oversee cultural exchange with other countries, but dancers ended up having to affiliate to the central government in order to be recognised and patronised as individual artists. As a result, dancers reformulated their artistic visions to fit ideological goals set by the central government (Chakravorty 2000: 109). More recently, criticism and awareness of this hegemony have led to the incorporation of gurus of other gharanas within national institutions, and attempts have been made to equally represent the different styles at Kathak Kendra, the national institute in New Delhi.

India in the 'West'

> *The late 1960s was a time when, like many restless students throughout the world, I too looked for a change. The rebel in me wanted to break away to unknown adventures. As a child of free India, I knew little of the hardships my father's generation had faced. I was eager to travel and my urge was to go west. I had heard of the successes of the great musicians Pandit Ravi Shankar and Ustad Ali Akbar Khan abroad. (Das 1988 cited in Morelli 2007: 53)*

Das joined a line of earlier pioneers of Indian arts, music and spiritual practices, who had travelled to the west to share their traditions, religion and practices[17]. Ethnomusicologist and student of Pandit Das, Sarah Morelli, has extensively documented the shifts in meaning and movement that occurred with Das's migration to America (2007). Das saw his move as a chance to start anew, 'to become rich and famous overnight,' and an opportunity to follow the path of successful Indian artists who preceded him (Das in Morelli 2007: 53). In response to the offer of a Whitney fellowship to teach kathak at the University of Maryland, Das went to America in 1970. In 1971 he was invited by Ustad Ali Akbhar Khan to the San Francisco Bay area to teach kathak at the Ali Akbar College of Music in San Rafael, California[18].

Das arrived in America, to a land of hopes and hippy culture, of social activists and liberal feminists, a growing Indian diaspora, and a melting pot of immigrant culture.
At that time, the San Francisco Bay area served as a nucleus of the development of much of the counter culture movement[19] where 'eastern' spiritual philosophies and cultural practices would provide a viable alternative to many of America's youth.   Bonnie Wade discusses how the philosophical turmoil of American youth in the 1960s facilitated a turn

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[17] The early pioneers were spiritual and religious leaders such as Swami Vivekananda who were instrumental in the beginnings of transnational communities spanning India and America (Morelli 2007: 54).

[18] Das discusses the environment at 'The College' as 'a great beginning of an Indo-American cultural centre of North Indian music and dance.' The College also hosted many artists: 'Pandit Ravi Shankar came to play with Khansahib, Nikhil Banerjee taught a short session, Ustad Ali Rakha gave master classes, Shankar Ghosh was permanent tabla professor, and G.S Sachdev taught flute. Outside the school faculty, Ashish Khan an Zakir Hussain had their Shanti ensemble, an Indian rock group' (Das 1986b: 32).

[19] The Counter Culture Movement of the 60s and 70s saw a fierce rejection of the conventional social norms of earlier decades, and witnessed the emergence of a number of critical social movements, including civil rights, gay rights and women's liberation movements. Opposition to the Vietnam war, racial discrimination, sexual conservatism, nuclear weaponry were some of the campaigns taken up by American youth.

Figure 5: Pandit Das giving a lecture demonstration for students at the University of Maryland (1970)

'eastward for inspiration, to the paths of yoga and transcendental meditation' (Wade 1979: 8). The emergent hippie movement of this era drew heavily on Indian thought, and music and the arts became an integral part of its expression. The San Francisco Bay area would prove to be a particularly receptive site for Indian cultural practices. Das's kathak encountered this generation of Americans in search of an alternate way of life.

New Audiences, New Learners

This was the beautiful age of the flower children – the hippy generation. Their search for life's meaning was a mellowing experience. I was trying to reinforce an achievement oriented discipline. The concept, which at that time, had lost its popularity. A path to mutual understanding was going to be rough. At times the obstacles seemed insurmountable. They were looking toward the East for answers, but I did not fit their idealised image of an Indian guru. I would tell them to be quiet, dance hard, and show respect – just as my guru and gurus before him had told their disciples. Caught between two cultures, I had some difficulty with the informal lifestyle and egalitarian classroom banter that American students were accustomed to. Having been schooled in the old world traditions – to respect and obey my teachers and elders, and to assume a secondary stance in their presence – my amused bewilderment at my student's behaviour never ceased. Daily they would appear with bare feet, men with long hair, women adorned with garlands of flowers in their hair, and bearing the names of Hindu goddesses and nature. My caustic objections aside, I was going through a tremendous learning process to understand the psychology of these young Americans. (Das 1986b: 32)

The shift to teaching and performing in the context of America posed a range of new difficulties for Das. In the early years of Das's teaching, it was not the Indian diasporic community that would take deep interest in his art, rather, Das's first students were all white Americans, and mostly women, whom he still affectionately refers to as the 'blondes and brunettes'. In the early years, Das taught a range of American students at the Ali Akbhar Music College. By 1979, Das left the Music college to form his own dance school called Chhandam. His 'Chitresh Das Dance Company' (CDDC) was incorporated in 1980. In 1988, Das formed the first university accredited Kathak course in the U.S at San Francisco State University. Several of the senior dancers and company members today began their kathak studies with Das at the SFSU program; the dance program at SFSU contributed further to the ethnic diversity of his company. The cultural misunderstandings, misfires as well as the successes of this period shaped Das's approach, his pedagogy and his performance. As Das describes, the behaviours of his American students were initially unfamiliar and frustrating. Das continued to try to instil the kind of discipline that he saw as critical to the development of any dancer. Through the years, Das's students began to adjust to the cultural expectations of the dance and of the teacher while Das, likewise, grew to understand and integrate aspects of American culture.

Yet Das's style, both artistically and pedagogically, paradoxically, have come to explicitly affiliate with 'tradition', a commitment that was further consolidated by his migration to America. Das insisted on traditional kathak solos, live musicians, improvisation, teaching within the *gurukul* model, and an 'old-school' approach, as he called it (see also Dalidowicz 2006, 2009). By the time I met Das, his students strictly adhered to a traditional form of etiquette. *Sadvyvahar aur Tehzeeb* or attitude and etiquette were taken as the most important aspect of a student's dance. Student's behaviours became so prescribed that novices fumbled to understand the necessary action, fearing the reprimands of breach of conduct, and substantial time and effort went into teaching the appropriate etiquette (see chapter 4; see also Morelli 2007). Yet, Das and his dancers also recognise their kathak as a part of an evolutionary and dynamic process. 'Traditions are evolving. They must…' (Das 2010). Thus, Das also clearly articulates the need for 'improvisation within tradition', countering the view of a bounded and changing practice. However, as he notes, innovation and improvisation only comes through disciplined learning through years of committed study (see Zarilli 2000; see also chapters 7, 8 and 9).

The new learners in the west would also impact on the dance style that Das would teach. Morelli's dissertation details the challenges and adaptations Das has made over the years as kathak was resituated (2007). One of the many struggles with the first generations of students was that the dance was being learned through bodies that had grown up in a western world. New learners in America did not look the same in their attempts to execute kathak skills,

> *I do think that because dance is so visual, on a basic level it does look different. You see a Westerner doing it; it does not look the same as Indians doing it. When you get past a certain level of development, somehow it doesn't matter as much. ... [But] I know he struggled with ... how to [work with] these Western-looking bodies, [which are] visually so different. But I feel his answer was go to the core—the core of the study does not have to do with whether you are Western or Indian, really. (Hayden 2003 in Morelli 2007: 65)*

Das's response was to vigorously train his students in the technical components of kathak, such as footwork and *chakkars* or pirouettes. 'He didn't care where your elbows were; he didn't care where your eyesight went; he didn't care how your shoulders were. He just wanted you to get dancing as fast as you could—footwork *only*. Because he wanted to build you up as fast as possible... to stand as a soloist' (Zonka 2004 cited in Morelli 2007 65). Precision in technique, rapid footwork and *chakkars*, was one aspect of the dance that was also readily appreciated by new audiences, many whom had less understanding of some of the emotional nuances of the form. Das and his early non-Indian company also encountered a kind of reverse discrimination, as questions arose around authenticity in the face of an all-white female company. For some, the company was novelty, for others, it was not authentic. But in any case, Das's response was to attempt to fiercely train his dancers to excel in the technical aspects of the art, so that they could respond to such criticisms through showing their own mastery of the art[20].

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[20] The emphasis on technique and strength was also further inspired by Das's appreciation of the technical prowess of athletes. Morelli's dissertation documents the influence of ice skating on Das's style, and in particular, on his development of a unique style of turning which would he would come to call the 'California chakkar' (2007:71). In later years, when I met Das, he was an avid runner and would consistently preach of the necessity of cross-training activities for his dancers, especially cardio-vascular forms of exercise that will build the stamina and endurance necessary to dance in his style.

Figure 6: First tour of India by Pandit Chitresh Das's American Company (1979)

In later years, Das's emphasis on strength and footwork was complemented by an emphasis on delicacy and grace. During my fieldwork, Das constantly stressed the importance of the four elements of kathak, *taiyari, laykari, khubsoorti* and *nazakat* or readiness, versatility in rhythm, beauty and the delicacy of the beauty. While these four elements have always been evident in Das's kathak, there was a noticeable shift to a softer style in recent years. Whilst Morelli (2007) suggests this later shift in emphasis to the softer elements of the form was motivated by the increasing number of south Asian students in Chhandam, disciple Charlotte Moraga explained that Das's own maturation as a teacher and performer certainly contributed to his changing style. Growing awareness of the criticism of his dancers' lack of grace and beauty, and ability to perform *bhao* or expression certainly contributed to this shift in emphasis. While his dancers were lauded for their fast and strong footwork, one prominent guru commented, 'but what about their hands?'. The question of how to get dancers bodies to conform to these aesthetic standards, especially where they did not grow up in India, is still a relevant one (see chapter 4 and 9). The question has become further complicated by the fact that many students of Indian heritage also move in ways that are grounded in the American context in which they grew up. Even dancers in India today move in ways that are counter to many of the aesthetic ideals of kathak, similarly requiring a re-socialisation into this traditional practice. The challenges and gaps in learning have required the guru, and now his disciples, to adapt to the needs of their students with a spectrum of innovations in teaching (see chapter 7, 8 and 9).

An Emerging Indian Diaspora

> *Once the flower children were gone, and the grants were gone, then I started teaching in Fremont, then the Indian diaspora became involved. (Das, KALW 91.7 radio interview, San Francisco, 2008b)*

It was not until the later years that the Indian diaspora in California became interested in kathak, Chhandam, and Das's teachings on Indian culture. Here, I briefly consider the emergence of this new group of affluent Indo-Americans as they became more involved in the Indian arts scene in the Bay area. California has historically occupied a distinctive place in the history of immigration from India, as Purnima Mankekar describes, 'the San Francisco Bay area is one of great historical significance to the history of Indians in the U.S. because some of the earliest South Asian communities in North America were formed here at the turn of the century in rural California (Mankekar 2002: 77)[21]. While Indian migrants encountered their share of hostility and opposition in the U.S, including the Asiatic Barred Zone act, which banned migration from South and Southeast Asia, the immigrant communities have steadily grown since its repeal in 1965. The Bay area has a reputation for being home to upper class and wealthy Indian families, many of whom have been involved in the information technology services and the boom in the Silicon Valley (see Lessinger 1994). The Bay area is now 'home to a very diverse Indian community, with residents hailing from all over the subcontinent and ranging from entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley to assembly-line workers' (Mankekar 2002: 94). By the time I arrived in the Bay area, there was a very large group of first and second generation Indo-Americans, who had become increasingly interested in finding a connection to their own culture and heritage. Indian communities continued to emerge in locations throughout the Bay area, San Jose, Fremont, Mountain View, Union City, Berkeley and so forth, which would all eventually become the sites of branches of Chhandam[22]. For many Indo-American families, an increasing awareness of the difficulty of teaching Indian culture, values and morality to their children encouraged them to find other ways to maintain some degree of connection to the culture of their homeland, a gap that Pandit Das and the school of Chhandam would help to fill (see chapter 5).

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[21]In 1946, after the 'barred zone' clause of the 1917 Immigration Act was repealed, there was an increase in South Asian immigration to the US; the second wave of immigration started after the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act' (Mankekar 2002: 77).

[22] According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the total population of Asian Indians in California was 314,819 , 0.9% of the overall population. Areas of the south bay were reported to have high concentrations of Indian Asians, with 10.2% in Fremont, 8.6% in Union City, 4.3% in Mountain View, and 3% in San Jose. (U.S. Census Bureau)

Re-exporting Tradition: Return Flows to India

Because I was away, I could see India... I only went during the months of performances, ... [and] developing all these things while living outside, has helped me to go back to India and teach a new way of looking, which is basically going deeper into the old school, while adding new technique of my own. (Das 2003 in Morelli 2007: 201)

Das's absence from India served to consolidate his adherence to a particular version of traditional practice, one he saw as 'going deeper into the old school'. Many Indians have found their identity and sense of cultural distinctiveness reinforced by the experience of living abroad; 'many important historical figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Ananda Coomaraswamy all discovered India through leaving it' (Tarlo 1996: 299). Das would return to India with his own distinctive style of kathak. His interpretation of the tradition confronted a modern India that did not support his idealised reconstructions of the dance. The predilection for 'modern kathak', the trend toward choreography and recorded music, and the disappearance of the guru-shishya parampara stood as affronts to his own conceptualisations of Indian culture and tradition. When I first met Das in 2004 in Kolkata, he was preaching the value of Indian culture to his young Kolkata students, who were being taught to look not to the west, but to look deep into their own culture. In 2001, the Kolkata branch of Chhandam, 'Nritya Bharati' was inaugurated. Das began establishing a base of followers in India that would be the recipients of his teachings on Indian culture through the kathak tradition. The confrontation between an Americanised guru and his students in his homeland was one that was also fraught with many tensions and frustrations. An idealised version of Indian culture ran up against the realities of living in a modern India. It also ran up against the presence of a genre of kathak that appeared to adhere less and less to the traditional or old-school way. As Das returned with his highly trained American dancers, the students of Nritya Bharati looked to them as exemplars of the Indian tradition, despite the fact that they had not grown up in that world. Through Das's returns to India, a uniquely crafted experience of *gurukul*, or residence with the guru, has emerged through Das's transnational movement patterns. I will be exploring Das's *gurukul* as itself a unique artefact of migration (see chapter 4).

30-year Anniversary of Chhandam

Since its incorporation in 1980, the Chhandam school has undergone much change. It has undergone an overwhelming shift in the numbers and demographic composition of the classroom, witnessed increasing involvement of the Indian community, as well as a growing recognition for Das himself. During the year following my fieldwork, in 2010, Chhandam school of dance and the Chitresh Das dance company celebrated their 30 year anniversary[23]. It had been 40 years since Das had moved to America, and 30 years since he officially opened his own school and company. A great deal has happened over those four decades, all of which have contributed to the style, form, and most importantly, the community that exists today[24].

The Chhandam school has undergone massive overhaul. In the beginning, Das taught each and every class by himself, travelling all over the Bay area, from Marin to Fremont. Today, Chhandam continues to grow with branches in San Francisco, Fremont, Union City, Berkeley, Mountain View, San Jose, Sacramento, and Los Angeles. His disciples, Joanna De Souza and Gretchen Hayden established branches of Chhandam in Toronto (1990) and Boston (1992), respectively. Chhandam currently has approximately 500 students enrolled at branches across North America. Since the re-opening of Nritya Bharati in Kolkata, a new branch was opened in Mumbai in 2010. Chhandam publications describe their 'world-wide' base with 'over 600 students enrolled across the globe, 25 teachers, and over 65 classes taught each week worldwide' (Chhandam 30th anniversary publication 2010: 13). Despite Das's efforts to attract male dancers, the majority of dancers in India and America are overwhelmingly female, remaining consistent with larger cultural trends[25]. Chhandam students in San Francisco today are primarily of Indian

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[23] See the following short video created by Chhandam for the 30th anniversary celebration. While I recognise that this video has been created as promotional material, it also provides a brief over view of the history of Das and Chhandam, and highlight the way in which Chhandam has chosen to represent the school and Das's work. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGQGpxY51rg&feature=player_embedded

[24] On the 30th anniversary of his school and his company, and the 40th year of his moving to America, Das reflected on his role as an artist. 'An artist is not made by one person, an artist is made by so many' he would often say. Das always cited three people first, his mother and father and his Guru-ji, although in many instances, it is his mother that he highlights, reminding all of us 'mother is the first guru'. But beyond that, there are several women who have made considerable contributions to him and his school, leaving their own mark on Chhandam. These include Julia Maxwell, Michelle Zonka and his wife and artistic director, Celine Schein.

[25] Das was well aware of the absence of males in his school and was often asked, 'where are the men?'. Despite attempts to create all male classes and workshops and opportunities for fathers, sons, and brothers to take up study, Chhandam would rarely have more than a couple males enrolled. When queried he would often respond, 'ask the society', referring to the wider stigma on men in dance and its association with

Figure 7: Pandit Das with 300 of Chhandam's students at the school production of the 'Ramayana' in California (2009)

descent, with less than ten non-Indian students enrolled at time of research[26]. I introduce some of these developments as exemplars of the successes and vicissitudes confronting a teacher establishing an art form outside his native home.

The face of the school is very different today. Students no longer begin their studies directly under the guru, and in fact, many new students have little contact with him. Das now visits different branches on the weekends, to maintain contact with all of the school's students and give them access to his direct teachings. In his absence, the senior instructors do their part to pass on the teachings of their guru, intact, to the new generations of students. It is now the devoted senior students who come to have the opportunity and privilege to train directly under him. Annual retreats and workshops provide the general student body the opportunity to study with Das, but these are few and far between. The responsibility to train beginners falls largely on this next generation of teachers. Disciples and company members double as teachers and are usually the first point of reference for all newcomers to the school. The wider ecology of the guru-shishya system is a complex system of relationships and hierarchies that are played out amongst the disciples and the growing body of students (see chapter 6). However, Pandit Chitresh Das remains the

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homosexuality. Despite his efforts to masculinise the dance in workshops by focusing on the strength of the form and incorporating the use of weights and dumb bells, few men would persist in their studies.
[26] Of the very few non-Indian students, most were products of the earlier years, such as Das's teaching at SFSU. Very few new non-Indian students pursued study in Chhandam during my research.

direct source of authority and knowledge, providing a living link to the ancient knowledge of the ancestors. The school remains based on the concept of lineage, although non-hereditary, and study with the guru is priority for any serious student. Today, Das trains his senior students and shishyas in several classes occurring throughout the week. Some students also receive private or semi-private classes, often in his home. Taking up residency with the guru during trips to India has become an important pedagogical strategy in training his serious students (see chapter 4).

Along with the school's growth, Das's choreographic style and performance history have evolved. A traditionalist or 'old-school' dancer, Das's work also exhibits a great degree of innovation. The phrase I introduced earlier, 'innovation within tradition' has become the catch-phrase at Chhandam to describe Das's philosophy and belief in systematic and intensive training coupled with the freedom to improvise that comes through years of training. Das's own performances exhibit great diversity and have ranged from the traditional two-hour solo to choreographed company productions. Das has created and directed a number of choreographic pieces, ranging from 'Gold Rush' (1990), a modern kathak interpretation of the California gold rush to dance-dramas based on the Hindu epics, such as 'Sita Haran' (2009). Since 2005, Das and co-collaborator, tap dancer, Jason Samuel-Smiths have won accolades and toured extensively with their award winning production[27] of 'India-Jazz Suites', a collaborative improvisation between kathak and tap[28]. Pandit Chitresh Das has performed extensively throughout America[29], India[30] and Europe[31], touring both as a solo artist, in collaborative productions, as well as with the

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[27] The original IJS collaboration was selected as the number one dance performance of 2005 by the San Francisco Chronicle as well as receiving the Isadora Duncan Ensemble of the year award (2005). Since IJS has toured extensively, including four tours to India performances across America, including Hawaii and Australia.

[28] Das's collaboration with Jason Samuel Smiths is the subject of an upcoming national documentary, 'Upaj' to be nationally broadcasted on PBS in 2011.

[29] Das has performed extensively though out the United States since the early 70s. In 1984 Das was selected to perform in the Olympic Arts Festival during the Los Angeles Olympic Games. Other select American performances include the Lincoln Center (1988), International Kathak festival in Chicago (2004), American Dance Festival (2004, 2006), and the American Folk festival (2008). In the San Francisco Bay Area, Chitresh Das and his Dance Company are a mainstay of the local dance season.

[30] Select performances within India include the Surya festival (1982); Pandit Ravi Shankar's Rimpa Festival in Benares (1983), representing his home state of West Bengal in tours throughout India (1998, 1999), Dover Lane Conference, Kolkata (1979, 1982, 1984, 1994, 1996, 1999, 2003); National Kathak Festival in New Delhi (2003), Fort William, Kolkata (2005), UMAQ Festival, New Delhi (2004, 2006, 2007), U.S. Consulate 50th Anniversary in Mumbai (2008), Karamatullah Khan Festival in Kolkata (2008), Mumbai Festival (2008), 50th Anniversary Festival, IIT Kharagpur, India (2009) amongst others

[31] In earlier years, Das also performed throughout Europe, including Bonn and Aachen International Dance Festivals (1983), Logan Hall in London (1984), and Nijmegen and Arnhem, Holland (1984). In the late eighties, he also performed throughout in Germany, Poland, and Hungary with Tanzprojekt.

Chitresh Das Dance Company, gaining national and international recognition. Amongst an array of awards, perhaps the most prominent was in 2009, Pandit Das was awarded the National Heritage Fellowship by the U.S. Government. Das's extensive career as an artist and teacher is thus its own testimony to his mobility and transcultural fluency, born of a movement between India and America.

Modernised Guru-Shishya: 'A Modern-Guru in Training'

Most literature and public opinion suggest that the ideal Guru-Shishya relationship is a thing of the past (see chapter 3). Most artists speak nostalgically about the parampara, days gone by, an idealised past where uninterrupted study with one's guru flourished in a historical epoch whose conditions supported it. Today, one is less likely to find this idealised version of shared wisdom and devotion encapsulated in a one-to-one relationship between master and student, where students take up full-time residence with their guru. Shifting social, economic, political, circumstances have made it difficult to sustain this approach to learning. In the 21st century, such lifelong commitment to one's guru and complete immersion in the art form complicated by the practical necessities of survival in the everyday world (see also Chatterjea 1996). The economic improbability of teachers taking students into their homes, of providing room and board, and the impracticality of a long-term apprenticeship with the guru when degrees from reputable universities may be given precedence, all contribute to the system's decline. Universities, academies, commercial and private dance schools are slowly replacing this traditional model, both in India and abroad. Providing certification is now valued in marriage arrangements, employment and more generally as educational capital (Pillai 2002: 20). Some dancers, performers and artists argue that a democraticised access provides a broader education and rids learning of the potential for patriarchal exploitation that many see as inherent to the guru-shishya (see chapter 3 and 10), while others argue that such a shift is dissolving the very moral underpinnings of the art and compromising the integrity of training.

The decline of royal and private patronage has also left a void in the possibilities for financial support. The disappearance of the traditional system of arts patronage has meant it is no longer economically viable for gurus to take students into their homes for extended periods with no monetary remuneration. The economic pressures of survival as an artist have led to its growing commercialisation, with structured class times, levels, examinations and fees as necessary aspects of any school (see also Alter 1994; Chatterjea

1996; Prickett 2004; Schippers 2007). The informal and qualitative relation with one's guru is replaced by a formalised system of curriculum, exams, and measurable certifications. Dance and music schools seem to be around every corner in Kolkata, and now, in the Bay area as well, making the acquisition of a 'certificate' quite accessible. It is lamented that the fast method is preferable over the delayed gratification of life-long relationship with the guru, where performance is never a guarantee, and years of preparation are required[32].

Yet, the guru-shishya has not disappeared. It has simply taken new shape and form, and in this way, continues to powerfully shape learning experiences in Chhandam.   For a committed group of disciples, and for a wider community of students, families and friends, the guru-shishya model continues to exert a vital force. It is to this present day model that I now turn.

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[32] During a beginner workshop, a student asked Das why Chhandam did not have examinations and certificates. He became quite visibly irritated at this question. Chhandam does not have exams or certificates. Real learning is believed to not be quantifiable. Examinations would undermine the basis of the guru-shishya parampara.

CHAPTER 3

Translating Guru-ness in Practice: A 'Modern Guru in Training'

The class stood silent, hands in namaskar position, feet together, eyes closed. Together, led by the guru, they hummed a chord, tuning their voices to one another, within the space, preparing for the opening invocation. Inhaling deeply, finding the origins for the sounds deep within the body, the dancers began,
'Aum',
'gurubrahma guruvishnu
gurudevo maheshvara
gurusakshat param brahma
tasmai shri gurave namaha'[1]

What does it mean to be a guru? The loose translations of guru as master or teacher do little to communicate the weight of the term and the significance of one's relationship with a guru. Kathak class in Chhandam always began with the Guru Shloka. As we chanted this *shloka* or verse, the resonance of our voices joined together in unison, flowing together with meditative gestures, attuning us to a higher self, connecting us quite viscerally to another dimension of experience, one within which the meaning of *guru* originated. One of the points I will make in this ethnography is a classic anthropological one: there is no such thing as 'translation' in the dictionary sense. The term *guru*, like others I will introduce in this thesis, such as *shishya, abhinaya*, or *riyaz*, all come from a world in which the body and its movements are deeply connected to a wider set of cosmological meanings. The *sholka* articulates cosmology through a Hindu paradigm, but the tradition draws on Sufi, and even alternate western forms of spirituality. The terms 'teacher' and 'student', by contrast, are embedded in a modernity where the dominant ideologies are secularised and rationalised. Every time we danced, the body was attuned to these concepts of a higher self, and a larger cosmos, framing our own sensations and perceptions within a cosmology, assigning it deeper meaning, and giving experiential force to the cosmology of belonging to a force bigger than oneself, to a divine. In this chapter, I begin the exploration of guru-ness, as it was understood and experienced in Chhandam. Within a more dominant secular framework, the response to the spiritual authority of gurus and the

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[1] The Guru is none other that the Creator, Brahma:
The Guru is like the Preserver, Vishnu;
Truly: He is Maheshvara, the Destroyer:
He is the incarnation of the Supreme Brahma himself;
To such a Guru, I offer my respect (transl. Das et. al. 2001: 7)

parampara[2] has drawn considerable scepticism and even hostility. From a rationalist, secular and modernist view, such practices and devotion to a spiritual and artistic guide are devoid of dynamism and agency. How do practitioners themselves talk about the dominant secular adjudications of their practice? Both guru and disciples in Chhandam have worked to establish the acceptable boundaries of what it means to be a guru, and in turn, what being a shishya means in this kathak lineage[3]. The significance of the guru must also be understood in relation to his shishyas[4], in which a deeply meaningful set of relations are forged, modelled on the deepest and most primary affective experiences of a child in which unconditional love and learning are mingled. In concluding this chapter, I consider my own role as a student training under Das, and the implications of this for my role as an anthropologist and fieldworker.

The Metaphysics of Guru-ness

At the close of our *pranam*, we perform *namaskar* and bow silently, eyes closed, first to the divine, then to the photos of the ancestors of the lineage or the great gurus, and then to our guru-ji, who returns the gesture. The guru, in the flesh, in the front of the class is envisioned as an intermediary for this higher more diffuse divine force. Swapan Chauduri, a Bay area tabla musician and guru explained,

> *In our Indian culture, the guru plays a major role.   Guru is actually a medium for the higher concept of Param Guru.   Param Guru is one you can call God [Guru of the Guru]. It is said in our country that the relationship between guru and shishya is made way before [you meet]. People who come to me, I never turn them away because this was already determined by the Param Guru, and that person who teaches, is the medium. (Chaudhuri, interview with Preeti Mann, 2010)*

The guru-shishya relationship is then, more accurately described as a triangulated relationship between the divine, the guru and the student. The word guru is far more than the loose translation that the word teacher suggests. He is an embodiment of this more pervasive divine force, a medium in daily life. 'It is not me, it is the divine', Das would

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[2] Parampara refers to the tradition of guru and shishya.

[3] The term shishya implies a devotion and dedication that is characteristic of serious students of the art. Throughout this dissertation, my discussion of shishyas or disciples signifies the senior, more experienced students, as opposed to neophytes. In cases where my discussion focuses on newer students, I signal this to the reader.

[4] I refer here, and throughout the dissertation to guru-ness in the masculine. This is because I will be adhering closely to the ethnographic specificities of my fieldwork, from which I draw wider reflective significance. Pandit Das was the male head of this lineage. The patriarchal forces underlying this tradition have meant that positions of authority have been historically held by male figures. I also refer to Das's shishyas in the feminine as the disciples I refer to were all women.

frequently say, explaining his ability to dance, especially in the case of improvisation on stage. The 'divine' was channelled through him, and as such, was explained as something beyond his complete control. Das does not claim divinity, but rather that significant experiences are affected by the divine force, which surrounds all of us, but that take root in the body of the guru. Followers and students corroborated the conduit metaphor. A local Bay area sarod player explained to me, 'the guru is like god, and when he walks into the room it is like the deity of that art form, and the embodiment of the art form is entering the room – and must be respected accordingly'.

The metaphorical extension of guru as channel for god in turn requires the behaviour of shishya, as devotee, to give their ultimate devotion, unquestioning faith and loyalty to the guru. The feeling that the guru brought the presence of the divine into our midst was certainly present in many of the actions of students. The ideal is that the guru is the focal point of attention, and disciples should be completely attentive to him, rising when he enters the room, touching feet, remaining silent and ready to serve. The idealised behaviour of the shishya held before us was the story of Ekalavya, the brilliant archer, who cuts off his right thumb at the request of the guru[5]. The shishya should exemplify the lifelong commitment, surrender and service to the guru that is integral to the actions and beliefs of any devotee. The shishya should ideally surrender oneself completely to the teachings of the guru, becoming an open vessel for the teachings. The notion of total surrender underlies this relationship between god and devotee, and between guru and shishya, and is believed to be the only way to 'break down the ego until gradually the ego subsides and the true self emerges fully' (Antze 2005: 31)[6]. In practice, the devotional ideal of complete surrender was difficult to uphold for this generation of American disciples, most of whom were women in their late 20s and upwards. The battle of ego was one that often erupted into conflict, where student acted against the wishes of the guru (see chapter 6). Das would describe the ego as 'a double-edged knife', referring to the way the ego was both a necessity and an obstacle. It was necessary to motivate and push a person's development, and was described by Das as the 'I will' of a person. Yet it is also constituted our ultimate surrender and realisation in this life. After being praised by Das

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[5] Das recounted the story of Ekalavya on numerous occasions. His retellings occurred in the context of his lectures, which were given daily. The caste dimension of this story was suppressed or discarded in the retelling of this story. Ekalavya was 'low born' and was punished for it – by his guru.

[6] Shah similarly states, the disciple is prepared 'for more advanced training in higher stages of human expression that focus on this inner self – the spiritual self. This is a long process that consists of the elimination of one's ego centred concerns, enabling the performer to channel his energies to creative expression rather than to the egocentric exhibition of himself, the person' (Shah 1998: 7).

for swiftly contacting a local editor regarding misrepresentation of our lineage, a senior disciple, Moraga, noted that it was this same quality, so appreciated in this context, that also got her into trouble. The pragmatics of performance, promotion, and earning a wage in the 21st century challenged certain aspects of the idealised behaviour of a shishya, but ultimately, shishyas were able to live out their devotion in other ways (see chapter 6).

The guru not only teaches the skills and total knowledge of the art, but through this, is said to lead the shishya out of the darkness. According to Chhandam's nine principles, 'a "Guru" is one who removes the darkness through direct knowledge and training'. Knowledge is imparted through the developing relationship between Guru and Disciple' (see Appendix A). This idea comes directly from the etymology of the word guru, as it is elaborated in the Hindu texts, the Upanishads.

> *The syllable gu means shadow (darkness)*
> *The syllable ru, he who disperses them.*
> *Because of his power to disperse darkness*
> *The guru is thus named.*
> *(Advayataraka Upanishad, verse 5, cited in Antze 2005: 28)*

The guru is bestowed with the wisdom to lead the shishya along the path of self-realisation and this capacity underlies the belief that 'guru is god'. In Chhandam, disciples understand their guru to possess an omniscient view, to see what disciples need, in order to further not only their study of dance, but their own spiritual and personal growth. The guru knows what is best, and has the dynamic power to guide his students toward such higher goals (see chapter 10). Hindu religious doctrines state that liberation from worldly existence can be achieved by following a spiritual path to a realisation of *Brahman*, the ultimate reality. The profound realisation of this spiritual goal requires an elimination of all ignorance that can only be attained through a transcendence of ego. It is the guru who has the ability to lead the shishya on this path.

The role of spiritual and vocational guide is often divided between two different people, but Das himself articulates an ideology of guru-ness that combines the vocational and spiritual components,

> *The word guru means one who removes darkness. That is the traditional word. But then, according to my mother, your shiksha guru and diksha guru are the same. Shiksha means one who teaches you a vocation and diksha is the spiritual guru. When I used to ask my father, he would say that you need to have a spiritual guru separately. My mother on the other hand, would always say, 'No. I have chosen your Guru-ji and he*

was chosen to teach you dance and that is your way of life. And from this, you will make money, you will survive, you will sustain yourself, and, this should be your path of spirituality. Everything is in one.' So, I chose my mother's vision and her belief that your guru is a shiksha guru, one who teaches you your vocation as well as a diksha guru, a spiritual guru, at the same time. (Das, interview with Yasmeen-Shaikh 2007)[7]

Das's elaboration on shiksha and diksha guru connect the wider understandings of guru-ness to Hindu cosmologies. From the recitation of guru shlokas, to the explanations of divine embodiment, students come to understand guru-ness within this wider web of Hindu religious meaning. Whilst older Hindu texts, like the Upanishads, contain ideas of guru-ness, more popular Hindu narratives, such as the Ramayana or Mahabharata, such as the tale of Ekalavya, also encapsulate the character of the guru and provide a better-known foundation for people's understanding of this role. Poonam Narkar, a Chhandam student explained, 'my sense of what a guru is, is from what I have read in the Mahabharata, from the epic stories of what the real guru is like. At the same time, you read about what the disciples are like, and it used to be so strict and staunch at that time' (Personal interview, January 20, 2010). The popularised television series of Ramnagar's Ramayana[8] proved to be highly influential among my fellow-learners in promoting images and ideas on many archetypal characters from these great Hindu epics in the public consciousness. This has been the case more widely, both in India and in the diaspora (see also Mankekar 1993). Within Chhandam, the 77 episodes of Ramnagar's Ramayana was accorded renewed authority as a source of information for dancers, as they prepared to mount a dance-drama based on the Ramayana (see chapter 9).

Guru-ness, in this context, draws largely on Hindu models, despite the presence of a similar figure within Muslim and Sufi cosmologies (see also Mlecko 1982). 'The Urdu equivalent of guru-shishya is ustad-shagird, but the more literal gloss in Urdu would be shaikh-murid, a relationship which exists between a Sufi master and his disciple' (Neuman 1990: 44)[9]. While North Indian Muslim musicians often went by the title Ustad, one only

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[7] Edward Dimock explains 'there are two types of gurus: sravana-guru, from who one hears the truth (who may also be the siksa guru or the guru who instructs) and the mantra-guru or diksa guru, who initiates the aspirant to bhakti and gives him the formula upon which he is to meditate' (1963: 117).

[8] Ramnagar's 'Ramayana' proved to be an overwhelming popular representation of the story which at the time, was said to have brought the nation to a stand-still. It is continually aired and functions as one of the primary ways in which this story is retold and communicated to new generations. Numerous other televised versions also exist but Ramnagar's remains the most popular.

[9] The use of ustad-shagird by musicians, (instead of shaikh-murid, which is never used in this context), illustrates the professionalisation of the occupation of musician, which Muslims initiated and developed in India. The Muslim custom contrasts with that of Hindus, or perhaps more correctly with Brahmans who did not professionalise this speciality in North India (Neuman 1990: 44).

ever heard the use of the term 'guru' in regards to dance. Many elements of what I describe as the guru-shishya relationship have been a part of the Muslim cosmology that suffuses North India, especially the Sufi heritage that has been immensely popular in the music and dance world. The relationship between pir and shagird converges with guru-shishya through its emphasis on devotion and surrender to the master, in exchange for esoteric knowledge, guidance and experience of the divine. Historically, intimate relations between a Sufi shaikh and disciple allowed the shaikh to instruct his followers on practices of self-purification and meditation leading towards intimacy with God (Werbner 2003: 21). Disciples selflessly devote to Sufi pirs making enormous personal sacrifice (Werbner 2003: 99) much as the shishya takes up the commitment to *seva aur tyyag*, service and selfless sacrifice, to their guru and the wider community (see also Mills 1998). The current modernist construction of the master in Indian dance has contributed to a narrowing of the tradition, as Hindu models are being used selectively throughout as the source of cosmology. The privileging of the dominant Hindu ideologies around the figure of the master neglect the parallels with pir-disciple relations and the Muslim/Sufi constructions of master and is a striking instance of the editing of 'tradition' that has occurred in the 20th century.

Misinterpreting Guru-ness

> *Das: You cannot become a guru so easily. What is a guru? It is a sensitive touchy subject. In the west, it is seen as a cult...*
> *Disciple (Moraga) adds: The idea is misunderstood, abused, and prematurely promoted. (field notes 2009)*

Das and his disciples were familiar with the cynicism and mistrust that shrouded the guru figure in the west. Several students explained that outsiders, and even family members, had been suspicious of their involvement with Chhandam when they first began, taking their growing involvement as evidence of the school as a cult. My own explanations to outsiders were received on more than one occasion with the same line of questioning, 'is it a cult?'. Assumptions of this nature have been facilitated by popularised and misappropriated versions of the guru, as well as scandals and controversy, that are propagated in the media in both India and the west, in television, films, literature and marketing campaigns. The term itself is often removed from the context of its original religious meaning, and used loosely to refer to anyone who purports to have authority in a particular field. Advertising campaigns use the term widely in slogans and naming of

products or shops, such as 'Image Makeover Guru', 'The Garden Guru', or even the 'Plumbing Guru'. Films, like the 'Love Guru', flagrantly coopt the term. Popular literature in the west, such as Gita Mehta's (1980) 'Karma Cola', take up the question of authenticity of spiritual gurus, humorously tracing plights of westerners misguided by illegitimate gurus in India.

In the west, and particularly in California, certain guru figures have gained considerable notoriety and generated large followings of westerners, including Osho (Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh), Sathya Sai Baba, and 'Amma' Mata Amritanandamayi Devi (see also Babb 1983, 1986, Swallow 1982, Warrier 2003a, 2003b). Western devotees continue to throng the ashrams of Indian gurus in the quest of spiritual enlightenment, and leading Indian gurus and their disciples go on tours abroad to spread their message of spirituality (Warrier 2003a: 31). However, the miracles of 'god-men' like Sai Baba, or the healing embraces of Amma, are often met with considerable scepticism by non-believers, both in India and abroad. Swallow writes, 'some of these godmen face criticism from more reserved, scholarly ascetics and from obviously conservative laymen, who challenge their claim to divinity and deride their simplified and syncretic philosophical teaching' (1982: 124). Criticism comes from the ambiguities surrounding the saintly man who renounces the world, yet continues to depend on devotees' offerings and often amasses great wealth in the process. Scandals around spiritual legitimacy, questionable behaviour, accumulated fortune, and sexual exploitation have tainted the image of an authentic spiritual guide, especially in the case of the more controversial guru figures in India, Osho and Chandranswami (see Narayan 1989)[10]. Rationalists and sceptics have long since denounced the miracles of such spiritual leaders. The influence of western evaluations has a long history in India. Schooled by the theosophists, Jiddu Krishnamurti (1949) emphatically denied the need for a guru, highlighting that we seek gurus for our own gratification, and that being aware of self does not require a guru. For him, gurus perpetuate exploitation of various kinds. Pandit Das and his disciples have certainly remained aware of the ongoing controversy surrounding guru-ness.

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[10] Both gurus faced allegations of corruption in the course of their careers as gurus and fell into disrepute among sections of the public. Satya Sai Baba and 'Amma' have also been accused of sexual abuse, immoral conduct and fraudulence (Warrier 2003a: 50), and the scandal has increased since Sai Baba's death.

Popular figures, like Sai Baba and Osho, have shaped the public conceptions of what a guru might or might not be[11]. It is against this framework that Das tries to distinguish himself. He has been careful to distance himself from such understandings of gurus, god-men and cults. Das's sensitivity around being called a guru, his discouragement of public rituals of deference like touching feet, or ears are all conscious, reflexive efforts by Das to respond, in part, to the controversy around the figure of the guru. Das is also careful to distinguish himself from the growing number of self-proclaimed and prematurely promoted gurus in the arts,

> *A real guru is a person who makes one think. Anyone cannot be called a 'guru' and it is unfortunate when young teachers use this profound word guru liberally thus losing its sanctity and significance. A guru should be able to expel all your ignorance, and should be fully qualified to clear all your doubts in your mind regarding what you are learning. Adhyapakas (teachers) can teach the basics, but it takes years of experience for a teacher to develop into a true guru. (Dhananjayan V.P and Dhananjayan S, interview with R. Natarajan 2010)*

Although the term typically connotes one of great importance, the title of guru can be adopted by almost anyone. Das did not arrive in America proclaiming to be a guru. It is a role that he gradually took up. By the time I encountered him, several of his students referred to him as 'guru-ji', a title he had acquired in recent years. Das was very particular about who would address him as such, reiterating the importance of this title and the bond that it signified. Re-negotiating the culture of scepticism around this term, he preferred to refer to himself as a 'modern-guru-in-training'.

From within the performing arts field, questions surrounding the appropriateness of the guru-shishya model for learning in the 21st c have continued to challenge the role of the guru. For some, guru-shishya is viewed as inherently patriarchal and counter to creativity. For instance, Ranjabati Sircar asks, 'the relationship between the traditional training system as it exists today and the body under training is strictly patriarchal; the system is authority, the body is object. The gender dichotomy…is clear: the disciple is female, the guru, male…Is such a pattern of training still the best way to develop creativity?' (1993: 2067). Sircar expressed his doubts by framing disciplined learning as somehow contrary to creativity. Many women in the performing arts have also expressed their rejection of patriarchy through a rejection of practices that originate within a patriarchal system, such

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[11] However, like these gurus, Das offers a path to well-being and happiness. In this context, devotion, and fulfilment come through dancing. While dance students might not be seeking a guru, or spiritual guide, he assumes this role for several devoted students.

as guru-shishya (see chapter 10). In her study of female Indian vocalists in Hindustani music, Maciszewski explains that the *gharana* 'has been patriarchally constructed to the extent that it often silences women's voices in the production of knowledge through musical style (2001a: 2). While a number of female exponents of various *gharana*s have acquired eminence, no woman has ever headed a *gharana* or lineage in Hindustani music. The same is true of dance *gharana*s. The emergence of alternate educational models, such as the university or dance schools have provided another option.

The proliferation of arts academies and university programs provide an alternative mode for learning, which move toward a more informal relationship between a teacher and student. In Kolkata, dance students can enrol at Rabindra Bharati and pursue a B.A, M.A. or even PhD in dance. In this context, students train under different instructors and are not bound to the teacher's directions outside of the classroom (Chatterjea 1996: 84). Dance school and academies provide another viable alternative for more recreational study of the arts. Chatterjea (1996) has criticised this shift to learning dance in the university context, but notes that the guru-shishya system 'has also become ridden with corrupt practices – the lure of financial gain often usurps the place of talent – that render it ineffective. In such cases the relationship between guru and shishya often becomes economically defined, and this has diminished its emotive quality, which in turn clearly affects the learning process' (Chatterjea 1996: 87). In 2009, I interviewed Amita Dutt, professor of kathak at Rabindra Bharati University. She similarly described some of the increasing flaws in guru-shishya relations,

Traditionally these forms where transmitted from guru to shishya and from father to son, generally what used to happen, especially in the performing arts, the father used to give special treatment to their children and not teach the other students very well to ensure that the children would have a good livelihood. In earlier times, money was not involved...but in the last 100 years, gurus were making more and more demands, in way of money and other material things, and if the students couldn't give then sometimes they wouldn't teach properly and so many people were suffering. When you are under one guru, if the guru is an benevolent dictator, than fine, but if he is a bad dictator, than it is very bad because you can't go to someone else and you are stuck there...in an institutionalised education system, whether you like your student or not, you are bound to teach them something, the thing is, you are there to teach...when you are with one guru, your vision becomes very muddled. You are directed by your guru's attitude, because most gurus consider themselves to be the epitome of all knowledge, and all arts, and so everybody else is looked down on...when you are in a big institution, with many gurus, then that idea that I am the greatest disappears. (Amitta Dutt, personal interview, February 5 2009)

Dutt's comments reflect the scepticism surrounding the kinds of people that have occupied the role of the guru, rather than scepticism for the entire system. Her explanations of why a university system was so productive were driven by the recollection of unfair gurus who privilege their own children, monopolise the knowledge and assign superiority to their own position.[12] For Dutt, the university offers a space to counter some of the deficiencies that have manifested themselves within the *parampara*. Despite the many criticisms, for many dancers, the guru-shishya system remains the only possible way to gain a real education in dance (see Rele 1988, Chatterjea 1996). Commentators, like Dutt, acknowledge that guru-shishya still exists, and has much to offer. I now turn to one example of how a reconstructed version of the guru-shishya is being lived between California and Kolkata.

The Lived World: On Becoming and Being a Guru

'An artist is known for him or herself, a guru is known by his or her disciples.'
(Das, Twitter, Sept 28, 2009)[13]

The guru has to have 100 eyes and 100 hearts. He has to be constantly working and training. The Guru has to always be there, watching his students. Otherwise, he is not a guru; he is just a teacher. (field notes 2009)

In some ways, the defining feature of a guru is simple: to become a guru one needs to have a shishya. Pandit Das was not always a guru. I inquired on more than one occasion, 'but, how does one become a guru?'. There is no governing body or institution that certifies gurus. The claim to this title is entirely subjective.[14] To the question of when he himself became a guru, he responded by saying 'the responsibility was always there'. I pushed this question on another occasion, to which he explained, 'there are no rules. It is different for everyone'. I asked if you could be a guru if your guru was alive. For himself, he responded, 'no', this would not have been possible as he would have sent his students to his guru, as he is the source. While he may have performed the ritual tying of strings, or *ganda bandha*, that marks the lifelong commitment between guru and shishya with some

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[12] Dutt and others explain that gurus often kept secrets, holding the knowledge for their family members. James Kippen describes a similar trend in music…'secrecy was designed to protect material from falling into the wrong hands…music has been considered a commodity which must be closely guarded (1988 :91). Dutt suggests that the university setting counters this kind of nepotism.

[13] This is a line that Das frequently recounted. Here, I reference his Twitter post, as the advent of Twitter provided a platform for him to more publicly express some of his commonly repeated lines. Rather than my own recollection of his words, the Twitter posts have functioned as a rich site for direct quotes of phrases otherwise spoken during class.

[14] Nor do I mean to suggest that such a policy would be useful. Far from it. I merely point out that the gross misrepresentation of the role of guru is also exacerbated by the fact that individuals prematurely attach themselves to this title. Anyone can call themselves a guru.

students, while his guru was alive he would still send them to his guru. His role as a guru was in constant evolution, 'a modern-guru-in-training'. There was clearly a shift from the early years in California when Das was seen as a teacher, and when I first encountered him, a point at which he had clearly become a guru to some disciples. Noelle Barton, a long-time student recounts,

> *We never referred to him as our* guru, *he was our dance teacher, he was 'Chitresh', we called him by his first name, or we called him Mr. Das...So the relation with dada I think evolved because of the changing of the students, the age group difference, and his own evolution, and he went back to his roots a bit more, that's why he is spending so much more time in India. (Barton, personal interview, February, 6 2010)*

Barton also explained a shift as the relationships between his dancers became more personalised and intimate: a growing familial sense amongst the community was accompanied by the transition to the use of 'Dada' or 'Dada-ji' in addressing Das, a kin term meaning 'elder brother'. Most students still address him as 'Dada', excluding the select few who call him 'guru-ji'. The senior-most disciple, Gretchen Hayden reiterates these shifts in relation to her own status as a shishya,

> *When I first came to Guru-ji in 1972, I viewed him as a teacher, and at the time, we called him by his name, 'Chitresh!' ....During the next twelve years of my study, I was never referred to as a shishya, because Guru-ji hadn't taken on the role of being a guru at the time and because we were 'students.' In the beginning, all I wanted to do was dance, learn, practice, and be in the moment. I was certainly not thinking of aspiring to become anything, let alone a 'shishya.'... Although I had felt in my heart to be a shishya by then, I did not have an official ganda bandha ceremony until Feb. 8 1998...the ceremony was twenty-six years after I initially came to Guru-ji. (Hayden, interview with Shruti Iyer 2010)*

For students who have come to study in Chhandam more recently, our introduction to Das is quite different. We are encouraged to immediately call him Dada-ji. The shift in nomenclature to 'Dada-ji' has signalled a increasingly personalised connection, moving away from the idea of teacher, toward a system of naming that embodies a more familial dynamic. The shift to 'guru' signifies an even closer bond, but builds on aspects of the parent-child relationship, and evokes a deeper connection based on unconditional love and caring between guru and shishya. In the traditional gurukul, the practice whereby a student resides in the house of the guru, shishyas would quite literally become a member of the family, being taken into the home, cared for, and participating in chores and daily life alongside the guru's family. Many accounts of guru-shishya stress the fact that shishyas are integrated into the household and are taken as one of the family (see Neuman 1990).

Long-term students develop close relationships with Das and his wife, Celine Das Schein, and are in many regards, family members. The wider Chhandam community functions as an extended family whereby senior students take up roles as older sisters or '*di-dis*', replicating models of Indian kinship. While Chhandam students are outside the blood-line, participation in the lineage is enough to constitute status within the larger non-consanguinal kin group. In many ways, the extended community functions as an extended kin group with reputation, duty and status forming an integral part of students' role (see chapter five).

A guru can function like a surrogate parent. In North Indian music, the ideal teacher-student relationship was almost homologous to that of father-son and made particular sense since the roles of father and guru were often combined in the same person (Neuman 1990: 45; see also Alter 1994)[15]. While all of the students within the Chhandam lineage were outside of the bloodline, the development of a parent-child relationship had been re-created. For a number of the non-Indian dancers in Chhandam, the model of guru as surrogate father took on special significance as many lacked a prominent father figure in their own families. Several students told me of concerns expressed by their own families and parents as they began to understand what a prominent role their guru was to play in their lives. Students from families of Indian origin may have had less difficulty integrating a guru figure, as parents and extended family members had a frame of reference for their guru. But even in such families, the prominent role Das would play in the lives of many of these dancers could cause occasional tensions with loved ones. Das foreshadowed this, warning his closest disciples of the difficulties they would face as their close friends and family members would struggle to understand their growing involvement with Chhandam.

The patrilineal construction of a guru was softened by the model of *bhakti*. This model adopts love as the key medium of devotion, lending itself to making of the mother-child relationship the primary model of attachment. Das frequently asked, 'who is a Guru? A Guru gives blood. That is why Mother is the first guru--mother gives blood and a mother's love is unconditional' (Das, Twitter, March 31, 2009)[16]. A parallel is also invoked through

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[15] This reflected the historic precedence of male hereditary lineages. The dominant model of guru-shishya as modelled on the father-son model is further evidence of the historical male bias, although, the father-son model is particularly applicable to the musical tradition. The organisation of knowledge through patrilineal descent has also shaped the assumption of a masculine personal pronoun. Guru is generally referred to as 'he',

[16] Das often cites his own mother as the most important influence in his life, and often highlights the role of 'mothers', reminding us of their crucial role in giving birth and raising children.

the unconditional love that both a mother and guru give to the child. The rhetoric of shared blood is engaged with and made accessible through the development of a deep affective relationship between guru and shishya.

Das's own shift into the role of guru was accompanied by his own decision to formalise his own relationships with his shishya through the ritual practice of tying strings, or *ganda bandha*. The status of 'official shishya' was marked by a ritualised ceremony in which guru and shishya recognised their lifelong commitment to one another in the official tying of strings ceremony on the banks of the Ganges in Kolkata. For elder disciples, as in the earlier excerpt from Hayden, this ritual occurred long after her commencement of study and served to ritually recognise a bond that was already there. Das talked about the ceremony,

> *Well, I do it a little differently than what was done in my childhood days. I started with my Guru-ji when I was a 9-year-old boy. I was initiated in front of the Goddess Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning. There was a fire sacrifice and I was offered to my Guru-ji. But I don't do that with my disciples because times have changed. Being in America, the Indians are also not the same…With my students, I have changed things so that they should spend at least a minimum of ten years with me. Then I would feel, I would say, 'Hey, it is time for you to become a disciple.' And then, you have to decide in your heart if you want to be my disciple. But it cannot be so easily said because it is not so black and white. (Das, interview with Yasmeen-Shaikh 2007)*

In order to maintain the sanctity of the guru-shishya bond, signifying its deep significance, and life-long commitment, the ritualisation of the bond is preserved for only the most serious and devoted of students. Das constantly asserts the intensity of this bond between guru and shishya and the responsibility one has when they take up this role. Chaudhuri reflects on the disappearing tradition of 'tying thread',

> *'[I]n the olden times they used to tie Ganda (tying thread). It means that from now on I am going to take care of you and I am responsible. At the same time it was also the shishya's duty to take care of their guru. The guru is never going to hide anything from shishya, and shishya is not going to hide anything from the guru. That was the main relationship between guru-shishya in those days. It used to work very well because guru was like your father, but also more than a father because the guru does not have any kind of self-interest in the shishya and is very open-minded. In our times, tying Ganda was a different concept. The Guru's knowledge was great and had a relationship that's very sweet and cannot be explained. (Chaudhuri, interview with Preeti Mann 2010)*

While Chauduri speaks of the tradition in the past tense, ganda bandha has taken on a growing significance for dancers in Chhandam. Many 'unofficial shishyas' exist in

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Chhandam, and aspire to one day be Das's shishya. The enactment of duty and responsibility is often enough to confer the status, however unofficially. It is this mutual obligation of the bond that is the foundation of the guru-shishya relation. Artists spoke of this commitment to their guru as a kind of marriage, in which, two people are bound for life, and in which both are reciprocal players.

Das was aware of the difficulties his students in America, both Indian and non-Indian, had upholding some of the behaviours required of a shishya. At a meeting of the disciples and teachers Das explained, 'if you think I'm your guru, you have to behave like a shishya – this is a problem for westerners and ABCD's[17]'. Where the cultural framework that endorses this relationship is absent, so too is the understanding and sensitivity to the role, and additional work has to be done to sustain the relationship in a foreign context. Attempts to convey the responsibility of the shishya, especially in the American context, required explicit efforts to delineate just what a shishya should be. The following excerpt describes the unusual detailing of the criteria to be a shishya that occurred in 2009 at a meeting of the disciples and teachers in Chhandam.

In a very unusual fashion, Das began writing down the criteria on large sheets of paper, attached to the wall for use at the meeting. At the top of the page he wrote, 'CRITERIA TO BE A SHISHYA'. Do you want to be a shishya? Yes?' He then went on to explain and write the necessary steps. The number one criteria, which doubles as the first of the 'Nine principles of Chhandam' was 'Attitude and Etiquette'. We are constantly reminded that we must approach the dance, Das, and especially our peers, with the right attitude. Number two was the '16 Tihais – everyday[18]', 'even when you are on the beach somewhere on holiday, you will practice the 16 tihais'. He added that this will also force you to have the above (1), and that all of them reinforce each other. Number three, 'Play an instrument'. This was slowly becoming a requisite in Chhandam, that all students will play an instrument, or take vocal lessons, or something of this nature. The fourth criteria was 'Cross-training' which should also be done everyday. Das stated, 'you will cross-train, whether it is swimming, running, or something physical and cardiovascular'. This was seen as necessary to develop the stamina and fitness necessary to dance at the necessary level. The fifth and final criteria was to 'Educate yourself, read and educate'. Six, 'memorise the nine principles'. Seven, 'Shlokas'. We are required to know all the shlokas that Das has taught. And the final eighth criteria, although this seemed more of a point of discussion, 'Dada-ji vs. Guru-ji'. This final point was there to reiterate that we are just students unless we take up all of these criteria. Das reminded us that Guru-Shishya is a two way street. He went on to explain that 'All of this must be combined, and then you will be tested, You will come before me and be tested, and if I say, yes, you are on the path, then you will have

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[17] ABCD was a colloquially used acronym for 'American Born Confused Desi'.
[18] The 'Sixteen Tihais' are a series of bol compositions that are practiced in succession, forming a roughly 5 minute exercise that has built within it the ability to test the student on many of kathak's most difficult aspects. This 'exercise' will be discussed at length on chapter 7.

to think – do you want this? Das also said this was different from when he was little and a guru-ji was chosen at a young age – but he moved past this and asserted today's criteria for being a shishya. (field notes 2009)

Being a shishya is much more than the loose translation of student, or even disciple. It is a role that a student must work toward and deserve.   Das outlined more practical steps to becoming a shishya on this occasion. This included unconventional criteria such as cross-training. He also emphasised material specific to Chhandam, like the nine principles and the sixteen tihais. Such practical measures only took on meaning within the affective bond with the guru, one based on belief that the guru will lead the shishya's self-realisation. Das closed this lecture by saying, 'You do this, and you will release yourself from fear, you will release yourself from darkness. This is why you have come to me'. Ultimately, the status of the shishya was conferred through student's own actions in acknowledging the bond. Only a few dancers were permitted to call him guru-ji, although many of the unofficial shishyas also referred to him as such. 'Don't call me guru-ji' is a request I heard time and again during my fieldwork. Addressing him as a 'guru' was only meant for those devoted students who understood the weight of this term, who knew what it meant to be a shishya, and who were participants in the making of the relationship between guru and shishya. Das's own insistence on the restrictions around who calls him 'guru' reiterate this point: the shishya is a reciprocal participant in this relationship.

The Emotional Dimension of Guru-Shishya

It was very overwhelming for me to see his involvement and to see how much he cares for everything and for everyone, and for all of his students. He is like a parent – I consider him, just to give an analogy, like a lighthouse. Ships come and go, they may stray across, they may be far off, but you see some glimmer, something shining, and then you find your way. But he is there. He's there, he always in one place. I mean, he is so grounded, and that's – we derive a lot of strength from him. And different people derive strength in different ways. People who are senior students, and who are serious practitioners of the art form, and who are much more dedicated and committed, they derive a different kind of strength and have a very different kind of relationship. But, even the newest student – who is month old in Chhandam, derives some strength out of the solid…, out of him or out of Chhandam as an organisation. That's how I look at it, and that's how I feel about him and his work and the institution. (Poonam Narkar, personal interview, January 20, 2010)

The guru-shishya relationship, although necessarily hierarchical, has been based on love since the historical incorporation of the bhakti-model. Narkar described the parental loving care and strength that students can derive from the guru, even as beginners. The emotional

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foundation of the relationship, one based on mutual love, care and trust, foregrounds the experience of learning dance in the *parampara.*

> The relationship between the guru and his disciple in its ideal form and essential nature is described and expressed by the devotion of the disciple to his guru and the love of the guru for his disciple. Without love and devotion there can be no communication and communication is the fundamental requisite of this relationship – the communication of a tradition. (Neuman 1990: 45)

The love and dependency between a guru and shishya are the foundation for this life-long commitment of learning. The further one immerses in the study of dance, the deeper their relationship to their guru, the greater their commitment to the art becomes, and the more enmeshed a dancer becomes in the love, dependency, and learning of guru-shishya (see also chapter 10).

The emotional basis of this bond is the very foundation for learning. Inside and outside the classroom, emotions are evoked in the learning process, and facilitate the actual learning that can occur. Milton (2002) has argued that 'emotion acts as a learning mechanism to filter attention'. The presence and intensity of emotions in the process of perception lead to better retention of the knowledge gained (see Izard 1991). In this view, emotions are an essential learning tool (Geiser 2008: 307), triggering attention, and working as a catalyst for learning. Creating an affective backdrop in which dancers developed the capacity to learn, to be attentive, and to devote themselves to the practice of learning was in part due to the efficacy of Das's role as a guru. Das's adept orchestration of mood successfully engaged the emotions of his dancers in a range of ways, and inspired and motivated dancers to eagerly pursue the art through study with him. Das could quite masterfully produce a mood that served as the affective backdrop in a class, and in a variety of ways, compelled students to push themselves, to try harder and to commit their energy to the mission of Chhandam, to 'educate, promote and preserve' kathak (see chapter 10).

In the inter-subjective play of being-in-the-world of the guru, the mood of the moment was a dominant felt-experience. Every situation has a mood. As Heidegger notes, 'we always have some mood. We cannot escape having a mood, as we are always being-with, that is, we affect and are affected by others in each moment of our being-in-the-world' (cited in Geiser 2008: 305). In the affective world of the guru, mood became a prominent aspect of conscious experience, not simply a background. Students *noticed* the elation, the anger, the heaviness, and the joy. The shifts from one to another were often quite drastic and

rapid. In some respects, this was his expertise as a kathaka and performer, whose role it was to create *rasa*, which loosely could be understood as eliciting a shared set of moods during performance (see chapter 8). Both in the everyday and on stage, Das elicited emotional response from those around him, inciting empathetic response in his audience, whether they are students in the classroom, or audience members in a theatre. 'Everything is a performance' one of his disciples exclaimed, regarding his ability to always be 'on'. He was always a guru, and always a kathaka, in every moment of everyday, and in that regard, affecting the background mood and eliciting emotions in those around him. His masterful evocation of mood was instrumental off the stage, especially in regards to teaching.

The emotional dimension of the relationship was highly influential as a stimulus and motivator. The guru's presence pushes students to go further, to excel, and to succeed in the vision of their guru. Students explain their ability to do much more than they thought possible as due to the presence of their guru (see chapter 10). Das's own charisma created excitement in his students and added fresh energy to any situation. Dancing before one's guru is one of the greatest tests a dancer can face. Two dancers talk about their experiences of dancing their first solo, with their guru seated on stage, supporting them and playing tabla,

> *In the beginning when I first came out, I was actually nervous that he was there. He was the most intimidating person to dance in front of. Cause everybody else, they'll probably like whatever I do, because they won't understand 25% of it...I thought 'what is he going to think?'. Cause he hadn't seen half of my solo. Because if he thinks its good or he thinks its bad, that totally determines where I am at. It was like a test....Sometimes I would do something on stage, and I would catch out of the corner of my eye, he would give a facial expression of being impressed, so that was really cool – the approving. That gave me confidence, cause for Dada to be impressed with me, that's a big deal. Then I knew I was doing well, so that helped. (Personal Interview, Labonee Mohanta December 2, 2009)*

> *One of the best moments for me in my solo was every time I'd look over to Dada, and he would just be sitting there proudly with his arms folded, leaning back (imitates) and was like, 'oh, so this is what she is doing' – he was pleasantly surprised and enjoying himself – and it just gave me that burst of energy. (Personal Interview, Antara Bhardwaj November 4, 2009)*

Success in front of the guru was integral in building the confidence dancers had in their abilities, and prepare them for the challenges and uncertainties of performance. And it was always said, 'if you can dance before your guru, you can dance before anyone'. Students certainly sought the approval of the guru, for the obvious reason that he was the most

knowledgeable, and his approval was the most a dancer could hope for in legitimating their own skill. Imbricated with this desire for approval, recognition, and legitimacy was the desire to please the guru and to make him proud. The observance of this, for both dancers, produced enough emotional and mental boost to give them more 'energy' for their dance.

Equally, failure before the guru, or the inability to perform a certain skill could invoke shame and disgrace, hopefully inciting practice and future motivation. His disapproval and disgust motivated students to work harder. Students in India spoke of the 'fear' they had of their guru. Considerable nervousness and anxiety was common, and pushing oneself to new levels was endorsed by an anxiety regarding failing in the eyes of the guru. 'Saving face' in the presence of the guru and one's peers is valued and integral to dancer's own constructions of self-image and confidence. The cultural prescriptions on shame and retention of honour are particularly intense in Indian culture, and dancing well before the guru is something every student hopes to achieve. Singling out individuals, putting students on the spot and the sporadic testing that occurs very regularly in our classes could be used as both a confidence boosting or as a shaming experience. Egos of the students were readily affected: whether agitated, crushed, boosted, or encouraged, a students' sense of their development and their self was hugely affected by the pedagogical skills of the guru. The daily dramatics of the guru helped to ensure that students remain excited, in constant anticipation, and intimidated, nervous, or possibly fearful in turn.

Students learn to be attentive to the emotional response of their guru. Students learn to read, interpret and enjoy an access to his emotional world. Merleau-Ponty describes emotions, and their external existence:

> If I try to study love or hate from inner observation, I will find very little to describe: A few pangs, a few heart throbs – in short, trite agitations which do not reveal the essence of love or hate...We must reject the prejudice which makes 'inner realities' out of love, hate or anger and leave them accessible to one single witness: the person who feels them. Anger, shame, hate or love are not psychic facts hidden at the bottom of another's consciousness: they are types of behaviour or styles of conduct which are visible from the outside. They exist on this face or in those gestures, not hidden behind them. (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 52-3).

The emotions of the guru are expressed visibly, in facial expressions, in body postures, and in gestures. Students often looked to their guru indiscreetly for any sign of approval or displeasure, understanding their own development and success through his emotional engagements. On one occasion, an intermediate student was called to the front of the class

to demonstrate. She tentatively approached, making her way through the thickening tension. Das stood at his tabla staring intently. She began singing *lehra* or melody, going slightly off key. Das grimaced, she cringed in response, sensing her error and her guru's displeasure. 'Too much nervousness' he said. She kept looking to her guru, at which he became annoyed. 'Don't look at my face' he told her (field notes 2008). Students desire the feedback of their guru, and in many cases, their seeking his approval was something he openly criticised. Disciples needed to be attentive to the guru at all moments, but over-relying on him was also discouraged. Students needed to find a balance between attunement and their own uncertainly or over-eagerness to please. Coming to intuitively understand the guru was a sign of an ideal shishya. One disciple recounted, 'Guru-ji talks about Gretchen as the perfect shishya because she always knew what he wanted without having to ask – she was very in tune with him and sensitive and always thought of everything that needed to be done' (field notes 2009).

Gaining an intuitive understanding of the emotional dimension of the guru's experience, and participating in that very experience is integral to the guru-shishya relationship on a number of levels. The empathetic connection between guru-shishya enables the shishya to know what the guru needs, and be able to fulfil her obligations to her guru, by taking care, and showing her love for the guru. The same shared emotional connection also enables the guru to truly teach the shishya. Through having access to a shared emotional state, the guru can actively teach, finding ways to motivate the student, and lead them through whatever challenges lay before them. Sharing a subjective emotional dimension with the guru also enables a shishya to learn the emotive qualities of the dance, to understand rasa, and how to create it. Studying the art of a master, one must feel it. Empathetic engagement is crucial.

Disciples aspire to develop this sense of emotional empathy, sensing what he feels and needs. They become deeply involved in his emotional experience. Empathy was key to learning. Empathy 'has long been understood in Western philosophical and social scientific traditions to refer to an act whereby an individual is able to gain some access, no matter how mitigated that access might be, to the embodied subjective experience of another' (Throop 2010: 772). But what kind of empathetic attunement occurred in guru-shishya? Empathy is reciprocal in nature, in that 'empathy entails the imaginative work of not only the empathiser but also the empathisee, who also participates in the process of being understood by another' (Throop 2010: 772; see also Hollan and Throop 2008). In

the case of guru-shishya, the empathetic interaction is shared, but along asymmetrical lines. While empathy is mutual in some regards, in the case of devotion, there is an asymmetry of emotional attunement invoked through the hierarchical nature of the relationship. The guru stands in a hierarchical position, and the shishya a subordinate one, it is the shishya, through devotion, who comes to gain access to the guru's emotional states. The guru also needs to be understood, and his world shared by others. This is necessary to his identity and authority, as much as it is a part of the survival of the art. While the guru observes and relates to his students, it is in the active attunement of the disciples to their guru that empathy is experienced. Students gain entry to what can become a shared horizon of understanding through their own attempts to participate in the intersubjective reality with their guru. An ideal shishya is empathetically attuned to her guru, participating in his emotional world. In this way, total learning can occur. The generation of empathy is facilitated by an enduring proximity to the guru, especially in the case of *gurukul,* or residence with the guru, securing the emplacement of these emotional horizons of experience (see chapter 4).

Love and learning are intertwined in guru-shishya. Das created situations in which his dancers wanted to succeed, desired to learn more, wanted to please their guru, or sought his approval. He created high-pressure situations in which nerve-wracked dancers are called upon to dance before him, struggle to perform, and then are compelled to practice by their desire to succeed before their guru (see chapter 6). He draws on disciples' passionate attachment and dependency to inspire their dance and actions to cohere with his own artistic vision, as disciples seek approval from their revered teacher (see chapter 10). He masterfully evokes feelings of bhakti or devotion to god through singing and dance, an affective and fulfilling experience that motivates ongoing commitment and service (see chapter 4). He loves and cares deeply for his students, an experience of which inspires the same in the shishya and secures the ongoing devotion to him, and ultimately to the dance. Such experiences further compelled students to learn. But such empathetic attunement, attachment, dependency and desire to please was not solely for the purpose of the guru; dancers also had their own self-interest in mind as they engaged in this relationship. The slower temporality of dependency in a learning relationship signals the eventual independence of the learner. While we consider the active role disciples played in accessing the emotional world of the guru through their own empathetic response, and his simultaneous use of this affective bond to motivate learning, it cannot be without

consideration of the end goal, the emergence of an adept and relatively autonomous dancer (see chapter 9).

CHAPTER FOUR

Place Matters: The Experience of *Gurukul*

> *In India, the guru-shishya relationship has had its own system that was incorporated into the social weave, where the shishya often times lived in the guru's house. Because it was already part of the cultural fabric, I believe being a shishya in India is more straightforward. In the U.S., it was more of an exploration and evolution of that bond. (Hayden, interview with Shruti Iyer 2010)*

The tradition of *gurukul* refers to the shishya's residency with their guru. *Kul* or *kula* is the Sanskrit word for family, lineage or house. In this ideal learning model, the student went to live with the teacher, becoming part of the household, and maintaining close proximity to the guru. Scholars and artists recall this idealised period of study: 'the disciples came at an early age to study with the guru and live with him as a part of his household…Each student became an integral part of the guru*'s* family and it was believed that such proximity was essential for imparting true and total education' (Chatterjea 1996: 69). How the *gurukul* of the past actually existed is relatively unknown, except for the narratives and recollections that bespeak a period when royal patronage provided the opportunity for dancers and gurus to focus exclusively on training (see Chatterjea 1996; Neuman 1990; Pillai 2002)[1]. Today, it is more likely that students will periodically take up residence, providing the opportunity for re-created versions of *gurukul*. For Das and his disciples, his return trips to India provide an opportunity to re-establish and re-make this idealised practice. In this sense, *gurukul* is in part a product of Das's migration, coming into renewed currency through the very logistics of movement[2]. In the American context, where students rely heavily on their guru for knowledge, not only of the dance, but also of the culture from which kathak has emerged, a radical dependency on the guru is created, which has contributed to the fresh relevance of periodic training within the *gurukul*. In this chapter, I describe the intensive moments of *gurukul*, as they are recreated through the return to India.

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[1] Neuman's study (1990) of North Indian musicians explains that many guru-shishya relationships existed between relatives, such as father and son, or uncle and son. In such cases, the practice of gurukul is likely. Evidence of non-hereditary shishyas taking up permanent residence is harder to find.

[2] Dance scholar Chatterjea writes, 'today…students who wish to train under a guru go and live periodically with his or her guru, paying a large sum in exchange. Again, the guru might occasionally venture into the city, if he or she is not already living there, and hold two-week to month long workshops where the dancers train intensively' (Chatterjea 1996: 80). Thus, even within India, the gurukul is necessitated out of regional movements of gurus, who travel to teach, and have students stay near to or with them to maximise the potential for learning.

Migration has also brought into focus other salient elements of the dance – that might have otherwise remained invisible. It has made visible the quotidian world of India. The struggles of the new learners and audiences of the U.S. made it apparent that understanding certain aspects of kathak dance relied heavily on bodily ways of knowing that were embedded in daily life in India. Taken-for-granted aspects of practical life endowed dancers with a knowledge of how to act, speak and move in culturally appropriate ways. Many of these sensibilities were not only important for knowing how to interact with the guru, but also provided a basis for learning the aesthetic and emotional dimension of dance. Kolkata, as a materialised site of practice assumed central significance to learning the subtler aspects of the art, including the patterns of interaction, modes of respect, or the emotional textures of daily life in India. For the avid dance student, understanding these daily embodiments of culture became an important part of the learning process. The misfires and breakdowns, for the America learners of kathak, as they struggled to learn the implicit assumptions of culture, indicates that elements of being-in-place still matter to the experience of kathak. These limits indicate dimensions that are taken-for-granted by a culture in which the art form evolved, and as such were least accessible to the learner. Place is not entirely transportable, and in the present chapter, I use the perspective of the learner to show why.

Suspended Moments of *Gurukul*: India

> *It is so different here in India because you sleep, eat, breathe and live with Dada.*
> *(Bhardwaj, personal interview, Oct 1, 2009)*

In Kolkata, senior students, both local and foreign, come to live with Das during his stay, spending as much time as possible with him for a period of anywhere from a few days to a few months. This usually meant students were near him twenty-four hours a day, ideally awake before him and up with him until after he retired for the evening. During each day, there were hours of intense physical training, but most of the hours were not spent in the formal classroom or studio. Life with Das in the Salt-Lake residence in Kolkata was a constant flurry of activity. Days passed with varied intervals of training, lecturing, hosting guests, running errands, rehearsing, preparing for performances, and experiencing a diversity of expressions of frustration and love by the guru. There were periods where we did not leave the house for several days, avoiding the press of Kolkata traffic for the sanctity of home and rigorous practice. There were always guests, senior artists, old

friends, students and their families coming to the house. And there were also periods of back-to-back teaching and performance engagements, which had the entire entourage travelling around Kolkata and rural west Bengal. Students became involved in every aspect of their guru's life, assisting in teaching and running workshops that he led, involved with all aspects of performance, often helping back-stage, assisting in whatever small tasks and errands needed attending, whether that be finding chai, or helping with sound check. Learning to conduct oneself as an artist, understanding appropriate modes of interactions with other artists, maintaining good working relationships, and navigating the politics of the arts world were all lessons learned through exposure and experience alongside the guru.

It was non-stop. Sleep was hard to come by, and the constant attentiveness with which we necessarily approached every movement, word and action in front of our guru inspired incredible mental fatigue. Daily training under his constant watch induced a cumulative physical exhaustion. Students mediated a sometimes tumultuous relationship to the guru, and we were guided into a constant state of a self-interrogation of our own motives and desires in life. This contributed to a degree of emotional stress that often manifest in tears and personal frustrations. At the same time, we all experienced incredible moments of joy and pleasure in dancing, in spending time near our guru, accompanying him to a range of prestigious event and being included in his range of daily experiences, the highs and lows. Das made every effort to incorporate his students in all of his activities while they stayed with him. You quite simply became – part of the family.

William Hanks remarked that 'the apprentice's ability to understand the master's performance depends not on their possessing the same representation of it, or of the object it entails, but rather on their being engaged in the performance in congruent ways' (1991: 21, cited in Marchand 2010: 11). Not only does the student engage the performative mode of dance, but they participate in the guru's entire way of life. The idea that if students' live the life of an artist, they will begin to understand the way of life, is evoked by Moraga, a senior shishya. Here she refers to the life of Frank Lloyd Wright,

> *When confronted with someone who seriously wanted to study with him, he said: First you have to cook with me, garden with me, go to the opera with me…. What he meant was that to really understand how he does his art, you don't need to study architecture with him. You can learn that at school. You need to understand his aesthetic — his*

culturally specific micro-nuances. This is what it means to learn any art that is complex, rich, and ever evolving. (Moraga, interview with Shruti Iyer, 2010)

Much of the learning is said to come through simply being near to, and spending time with the guru. The ideal model relies less on didactic teaching, and more on the implicit learning through participation in daily experiences of the master. Constant exposure to the master's mode of being requires practical engagement with the 'rules' of the field[3]; these adaptations, of knowing how to dance, act, move or talk in front of the guru, are thought to carry with them the underlying moral precepts and cultural values that, through repetitive action, will be inscribed and understood, successfully crafting a new moral actor.

The Being-In-Place of Kolkata

> *I awake early in the morning. I quietly tip toe out of our room. Shortly after, Seema wakes up and joins me. The marble floor is cold beneath our feet, but we dance. The house still sleeps. We do not wear ghungru. Our bodies are cold and tired, and the pace is slow. It is still dark but as the outside world awakes it enlivens the background sound-scape with the morning chorus of conch blowing, dog barking, the deep voiced vendors (offering their sales pitches for a variety of things that I have yet to discover), the occasional devotee singing some version of 'hari ram hari krishna', as well as the melodious hacking up of phlegm. Even from the confines of Das's residence, the everyday sensed world of Kolkata seeps in.*
>
> *Tulsi-di, who works at the rented residence in Salt Lake house, and since our stays has converted to a faithful admirer of Dada-ji's, unlocks the padlocked door with a skeleton key, and quietly enters, wearing a cotton sari and a woollen shawl to keep her warm. She begins making chai, and shortly there after, knocks on Dada-ji's door, as she does every morning. We used to do this, but she has now taken this as her duty and becomes offended if we interfere. Finally, we hear Dada's door open and his clicking chappals or sandals on the marble stairs, causing all of us to jump to attention, bowing in a namaskar as he descends the stairs. (field notes January 2009)*

Participation in the local life world, hearing the morning sounds, feeling the textures of the floor, or observing the movements of others, are all part of the daily experience of residence with Das in Kolkata. Sensory, emotional and kinaesthetic patterns exist amidst this horizon of daily life in Kolkata as the taken-for-granted assumptions of quotidian life. In this chapter, I use the phenomenological term 'horizon' to refer to those aspects of daily practice which become so familiar that they retreat to the background, only to act as

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[3] Here I draw on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1990a) who describes the practical sense that is gained in adjusting to the demands of the field. 'A feel for the game' is acquired through this encounter between the habitus and the field of practice (1990a: 66). In this process, we come to understand the implicit 'rules' for participation.

invisible supports. In this sense they take the place of the horizon in the visual field of perception – not in focus, but very much present as a relational point of reference. In this chapter, what might loosely be referred to as Kolkata forms the 'horizon' for dance. It is made up of quotidian forms of emotional relationships, ways of behaving in front of superiors, or even in front of those of lesser status. All of these elements endorse a way of being-in-place that is specific to this site of practice.

Learning involves participation in a set of inter-subjective relations situated in a total-environment where a different mode of practical engagement is required. While the affective dimension of this relationship creates its own strong sense of its own place (see chapter 5), it too relies on a background horizon to create a total learning environment. The body-in-place shares an indissoluble relation with the materialised and invisible supports that create the total environment for learning. I employ the concept of a 'total environment' from Trevor Marchand:

> [M]aking knowledge is a process entailing co-ordinated interaction between interlocutors and practitioners with their total environment. As a minimum, the latter consists of artefacts, tools-to-hand, and raw materials; space, place, and architecture; paths and boundaries; time-frames and temporal rhythms; light, darkness, and weather. As sentient beings, we are engaged with a changing array of environmental factors at every given moment, all of which impact the thoughts we think and the actions we produce. (Marchand, 2010: 2)

The materiality of daily life in Kolkata endorses in the body generative attitudes and prevalent dispositions that are relevant to learning kathak. In considering the significance of 'place', I pay attention to both the invisible supports and to the more tangible aspects of lifeworlds, to the webs of social meanings that are brought to life in places. This can include dimensions of hierarchy, of gendered patterns of behaviour, as well as emotional orientations, as they exist within materialised sites of practice. The indispensible relations between a body and place (see Bourdieu 1990a; Casey 1993, 1997; Heidegger 1962; Merleau-Ponty 1962), or an organism and its environment (Ingold 2000) have emerged as salient to both anthropological and philosophical endeavours. This theme also consistently emerged as salient to learning kathak, and so, in this chapter, I explore the way in which bodies inhabit places, and places inhabit bodies. Bodies are themselves changed, not only through skill acquisition in specialised training, like kathak, but also through ongoing long-term participation in specific material sites of practice. Human physiology is itself modified. Greg Downey has described the ways in which bodies are transformed in skilled

practice – from the muscular level to the neurological level (see Downey 2005a and 2007). In less obvious ways, participation in everyday worlds of materiality and movement also affects and re-shapes the body. Aspects of the material world, such as clothing, furniture, tools and architecture, are part of the experiential dimension, providing additional support for the patterns and attitudes of social life, but also shaping our bodies in very tangible ways.

On the most basic level of materiality, aspects such as floors, shoes, saris, lack of chairs, or even cutlery for that matter, endorsed particular patterns of movement. Clothing, as a material object that is nearest our body at all times, affects the way we sit, stand and move through space. For example Banerjee and Miller have described the way in which clothing, in particular, the sari, affect the movements of its wearer. Banerjee and Miller (2003) write about the sari as a garment that is lived, attending to the ways in which the wearer manipulates the sari and responds to its movements.

> When walking, the right leg determines the length of the stride, which is kept in check by the warning tension at the ankle when the stride is too long for the sari. The left leg needs to move a little bit out and forward so as not to trap the pleats between the knees. The *pallu* may slide off with the movement, in which case the right arm comes up to restore it to the left shoulder, but carefully so as not to crush the cloth. After a few strides the sari may slip down from the left waist, and the left arm needs to pull it back up in order to retain the fan shape of the pleats. (Banerjee and Miller 2003: 25)

Marcel Mauss has made a similar point much earlier regarding footwear. 'The fact that we wear shoes to walk transforms the positions of our feet: we feel it sure enough when we walk without them' (Mauss 1973: 74)[4]. Heiko Henkel has discussed the ways in which the physical structures of old neighbourhood in Istanbul were constant reminders to inhabitants of their Muslim heritage and way of life (2007: 57). The materiality of place has effects on the bodies that move through them, affecting both the phsyiology of the body and its kinaesthetic memory. Dance anthropologist, Sally Ann Ness writes, 'any city gives form to the space and time it inhabits, as well as to the people who inhabit it. In so doing, it may reveal some of its residents' more basic attitudes toward public and social life, attitudes that also serve to form the basis of symbolic expressions' (1992: 33).

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[4] Prohibitions against shoes also meant that people always left their shoes by the door upon entering a home, often going barefoot or in sandals. The prevalence of flat-footed, open shoes in public encouraged a particular physiology and relation to the floor.

Whilst a holistic consideration of the material world of Kolkata, a very heterogeneous space, remains near impossible, I will introduce throughout this chapter and later in this dissertation, aspects of the material world that were relevant to our learning: seating, locomotion, and dimensions of hierarchy (this chapter), floors and shoes (chapter 7), and clothing (chapter 9). The quotidian world of Kolkata continues to support many of the implicit principles of kathak, such as patterns of deference, or emotional orientations, that are not supported through daily life in America. Being-in-Kolkata not only created the possibility for uninterrupted and lengthy co-habitation with the guru, in a way not possible in America, but it also provided the possibility for moving and living amidst the culturally specific daily world of Kolkata, a world that kathak inhabits.

*Sadvyavhar aur Tehzeeb***: Attitude and Etiquette**

> *I am more interested in the way that you walk into the room than in how you dance*
> *(Pandit Chitresh Das)[5]*

Learning attitude, etiquette, or comportment was a goal of Chhandam that found its optimal expression through suspended moments of *gurukul* in Kolkata[6]. The city, its inhabitants, and the everyday world of Kolkata, provided a rich backdrop for re-creating an experience of the *gurukul* in which we could deepen our understanding of the culture, and such practices like 'knowing how to walk into a room'. In Chhandam, a great deal of this can occur by simply being near the guru, whether that is in California or Kolkata. But the *gurukul* in Kolkata provided an opportunity to be fast-tracked through this re-socialisation While a great deal of 'cultural etiquette' was communicated in America (see chapter 5), learning *sadvyavahr aur tehzeeb* took on new dimensions in the Indian context. The return to India provided a unique opportunity to be fully immersed in an everyday world that provided invisible supports for ways of knowing and being required in the dance.

The process was not without tensions and contradictions. Many aspects of life in modern India did not match up to the idealised lifeworld that was imagined through Chhandam's kathak. The return of Das and his American dancers to Kolkata also brought into focus those aspects of modern India that no longer supported the reconfigured ideals of

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[5] This is a phrase that Das often repeated and was well known by his dancers. It was also written in the Chhandam reader (Das et. al. 2001) and a similar version was included in Chhandam's nine principles (see Appendix A)

[6] It must be noted that the world of music and dance has preserved an older etiquette, etiquette of the courts and of the upper class patrons on which artists relied and were part of. Much of this behaviour can also be found in other guru-shishya relationships and training centres for the arts, although in varying degrees.

Chhandam's kathak and its traditionalised etiquette, which by now, had come to carry obvious traces of its diasporic attachments[7]. His strong assertion of ritualised modes of interacting in the dance space, reverence toward one's *ghungrus*, to other dancers, and to the guru, all received fresh impetus through Das's migration. Practices such as these confronted dancers in modern India, some of who adhered less strictly to such ritualised behaviours. I witnessed several workshops in Kolkata during which Das and his dancers were critical of the way local dancers approached the dance space and treated their *ghungru*[8]. Das's school exhibited the most ritualised and strictly adhered to etiquette out of all the schools I visited during my MA fieldwork (see Dalidowicz 2006). Transnational flows are not necessarily a smooth affair; knowledge does not flow seamlessly. Rather, such flows reveal the contradictions between imaginings and the lived realities.

In the following sections, I discuss aspects of behaviour that were learned through the experience of *gurukul* in India, supported by the backdrop of life in Kolkata. At the same time, confrontations between the idealised attitudes of Chhandam's kathak ran up against a modern India, in which such traditional behaviour was not always relevant to participants there, and I consider some of these contradictions here. However, in asserting the importance of the lived world of Kolkata to learning, I note that the gulf between the idealised behaviours of Chhandam and actual daily life is not as great for locals. While local students also learn a set of behaviours and sensibilities specific to Chhandam, their learning need not cross such a vast divide of understanding. The widest gaps existed for those dancers raised in America.

Space and Hierarchy

> *Dada-ji came down into the main room, to find us dancing. He insisted we keep dancing, but the footwork quickly subsided. We gathered around for morning chai, breakfast, and ensuing lessons. In the background, someone had begun playing one of Dada-ji's favourite CDs in rag bairagi, suitable for the early morning. We sat on the floor, seating ourselves lower than our guru. He insisted that we sit on the sofa. It happens like this every morning. Usually, the local Indian students are the resilient ones who remain on the floor and would almost never occupy the sofa without his*

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[7] Aspects of Das's aesthetic style and technical development also reflected the transnationality of the lineage, and its U.S. contextualisation. Sarah Morelli has extensively documented the stylistic changes to Das's style that occurred through its recontextualisation in California, such as the California chakkar (2007: 71). Das's desire to train his American dancers to excel in the technical aspects of the dance also shaped the style of the lineage and the kind of kathak that his American dancers learned (see chapter 2). I attend here to the reiteration of 'tradition' as part of migration.

[8] Lack of adherence to traditional etiquette was not evident in all schools in Kolkata; it was present, but in differing degrees.

persistence. Those of us from North America do not require as much persuasion. (January 2009)

Spatial arrangement around the guru was always particular. At the table, in a car, in the living room, it was usually one of the most senior who was seated nearest to him, or someone who was being given special privilege on that occasion. Students must remain aware of their relative position to him. Both horizontal and vertical dimensions of space were used to symbolically signify our positions in the hierarchy. In an informal setting like this one, repeated every morning, Das encouraged students to break the conventions of hierarchy, although it was always the senior in hierarchy who could show love or moral egalitarianism by suspending the norm. It was crucial that students attuned to the particularity of this informal session, so as not to duplicate this breaking of convention in other contexts, for example, taking a seat in the very same room when guests and the guru were sitting on the sofa and chairs. Understanding the shifting field, and its permeable rules are part of the students' role. It often occurred that the same 'place', in this instance, the sitting room of the Kolkata house, was imbued with different norms and conventions depending on the particular configuration of people in the space; inter-subjective relations affected the experience of place and our bodily movements within place. Appropriately, junior students would occupy a lower space, and if requested, might move to occupy a position of equal dimension. There were certain local students who quite adamantly resisted Das's urging, and held firm in their position, both spatially and symbolically, unwilling and unable to transgress the conventions. It was less of a struggle for western learners, already familiar with the permeable boundaries of convention through experiences in America, where such situations were frequent[9].

The symbolic marking of hierarchy through the use of the vertical dimension of space was learned in Chhandam classes in a spectrum of ways. We often remained seated on the floor, lower than our guru. Some students attempted to perform the ritual gesture of touching the feet of the guru. We used the vertical dimension in our *pranam* or opening invocation of the dance to show reverence in our dance, coming to our knees, to touch the floor, and show our respect. Familiarity with this mode of knowing and an implicit

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[9] My first encounters with Das were in Kolkata, and with that as my only frame of reference for our relationship, I found myself initially following the behaviour of the local Indian students more closely than the American students, less comfortable with knowing how to act in an informal setting. On later trips to India, after having studied and interacted with Das in America, and after developing a closer relationship with him, I too found it easier to shift codes, interacting more fluidly in an informal space, knowing when this was appropriate, and knowing when more formalised behaviour was appropriate.

recognition of hierarchy occurred in learning kathak, in the isolated sense of being-in-class. But occupying a daily world where this patterning continues to be relevant, even off the dance floor, and in both the private and public domain of daily Kolkata life, reasserted these patterns, reminding us of their relevance, giving us new contexts for their experience and sedimenting the patterns further into our body-consciousness. The material world further endorsed these patterns, albeit more so in the past. While modern Indian homes and public spaces might not always conform to such historical spatial arrangements, sitting on the floor was conventional, and is still practiced. Wide open spaces and an absence of chairs endorsed sitting on the floor, and is still present in some public, educational, religious, and private spaces. In the past, eating on the floor was normative, and I still had occasion to share a meal with a family in such fashion. While eating on the floor might today be associated with poorer families, this was not always the case.

Such particular spatial arrangements endorsed the typical cross-legged position, a position that as students of the arts, we frequently inhabit. The cross-legged posture, manifest in relation to certain spatial arrangements, inhabits the body in very tangible ways, lengthening muscles and releasing joints. One only needs to ask a novice who attempts to sit like this for an extended period just how much habitual skill is involved. While architecture, furniture and styles of interior design change, they do so with greater rapidity than the postures which once flourished within such spaces. In India, people continue to sit cross-legged on furniture, despite the obvious changes in the material world.

Engagement in Indian quotidian patterns was a part of learning, and the immersive experience of life in India. It introduced and endorsed a particular movement world that was the silent backdrop for all aesthetic and artistic practice. Learning how to sit, stand, walk, enter the room were all part of a common-sense repertoire that needed pedagogical attention for those unaccustomed to it. While non-Indians and American *desis*[10] would often make mistakes, local Indian students were also culprits of etiquette violation. The cultural etiquette that Das taught was particular, and embodied a historic ideal of respect and hierarchy which students may or may not have been familiar with. Students, in both India and America, came with different pre-conceived ideas of Indian cultural values. Some required more active coaching, and some very little. Moving, sitting, and gesturing typically involved an implicit understanding of hierarchy, one's position in it, and

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[10] Desi, meaning 'native', was the colloquial term often used to refer to Indians in America.

knowledge of how to non-verbally express this recognition. Entering a room and traversing space required a cognisance of the location of others, their relative position to you, and the appropriate acknowledgement. Appropriate greetings, a *namaskar* or touching feet, awareness of pathways[11], being attentive not to cross in front of others, attention to the vertical dimension of hierarchy and the prescription to sit lower than your senior, prohibitions on showing the bottoms of feet, and a general attentiveness to poise, whether seated or standing, were all aspects of movement that signalled a student's awareness of traditional etiquette, an implicit understanding of hierarchy and modes of respect. Although much of this etiquette is prefaced by in-class training with the guru, *gurukul* in India contextualised the etiquette, and afforded students the opportunity to 'sleep, eat, breathe and live' with the guru, and to do so in an environment where such patterns can be lived and supported twenty-four hours a day. I now turn to another common practice of daily life that took on special significance with the guru and his students, that of eating.

Commensality

Commensality provides another rich opportunity for the teaching and learning of the basics of sociality. Mealtime brought the guru and all his students together, and eating together was, in America and India, a focal point of our interactions outside of the classroom. Das maintained very clear practices around eating together with his students – we always said a lengthy grace together before each and every one of our shared meals, whether it was at home or in a restaurant. The grace, indicative of his own eclectic past, the diversity of students, and an inclusive approach, was a lengthy repetition of grace and praise stemming from a number of languages and traditions, including English, Sanskrit, Hebrew, Japanese, and so forth. Every meal we shared, whether in a private home or a public restaurant was preceded by this phrase. Das would always insist on being the last to take food and eat, ensuring that all of his students had food, a vivid display of paternal care for his students. During the Californian retreat, this would become quite a prolonged process, as Das would wait for all fifty of his students to take their meals before he would begin. Das's insistence on his students eating first was a gesture of his love for his students, as it inverts the normative pattern, whereby the hierarchically dominant one eats first, and the subservient,

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[11] If it was necessary to pass in front of another, holding out the right hand signalled one's recognition of the violation, and was a respectful way of traversing an otherwise off-limits space. Such spaces could be directly in front of any person, in front of ghungru, or in front of the alter.

wife or servant would eat last[12]. The most senior students would, alongside their guru, wait patiently for their food.

Care and concern for others was symbolised through the sharing of meals, and subsequently, mealtime provided a rich setting for performance of these values. Blunders at the table were subject to playful ridicule. The tale of a self-absorbed student who took food only for herself and failed to offer others circulated on my first stay at Das's house, a warning of what not to do. Memories of other mistakes were one way of indirectly communicating the appropriate behaviour without explicitly articulating any set rule. Rather, students gained an awareness of how such behaviour could be interpreted and what it indicated about the individual. Students fussed to make sure their guru was cared for, full and content with his food, while he simultaneously did the same, ensuring everyone was nurtured and looked after. Expressions of love were often played out through commensality. Within the *gurukul*, sharing food, as with most families, provided a daily opportunity for the performance of roles, duties and obligations.

The style of eating in both India and America, also demonstrated an understanding of culture. Such movements themselves embodied practical cultural knowledge that lent to a deeper knowing of the culture. We all ate with our hands, both in India, and often in America, in appropriate settings when the appropriate Indian cuisine was available. The felt and sensed act of eating with one's hand, and adeptness in so doing, carries with it an understanding of the world, establishing a different relation to food, quite outside the American experience, and brings one in more intimate contact with the cultural history and lived world of India.

The Non-discursive Elements of Discursivity

Talking with, or in front of the guru or other seniors required a prior non-discursive understanding of when to talk, how to address, how to speak, and what to say. 'Students must master both content and the interactional rules for discussing content – they have to know when to speak and how to formulate their utterances. This ability is…communicative competence, the ability to use language in socially appropriate manners…' (Pelissier 1991:

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[12] Cecilia Busby describes that for women and men to eat at the same time points to a notion of them as not only strongly connected, but as equal partners (2000: 172; see also Fuller 1992). Das's gesture asserts an equality and intimacy between himself and his students.

85).   The greeting ritual, *namaskar*, in Bangla speech is 'particularly relevant to the linguacultural construction of actors and action' (Wilce 1998: 9), and is a greeting that is used in Chhandam, as an act of respect and deference. *Namaskar* was accompanied by the bowing of the head, hands in prayer position. More often than not, this gesture was performed without the accompanying phrase. Each and every time we met our guru, and every time we departed his presence, this ritual was performed, acknowledging and publicly stating our position to him. Some students, especially senior students, would take great care, to express deep sincerity in this gesture, pausing, closing their eyes, and bowing deeply. It was a moment of expressing their own recognition of their relative position to him, paying respect and honouring their guru. However, Das added new, more reciprocal dimensions to the gesture. It was, he said, a way of recognising the divinity within oneself, or the 'guru in yourself' as he often urged us to look for. Das discouraged his students from touching feet, and this sincere *namaskar* took the place of the more ostentatious recognition of hierarchy that was performed by touching the feet of a senior. C.J. Fuller (1992) explains that this symbolic greeting expresses two of the most critical features of Hindu religion and society. Firstly, there is no absolute distinction between divine and human beings: human beings are actually seen as divine in one way or another. Secondly, the gesture expresses an inherent asymmetry in rank, because it is made by an inferior to a superior (Fuller 1992: 3-4). *Namaskar* is often translated in Chhandam as 'the god in me greets the god in you'. Like most interactions with Das, such a greeting was ritualised, and made potent. In that moment of inter-subjective exchange and recognition between you and the guru, it was a moment of expressing the deep affective bond, one of both equality and hierarchy. In Das's acknowledgement of your greeting, and his own return, sometimes a *namaskar*, sometimes a nod of the head, there was a moment of deep personal connection. This always began and ended each and every interaction we had with our guru, creating a sense of significance, connectedness and spirituality to each and every encounter.

The gesture was freely and frequently performed by Chhandam dancers, both in and out of dance class. It was a symbolic gesture of our respect for others, for Indian culture, for our guru, and for ourself. In the public sphere in America, the gesture stood out, as we performed our connection to India, its tradition and to Chhandam. Upon greeting and meeting a local Indian musician in a setting outside of Chhandam with the by now ingrained pattern of *Namaskar*, he remarked to me, 'oh yes, you are from Chhandam', recognising my diligent performance of *namaskar* as a marker of the lineage. Within the

local Kolkata context, this gesture melded into the backdrop of similar gestures, performing *namaskar*, touching feet, prostration in temples, or similar acts. The movement-scape of everyday Kolkata was bursting with similar expressions of hierarchy, as well as acknowledgements of divinity, and our own greetings, performance of *namaskar* gesturing occupied a comfortable space in this midst.

Speaking order was relevant to group interactions. Students in any Chhandam class did not speak out of turn, and asking questions or clarifications was typically not allowed in class, unless during designated times. Such rules relaxed in informal settings but did not entirely disappear. Das would, at appropriate times, encourage his students to ask questions, or express their opinions, a request that ran counter to a student's role. The breaking of conventions of hierarchy was confusing for some. Ochs discusses a similar pattern in Samoan society. The relative lack of questioning is connected by Ochs with Samoan notions of status: 'Low-status people (including children) are supposed to listen, not ask questions. To ask questions is to act above one's station, thereby challenging the status of both listener and speaker' (cited in Pellissier 1991: 87). The expression of non-conventional behaviours – which in this context was being encouraged to ask questions – was more difficult for some, and was often met with a range of shy and nervous behaviours: long silences, the covering of the face, with ones hands or *dupattas* or turning away to conceal one's faces in moments of laughter or embarrassment. For the most part, American students exhibited far greater ease with transitioning to this mode of interacting and were less reluctant to break the norms of conventional guru-shishya, freely talking with their guru, and acting outside of the behavioural model experienced in class. They were accustomed to doing so in America where frequent participation in informal gatherings and public outings with the guru and his disciples provided ample opportunity for disciples to interact with their guru in a more relaxed environment. There the cultural framework supported more egalitarian interactions amongst those of different status. Local students were far less likely to initiate a conversation, ask or question, or respond with any haste to their guru; their participation was more subtle.

Knowing how to talk, in front of the guru, and in front of others whilst representing the lineage was also an important skill for any kathaka. Das would often test his dancers, asking them to explain key principles, or to answer challenging questions, often making it difficult to respond, interjecting at points when students might fumble or pause briefly, driving home the point that dancers needed to be prepared at all times. In these instances, a

more confident, even arrogant attitude, was encouraged by Das. Survival in the arts required a certain savvy and finesse in promotion to patrons, audiences, donors, or grant-readers. Learning the 'how to' of talking relied on two very different modus operandi, one which prescribed a traditional etiquette of humility and respect, and another which endorsed a self-promotion and savoir-faire that was needed to survive as an artist within the global capitalist economy. Dancers needed fluency in both fields. The following account of a missed opportunity to talk about the art during one students' *gurukul* experience in Kolkata, highlights the necessity of learning to speak, and the challenges in knowing when and how to do so:

> *If he scolds or shouts at somebody, it is for a reason. I think as long as you understand why he is saying what he is saying, then you really understand what he is trying to tell you. If he gets angry, he is not angry at one person, and its not a personal thing, but its actually a lesson for everyone in that room. For instance, one day, we were in class, and there were these two young girls...they were going door to door, promoting a classical album that had recently been released, and they had come to the house to promote and market it. The students opened the door, heard what they had to say, and then the girls left. Dada-ji came back, and he suddenly, he was outrageous – 'these two girls came and were trying to sell a music album, they come into this house, they don't even know what is happening in this house, they don't know what is going on, there is tabla here – you are wearing ghungru, and there is a class going on, and those girls had no idea what was going on – and nobody even tried to tell them what was going on'. It was a fantastic opportunity to introduce two girls to what was going on, to who this person was, ...it was not about introducing him, but for us, we should have at least told them where they were, especially since they were selling classical music album, we should have told them what we are doing, given them a brochure and tell them about Chhandam and about the art. They should've taken something back with them, so we missed an opportunity to educate, promote and inform. Basically, the outrage was on one person, but it was for everybody – we all should've known, but none of us thought of it, some of us probably didn't know what was appropriate, and what is not appropriate, you also have to be aware of what we are saying, especially when he is around, what is right or wrong, but somebody should've taken the initiative – that was a lesson for everyone. It was huge – that was a pretty long lecture that everyone got. That's the lessons – how you talk about what you do – educating, even if its just one person, you don't have to wait for the right setting, or right time, you have to create that opportunity to talk about what you do, and to promote. As an artist, if you want people to know what you are doing, and to know what the art form is about, then you have to talk, you have to be a kathaka, as he says all the time. (Narkar, personal interview, January 20, 2010)*

I was both impressed and intimidated by his entourage of dancers trained in America, many of whom possessed an articulate well-spoken manner, often acting as MC's, spokespersons for various events, or actively petitioning potential sponsors, and promoting the art in every breath. The senior students had ample rehearsal, and most had attained a

confidence and self-assuredness in presentation, particularly when representing the lineage. They also had learned how to speak in front of their guru. This self-assured comportment, confidence and independence, was ideally cultivated in all dancers, both in India and America. Yet, there was unevenness in its performance. Das directed one local Kolkata student's attention to the behaviours of some of his American students, who, by the same age, were living on their own, driving a car, and living relatively independent lives. Certainly, an independent and self-assured attitude was existent in modern India's expressions of femininity, with a strong generation of Indian feminists amongst the middle and upper strata of Indian society. Yet, women of the same age in America certainly had more opportunity to venture out independently, to navigate the public sphere, and to cast out on their own. Many of the Kolkata students were of lower and middle class families, belonged to a different class habitus, were subject to more restrictions on movement in the public sphere, and were participants in a daily world that was more explicitly patriarchal. While students and guru recognised the different positions female students occupied in both places, the idealised dancer was a creation of Das's participation in both worlds. The conflict between the transnationally imagined Das's ideal and the reality of practitioners grounded more in one world than another came to the surface on such occasions, as dancers in one locale or another, failed to conform to ideals that were beyond their dimension of their previous experience.

Learning the Rules of the Game: Mistakes and Misfires

The implicit rules of interaction were for the most part, not articulated as such, unless they were transgressed. For the learner and for the anthropologist, such violations were an occasion for reflections; the act of making mistakes was a chance for an unwritten rule to find some form of verbal expression. Checks on my own behaviour certainly steered my own understandings of appropriate comportment and etiquette, enabling a deeper understanding as both an anthropologist and dance student. Survival in the field meant adopting a new 'somatic mode of attention' (Csordas 1993: 138) that enables students to attend to and with their body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others. Entering a field in which the taken-for-granted precepts for actions are unknown, are cause for a more discursive reflection on the unsaid, and bring such somatic modes of attention into our conscious mode of attention. Mistakes, constant checks, and realignments temporarily diverted our conscious awareness to participate in what others might have considered basic knowledge, until a point where we could sustain the patterns

independently. While simple mistakes like showing the bottom of one's feet, or stepping over a book were quickly corrected, larger breaches of fundamental etiquette were often made into unforgettable examples. In such cases, it was the breach of basic values of the *parampara* that caused such upset. I include below two different examples of the kinds of misfires and breakdowns that occurred, the experience and memory of which was enhanced by the intensified pressures of residency in the *gurukul*

> *The house was a flurry of activity, musicians coming and going, and constant preparations for the upcoming performances. We would have a brief rehearsal, our one and only chance to dance with the live musicians. The performance program would include both Das, and dancers of Chhandam Nritya Bharati. There were some quick costume changes as dancers were in back to back pieces. In my own ignorance, I asked Pallabi why the pieces were in such an order, which seemed to complicate her transitions and costume changes. Unfortunately this set off a chain of unreflective inquiries amongst the rest of the students as to why Pallabi's first piece was not earlier on in the program to give her time to change. Before Pallabi's rehearsal, she asked Dada about this, explaining the difficulty in transitioning from one piece to the next. Dada was annoyed by the suggestion. He had planned this carefully. He rebuked her and carried on with the rehearsal. But when Shudipta entered the room and asked the same question, this repetition of the same mistake was a catalyst for the ensuing tirade. What I had assumed was my own innocent question, had spiralled into a gross offense and slight toward the guru. The vehement denunciation of the students began with the first perpetrator, Pallabi. Feeling horrendously guilty, I attempted to interject, explaining it was my question. But my involvement was dismissed, after the commentary that often accompanied my mistakes as a 'stupid foreigner'. But Das reproached the others. Pallabi and Shudipta were scolded harshly, how could they do this, he had worked so hard to plan this out, and here they were, only thinking about themselves. One by one, Das moved up the hierarchy, throwing invectives at each student, until he came to Anusha, the branch head for Nritya Bharati, who had been absent for most of the drama, and had just entered the room. This was somehow all her fault. He took this opportunity to reprimand her for her lack of dedication and work for the school. She stood quietly and complied, accepting responsibility for this. Then he told the musicians to leave, that was it for rehearsal. Pallabi would not dance the solo. (field notes January 2005)*

A day later, Pandit-ji asked me about my thoughts on the events of that day. I offered my synopsis, to which he raised a formidable eyebrow. My interpretation passed. Although there are many ways to read this, the questioning represented an undermining of the guru's authority and a display of our lack of belief in him. It transgressed some of the underlying foundations of the relationship, the ultimate trust and faith that are the cornerstones of guru-shishya. From another perspective, it reflected the principle of a line he continually tells us, 'do not have the audacity to show your creativity in front of your guru'. One does not question the guru in such a way; to challenge him openly like this went against this

foundation of the guru-shishya system. The re-allocation of blame in this excerpt also highlights the importance of responsibility of the seniors (see chapter 6). In the end, Das's planning had been carefully thought out, even though we did not immediately understand his reasoning. Despite this grave error, Pallabi did end up dancing the piece. Foundational principles, which are not usually explicitly articulated, are brought to the fore by the violation of implicit rules. An astute student is expected to understand the deeper meaning embedded in such experiences, narratives, anecdotes, and quotes.

> *It was the day of performance, and was also the day that one of the dancers would be given her ghungru officially by Dada-ji, an auspicious occasion. In the business of the day, preparing for the performance, the rest of us in the house had gotten wrapped in our own tasks: getting ready for the show, eating and losing awareness of the importance of the day. We neglected to notice that both Puja and Dada-ji were preparing for the ceremony upstairs. Dada-ji was ready to begin the ceremony. But none of us were there. When we realised, we quickly ran up, and entered in the midst of the short ceremony. When we entered the room we saw Dada-ji and Puja standing before the alter. Puja was dressed in the ritually appropriate white sari with red border; the garlanded photos of Dada's parents and his guru-ji, burning incense, the sound of chanting shlokas, all added to the moment that Dada-ji so powerfully presented. He presented Puja with her ghungru, putting his right hand gently on her head as she received them. And we had missed most of it. (field notes January 2005)*

What followed was probably one of the harshest reprimands I have seen in my time with Das. It is still remembered amongst those present. Again, the most senior students received the fiercest scolding, for in their senior positions they bore the responsibility and should have had the foresight to intercept such disrespect. Mistakes like this would serve as lessons for all of us. The emotional response by the guru, and the barrage of tears that followed, the upset and regret from those guilty of such selfishness indelibly inscribed that moment in our collective memory. In terms of exemplifying the attitude, etiquette and values he was teaching, our actions went directly against this. We had all become too self-absorbed. It was an inexcusable error that demonstrated our lack of readiness and knowledge. It also demonstrated our lack of care and concern for our guru sister on such an important day. Part of what Das teaches is an idealised selflessness, a concern for others that echoes the ideals of *tyaag aur seva*, service and selfless sacrifice, as embedded within the Hindu philosophical tradition. The themes of responsibility and duty so prevalent in Hindu conceptions of dharma and understandings of the family also emerge here and are treated more fully in a later chapter (see chapter 6). Accusations of self-absorption reflect a de-railment from the way of life as set out before us. The ultimate ideal requires a

transcendence of ego while such expressions of selfishness reflect maladaptations to the way of life.

The misfires and breakdowns reveal a set of values students ideally acquired through ongoing socialisation into Chhandam. While a great deal can be learned in the American context, the background world of Kolkata sustains these practices in ways unachievable in the American context. The differences between study in India and America reveal some of the underlying necessary ingredients, which rely for their presence on the materialised sites of practices, or places, where the relationship is lived. The cultural 'horizon' includes elements such as quotidian forms of emotional relationships and ways of behaving in front of superiors. To acquire them requires uninterrupted or at least lengthy co-habitation. Experiencing the dance and one's relationship to the guru in India adds another level of depth to the students' ways of knowing. The Indian experience provides ample opportunity for students to learn the underlying moral and ethical principles embodied in this way of life, one that hinges on a model of Indian kinship and sociality. Learning occurs through a practical engagement in that daily world. The passive pedagogies of place are able to teach the underlying value system, and much of the work is done simply by 'being-in-place', for a length of time.

Ruptures in Place World

> *I just returned to California from a two-month stay in Kolkata, with Pandit-ji, living, eating, breathing, and dancing with him for nearly every hour of every day. Less than two days ago we were dancing in Pandit-ji's Kolkata residence, and here I was, arriving at the Berkeley studio, about to dance. I was still bleary-eyed and jet lagged, and might have opted for sleep, had I not known that Pandit-ji would also be in class that day. Obviously, if he would be teaching class in the haze of his jet lag, I had to be there.*

> *Returning from India is often more shocking to my senses than the reverse. Stepping off the plane, the once perceived cleanliness and orderliness of the environment appears as a sterile blandness. In contrast to the shrieking car horns of Kolkata, the surrounding silence is deafening. The air feels different in my lungs. I peer out at the empty streets in my Berkeley neighbourhood, and try to recollect the streets of Kolkata. I always find the first hours of changing 'places' some of the most revealing, where your senses are attuned to a life world that has suddenly been removed – the differences are sometimes alarming.*

> *As I approach the Berkeley studio, the familiar sound of ghungru (brass bells) can be heard. The thunderous melodies of these bells send shivers through me. Within the blink of an eye, or so it seemed, there I stood, before guru-ji, in the Berkeley*

studio. In that instant, the continuities and differences of standing before him were staggeringly obvious. As I looked to him, it was with a new understanding, depth and closeness that I felt to him after spending so much time in his presence. I put on the same shalwar kamiz I had worn a few days prior in India, somehow still stained with the irremovable scent of what I took to be 'India', I wrapped the same ghungru, and prepared to dance. On one hand, it was the same thing, the same dance, the same compositions, the same teacher – yet it felt so remarkably different. The first slap of my bare foot on the studio floor and I was thrust back into the reality of this environment. I was certainly not in India anymore.

Slapping my foot on the wooden floor of the Berkeley dance studio awakened my body, from the nerves in my feet upwards, to the new environment within which I moved. The felt-sense of the floor, no longer the marble or concrete dance floors of India, and the different sound emanating from my foot slapping the floor, was a potent reminder of the world I had left. The material reality of such lived spaces informs our experience of the dance, whether in the studio itself, or in the world outside, which occasionally seeps in. In the moment of dance, it feels as though we could be anywhere, our senses enraptured in the full body immersion into the dance. Yet, the passive pedagogies of place remain constantly present, subtly affecting our experience of the dance. Returning to America, the affective dimension of my relation to Pandit-ji was stronger than ever, and came alive in that studio in new ways, with the recent memories of India lingering nearby. My dance, my technique and footwork, was certainly stronger than when I had left, after dancing almost daily with Das for weeks on end. The continuities of my experiences were overwhelming, yet they were punctuated with subtle realisations of the different world we now inhabited. The differences in experience extended far beyond the feel of the floor, and other aspects of the material world, although, it should be becoming apparent that the materiality of place certainly mattered. The quotidian world of movement, the backdrop of normative social convention, the patterns of interaction, and the cultural specificity of emotions in America were vastly different from the daily world of Kolkata and provided a very different framework for understanding and experiencing the dance. Some aspect of authority for this style of dance will always remain in India, for it provides a place, grounded in materiality, that is peculiar and particular, and unlike anywhere else on the planet. Despite the increasing flows of transnational knowledge, it seems some things just cannot be transported.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Place-making and Transnationalism in the Indian Diaspora

Kathak Retreat, Camp Gualala, California, 2009

> *We come to the end of an exhaustive training session, and before we have a chance to catch our breath, we are being led into the closing pranam. Singing the familiar melody, we go through the soft, fluid motions, bowing to the earth and to the divine, which brought us this experience, and coming to close, holding the last note. We are lulled into a mood; a familiar feeling washes over us, one we know well. For an instant, it seems as though the surroundings are irrelevant as our bodies reverberate with the bliss that follows an intense training session with our guru-ji. Later a student from India who is present at the California retreat says quite adamantly, 'it is just like India'.*

The *kul* of *gurukul* refers to a form of 'housing' the individual that does not depend on geographical location, but rather on affective ties, values, ways of behaving towards one another, and forms of 'care' between the guru and shishya. A guru is the central source; he is the living embodiment of authority and knowledge as well as divinity (see also Gold 1995, Mills 1998, Werbner 2003). As the authoritative embodier and vehicle of divine grace, the guru can move around, and with certain minimal requirements, re-create *gurukul* for his dancers, such as he has managed to do in California. This is exemplified in contexts like the annual kathak retreat that simulate aspects of *gurukul* through providing an opportunity for uninterrupted study with the guru in California, if only for one week. In chapter four, I argued that certain aspects of understanding kathak rely on ways of knowing acquired through participation in the lived world of Kolkata or other parts of India. While I maintain the importance of 'place' to such practices, I now consider the extent to which these practices *can* be transported. Despite this dancer's insistence that the retreat was 'just like India', in fact, nothing about the log cabins in the middle of the redwood forests at camp Gualala was like India. Yet, on other levels, it certainly felt like India.

In this chapter, I discuss the sense of 'place' or home that is constituted within the diaspora, or any geographic location for that matter, as the framework for the guru-shishya *parampara* is re-established in new environments. As dancers move between India and America, there remains a remarkable continuity in practice and consistency in student's experience. Despite the shifting external factors, a strategy and manipulation of certain

central elements sets the scene for a constructed sameness in experience. A strong sense of place can be created through elements not necessarily rooted in one geographical spot, such as the strong moral and emotional relationship between guru and learner, the rituals of respect and the sensory transformation of dance spaces. All of these are only actualised through the experience of the dancing body. The guru and his closest disciples develop adeptness at transforming any space into a fertile environment for an experience born of several inseparable components: the guru, the dance and the adept or advanced learner. In being mobilised, they even have the capacity to temporarily create the sense of inhabiting that missing 'total environment' left behind in Kolkata, and to make one exclaim: 'it is just like India!'

As Edward Casey reminds us, 'not only do we discover ever new places by means of bodily movement; we find ourselves in the midst of places we already know thanks to the intimate link between their abiding familiarity and our own corporeal habituality' (Casey 1997: 233). By moving in ways familiar to us, we can create the sense of revisiting places already known. For the largely Indo-American participants, re-experiencing India in this way was also important to assuaging immigrant anxiety in the diasporic setting. In this chapter I consider the strategies of place-making, employed by Das and his disciples, as they effectively re-create opportunities for students to experience 'India' in varying degrees through their bodily engagement in kathak. Yet, as dancers negotiate their status of living between two worlds through the dance, their experiences also became more than simply re-making 'India'. Rather, Das and his disciples created a new emergent culture of kathak that is neither entirely Indian nor American. Participation in a cultural practice like kathak is establishing a new node of Indian-ness, that is at once grounded in India and transcends India. Re-constituting a new centre of knowledge on the periphery of India has been crucial to establishing the diaspora as a new source of authority and authenticity for redefining kathak.

Transporting Place

Bodies exist in place. More than simply being in place, bodies move through places. The habitual body memory we possess bespeaks the place in which it was learned, and in that way, place inhabits the body. Bodies carry with them the corporealised history and memory of being-in-place, the comportments, gestures, and spatial familiarity that

accompany interacting with a particular place, and they remain part of our repertoire of knowledge, no matter what other places we come to inhabit. Touching feet in the spirit of reverence, sitting cross-legged on the floor, embodied understanding of the hierarchal meanings of the vertical dimension, even knowing our way around a neighbourhood, are patterns ingrained through participating in a particular lifeworld, remaining as latent capacities for action. Thus, returning to a place, as when immigrants return to their homeland, or when a person returns to a previous place of occupancy, a sense of familiarity comes rushing back to us, as we smell, hear, feel and begin to move in ways synonymous with that particular place. Ways of being, earlier forgotten, are re-ignited in such returns to place. The multi-sensory nature of experience triggers our embodied memories and knowledge of that place. Kalpana Ram reflects on Guha's idea that the past of the immigrant lead a half-life, like seeds in the winter ground awaiting the right weather to spring back to life (1998:159):

> [T]his magical springing back to life is experienced by immigrants every time the right soil is restored –every time the Indian immigrant step back on the tarmac in India, all kinds of embodied dispositions and ways of knowing that one did not have access to without the social landscape are instantly there, at one's disposal. On a smaller scale, they also spring back into life whenever immigrants from the same background have social dealings with one another: the body movements change, even if one continues to speak English the accent changes, and quite fundamental aspects of one's being, such as what it means to be a woman, alter in a subtle way. (Ram 2000a: 271)

Participating in traditional practices like kathak engages the body fully in a synaesthetic experience. Engaging in familiar gestures, hearing sounds of the language, music or smelling scents, the body is inhabited in a way that constructs a powerful experience of a place, such as India. We carry our past with us, as embodied understanding, as know-how, and as practical knowledge.

> If the past were available to us only in the form of express recollections, we should be continually tempted to recall it in order to verify its existence, and thus resemble the patient mentioned by Scheler, who was constantly turning round in order to reassure himself that things were really there – whereas in fact we feel it behind us as an incontestable acquisition. (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 418)

For immigrants from India, or those with knowledge and experience of India, this past that we feel behind us 'need not be thought in order to exist for us – it exists in us, in our embodied dispositions and orientations to the world acquired in primary socialisation' (Ram 2000a: 261-2). For such migrants, inhabiting the dancing body of kathak has the

capacity to induce a sense of familiarity, as the body senses, moves, and acts in ways previously known. Indeed, it is enough to have spent an intensive number of years training – even in a seasonal cycle – in India, for even Canadian and American students to experience this sense of familiarity. It is also heavily infused with a larger cosmological sense of place, invoked in the ritualised practice of the dance. A remarkable continuity is experienced, across geographical places, as the guru and his followers become implicitly involved in effective strategies for place-making as they discover ways to effectively re-establish the framework for guru-shishya parampara in new sites of practice. In the latter half of this chapter I discuss how the re-making of place in the Indian diaspora has led to an even more radical kind of newness, a particular distinction, and the creation of a new culture.

Sensorial Transformations: California

Camp Gualala, Kathak Retreat, August 2009

It is 6am. Three long blows of the conch shell from the upper cabin signal it is time for everyone to arise. We will begin dancing in half an hour. Weary dancers pull themselves out of bed for yet another long day of dance. It is a crisp cool morning in the redwoods of Guala and we are all there, from the most senior of the company members to relative beginners. Some fifty of Das's students have gathered for this week long retreat – a chance to experience, if only for an instant, the tradition of gurukul, whereby the student lives with their guru, training, eating and breathing with their guru day and night. Of course, for us, it is only one week. And a good thing, most would not last another day.

We silently assemble in the dance lodge, a log cabin with a huge stone fireplace, and skylights to the redwoods beyond. It is not India, but the energy and intensity of study feels the same. We all begin the silent ritual of tying our ghungru, carefully wrapping each string of bells with the right tension around each leg. Dada-ji enters the dance space and everyone rises to respectfully greet him with a namaskar. The room is thick with anticipation – we all know that soon, our shalwars (Indian dress) will be drenched with perspiration, the blood will be coursing through our veins, our fatigued muscles will be pushed to new limits, our calloused heels will numb to the repetitive turns, and our lungs will burn.

The sound of the tanpura[1] drone fills the space, resonating within our bodies. Dada-ji asks a student to light the incense at the altar set up at the front of the room. He begins to tune his tabla. The sounds, smells, and sights before me transport me to another familiar dimension of experience. While it is my first time at the retreat, I know this feeling well. One by one, we finish tying our ghungru and begin stretching, waiting for the last of dancers to finish. We haphazardly organise ourselves in the space. The hierarchy of dancers manifests in the way we position ourselves, seniors near the front.

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[1] A tanpura is a stringed drone instrument

We begin, as we always do, with pranam, an invocation to the earth, to the gurus and to the divine. We sing, moving through our meditative pranam. With the conclusion of this ritual, we mark our commencement of the dance. We enter into a ritualised and meaningful space to experience the dance and to connect with a world beyond. We begin footwork. As Das sings, dances and plays his tabla from the front of the class, he sets the tempo and rhythm and pulls us into a stamina testing session of rhythmic footwork, pushing up to high speeds.

Within minutes beads of sweat begin to accumulate on my brow – it is just the beginning. The weight of the ghungru helps us to feel the floor beneath our feet. We continue like this for an hour, maybe two depending on how Dada is feeling – moving through different footwork and different rhythms. The retreat offers a very special opportunity to experience the powerful sensations of a room full of fifty dancers, with fifty pairs of feet, and fifty set of ghungru, being guided in unison through crescendos of rhythmic footwork. We are unified also in voice, singing the lehra or melody. We are all completely absorbed, enraptured in this powerful play on our senses, transported to another dimension of experience.

Every so often, I glance up, catching site of the redwoods through the skylight, a brief reminder of where we are. But then, Dada says, 'again', and I am snapped from my momentary contemplation to the task at hand, to the dance, and to the feeling in that room. And we begin again....

The active pedagogies of the guru and his disciples are instrumental to the sensorial transformation of space, the re-creation of a particular experience of place, and an assertion of an imagined India. Removed from its original context, the practice is sustained through other active strategies that are intended to compensate for the rupture from the original place that endorsed the art, and the understanding of culture that it carries with it.

In America, students devoutly adhere to the prescribed modes of respect and fulfil certain obligations to their teacher, but within the confines of daily life in America, students are restricted from complete immersion and residency with Das. For Das, having students reside long term with him in his home in California was not part of the economic or social reality in which they lived. For students, spending time with the guru whilst living in America also posed logistical problems for most, many whom had other employment, families and other commitments. Thus, the annual kathak retreat provided one of the greatest opportunities for complete immersion in this world. Newcomers, as noted in the quote above, could experience a strong sense of the guru-shishya parampara. Outside of the dance retreat, limited opportunity for such enduring proximity to the guru existed in the American context. The annual summer retreat provided an opportunity for all students of Chhandam to have an experience modelled on the *gurukul*, whereby students would stay

Figure 8: Pandit Das teaches to students at the kathak retreat at Camp Gualala in northern California

together for up to one week, with their guru, in a location removed from the city and from everyday obligations[2]. Whereas the trips to India were typically reserved for the core group of committed students, retreat was open to all, from beginners to the most advanced students. The retreats were usually one week of intensive training and there was typically up to fifty students present. Outside of retreat and intensives, newcomers' interactions with Das were limited to his attendance at class, which for the juniors, was highly variable, as he usually split his time between visiting the over five branches in the Bay area. For seniors in America, spending time with the guru outside of the classroom often translated into both formal and informal gatherings of the closest disciples. These occurred over shared meals, after class, or at administrative meetings that doubled as time for Das to lecture, talk to and interact with his students, as well as during visits to his house.

Experience of the retreat usually served to consolidate the experiences of new students. As a senior disciple explained to me, she had to do a lot of work to cultivate students and have

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[2] The week long kathak retreat did come with a high price tag of close to $700 US, in part due to the provisions for food and accommodation.

them attend the retreat for the first time since they were unaware of what it was. But after having attended one time, and having an intensive experience with Das, the initial work was done. After this, most students would willingly attend intensives and future retreats.

Transforming Space

> *Dance in such a way that the floor, the bells, ghungru, the audience and the environment becomes one, and that is the essence of every spiritual teaching. (Chitresh Das, in the words of his guru-ji, Pandit Ram Narayan Misra)*

Delineating a ritual space that is *'markedly discontinuous from the locality surrounding it'* is necessary to the living out of guru-shishya, and through this, to the learning of the dance. Samuel Mills discusses the creation of devotional centres for saints in Islamic Bengal, and a similar way in which *'devotional activity continually redefines these social and physical spaces as exemplary centres'* (Mills 1998: 4). The mobile nucleus of authority, composed of the guru and his students are able to define an arena of non-contradiction where the guru's authority is consensually accepted and where some degree of respectful behaviour is compulsory. The identities of both the guru and student are only realised within this emotionally and spiritually saturated delineated space, constructed through ritual practice. Newcomers and outsiders take their cue from this devotional interaction, and ideally subscribe to the conditions of the transformed space. Without the supportive horizons of everyday India, artists and teachers had to use other methods to effectively create a similar space for the tradition. In the absence of a wider set of supportive norms, there were enough ritual activities to inculcate a sense of temporary transformations.

Part of delineating this ritual space was establishing its transformation, part of which was done by the inclusion of certain material objects, especially an altar, with a photo of the great guru's pictures, incense and usually the drone of the *tanpura*. For the most part, these were required. The setting up of the altar, with the photos, as well as the presence of *ghungru*, changed the room from a simple dance studio, or change room, into a ritualised space, which required set patterns of behaviour and rituals of respect. We engaged in highly ritualised behaviour; certain actions, gestures, objects were also cues that delineated an emotionally and spiritually saturated space of interaction.
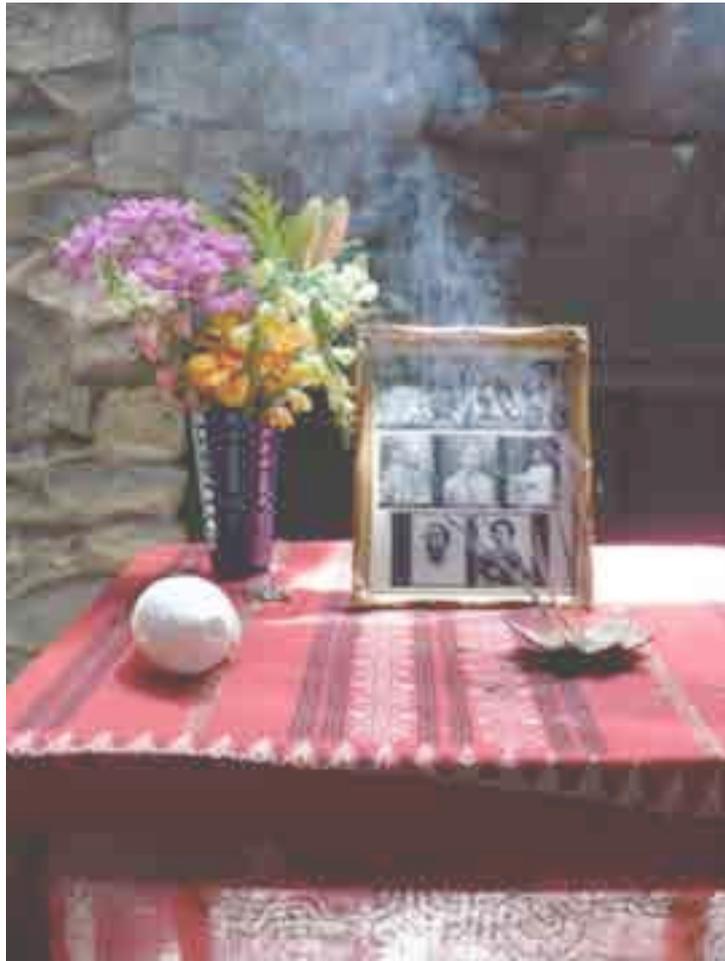
Figure 9: The altar as it was set up at the kathak retreat

Figure 10: Pandit Das lighting incense at the altar as students begin their opening pranam during a ghungru ceremony in the San Francisco Bay area

While we transformed the space though lighting incense, creating an altar, playing music, we also reoriented ourselves in a particular way within the room. In the classroom, there was strictly enforced etiquette surrounding the entrance into the dance space, requiring a pausing at the entrance, and a deep *namaskar*. This and other actions clearly marked the shift from the secular to a sacred domain. This was also indicated in the opening *pranam* or invocation that was done at the beginning and end of the class. The invocation clearly indicated the temporal and spatial frame within which this transformed dimension came into existence. Ways of moving in relation to others, in relation to the guru, to senior instructors, in relation to the altar, and to the great guru's photographs that were at the front of the room, were all prescribed. The prescribed etiquette came to take on a central importance as it played a significant role in enabling the production of a space of non-contradiction. Transformations in sensorial space only came alive when people knew how to comport themselves in relation to these items. The guru and senior students bore the responsibility to educate and inform. The following narrative serves as a vivid example,

> *On one unforgettable occasion during the preparations for a concert, a boyfriend of one of the dancers expressed his bewilderment over the shifting playing field. Confused and irritated he explained that a few minutes earlier he had been helping by carrying stuff in and out of one of the rooms, with his shoes on. A few minutes later, as he went to do the same thing, he was admonished for entering. He responded with exasperation, 'how do I know, one minute you can wear your shoes, the next minute you can't!'. In the few moments he was absent, an altar, with photos of the guru and ghungru were laid out, transforming the room.*
> *(field notes 2009)*

Bewildering experiences like this occurred for outsiders and for some students who had limited experience with their guru outside of class. Uncertainty in patterns of interaction created awkward encounters in the public domain as guru and student interacted against a horizon of American cultural attitudes and embodiments. As this mobile nucleus of authority moved into public spaces, similar attempts to transform them occasionally ran up against non-participants and contradiction. For example, when kathak classes were held in dance studios, there were often interactions between dancers who were operating within very different fields of practice. It became the work of the followers to dutifully enforce a ritually potent uncontested space, by reminding outsiders of etiquette, asking them to take their shoes off upon entering space, a proposition that was occasionally odd when renting space or using shared public areas.

Figure 11: Pandit Das teaching in Kolkata. Similar transformations in the studio space occurred to elicit a similar mood

Transforming Bodies: Corporeal Re-education

The most viscerally sensed transformation in our bodies comes in moments of dance, which, aside from all of the background transformations, remains the focal point for our experience. The dancing body (the central focus of chapters 7-9), as it rehearses, repeats and performs technical aspects of the dances, brings to life a particular aesthetic sense of the body, creating a familiar sense of being, and locating our bodies in place. The moving, sensing and dancing body is the site of experience. By moving in new ways, we can create a sense of familiarity that invokes a place. Merleau-Ponty explains that the body itself is place-productive, bringing forth places from its expressive and orientational movements, its literal kinetic dynamism (Casey 1997: 236; see also Kohn 2011). We inhabit our body, through comportment, postionality, gestures, and through the dance. By moving and dancing, we bring to life a sense of place. As kathak dancers, in that we carry with us the

Figure 12: Students in California performing pranam

skills, behaviours and orientations to recreate the life world of kathak wherever we go, our bodies are home to these lifeworlds, bringing them forth, when required. While I do not detail it here, transformations in the way we inhabit our body, through learned comportment and behaviours, as well as through learned techniques and skills of kathak, provide one of the most necessary ingredient for the creation of a coherent sense of place (see chapters 7-9).

Guru-Shishya: Making Moral and Emotional Relationships

The realisation of the affective bond with the guru and fellow students through prolonged contact with the guru is itself a form of place-making, and provides a sense of home or emplacement no matter where it is practiced. This has taken vital importance in the case of a transnationally mobile guru like Das, who spends the year travelling and teaching between India and America. The guru, as a mobile charismatic authority, exerts a power on place through the living out of these deep affective relationships with his students, whether in India or America. The relationship itself encompasses a whole set of emotional

and affective orientations that shape experience of the present, and on many levels, is transportable and recreate-able in almost any country, accompanied by the necessary strategies for emplacement. In an earlier chapter I quoted Poonam Narkar, who described Das as a lighthouse, orienting the traveller to the way home. Unlike the lighthouse, Das is never in one place, as he is constantly performing and teaching throughout India and America. Yet, the affective relationship between guru and shishya itself provides a sense of home or stable place, no matter where it is practiced. Students feel this. Our emotional and visceral experiences are emplaced through a strengthening connection to a guru, who provides a sense of place and a feeling of home amidst an otherwise chaotic world. The emotional and affective orientations that come with the relationship, not only serve as the cornerstone for all learning, but also provide a kind of 'home' for the practice (see chapter 4). The relationship of guru-shishya enables a 'place' to be made without this requiring fixed geographical or spatial boundaries. Love, care and concern between the guru and his students are critical in the re-establishing of this framework in new settings.

Otherworldly Experience: Divine Cosmologies

> *As for me it was an out of the world experience. It was a piece out of the childhood fantasy of gurukul experience. The wholesome approach to the art form by Dada-ji never ceases to surprise me. (Indo-American beginner student on her first experience of the kathak retreat in America)*

Place, and a felt-sense of place, is quite evidently, not merely a location in space, but involves a whole set of relational meanings that can be detached from actual geographic locations. In this sense, place has a 'virtual dimension'. Dancers are never entirely moored in physical spaces. Rather, emplacement also entails the creation of an imaginary world, which is sometimes experienced as more real than the one around the performer.

> [P]lace has a virtual dimension overlooked in previous accounts. A place I inhabit by my body is not merely some spot of space to which I bring myself as to a fixed locus – a locus merely awaits my arrival...A place is somewhere I might come to: and when I do come to it, it is not just a matter of fitting into it. I come into a place as providing an indefinite horizon of my possible action.
> (Casey 1997: 234)

The indefiniteness of our experience of place is created through this virtual element of emplacement. In experiencing the 'place' that is evoked at Camp Gualala in California,

dancers evoke other available horizons of experience, however distant or imagined, including India, but also including the wider religious cosmos. The *'gathering'* power of place, as Heidegger has called it, adds additional significance to our own emplacement[3]. The *'gathering'* of meaning in this context becomes even more potent as it is aligned with another virtual dimension of place: a place in the cosmos. Perhaps the most primary and overriding experience of place through dance is the knowledge that through dance, we are entering a very distant and imagined place, a metaphysical dimension of experience, and establishing a lived grounding for the possibility of experiencing some aspect of the divine. As this first timer explains, it was an almost fantastical experience of an idealised *gurukul*, that connected not only to an idealised Indian *gurukul*, but to another world in some sense. Emplacement in the cosmos is always the background for dancer's understanding of their immediate present. Prescribed ritualised actions firmly establish this transcendence to an other-worldliness, something that is marked at the beginning and end of every dance session, and at the beginning and end of every interaction with the guru. We are transforming our immediate space into the a place for the living out of this affective dimension of our relationship to our guru, an experience of an other-worldly cosmological dimension, that is distinctively religious, and a particular experience of our bodies in motion. The feel of the *ghungru*, the sound of the drone, the smell of the incense, the dancing body, and the emotional mood elicited in relation to the guru – all of these variables lend themselves to an experience, not just of an imagined India, but of a metaphysical dimension of experience. This knowledge of a distant, yet accessible cosmological dimension, enables us to experience continuities in the dance, no matter what the backdrop.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *   *</p>

We can temporarily transcend the limits of our immediate place in some ways, remaining grounded in a sense of home and feeling of place that is evoked through the coming together of all these dimension I have described in the last few pages. In this way, a log cabin in the middle of the Redwoods, a place that bore no resemblance to Kolkata, is transformed into a place for an embodied experience of India, and of an other-worldly experience. The relational meanings that sustain this practice enable a certain detachment from a purely geographical place, as the relational framework can be re-established

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[3] See Chapter 1, Pp. 8. on Heidegger's 'gathering'.

elsewhere. In this sense, 'place' both transcends location and is rooted in location – if by location, we mean a 'fixed spot in space'. In chapter six, I continue to investigate the ways in which Das's disciples and the larger community of dancers in Chhandam participate in re-establishing this framework for learning.

A Place in the Diaspora: Creating Distinction

'Can we recreate India here?' Das rhetorically asked, as we sat on underneath the redwoods on the spacious deck at Camp Gualala. (field notes 2009)

Migrants demonstrate this possibility: to move across borders and geographical places, yet, with minimal requirements, are able to engage in a process of emplacement that recreates a cultural world of their making. In many ways, an experience of India was being evoked and experienced by the participants of the retreat in California. Yet, both the guru and the dancers understood the dance, the teachings, and their experience of kathak as being more than simply a re-creation of India. A more radical newness to the re-creation of cultural practices had occurred in Chhandam – in the process of trying to define what it means to be Indian in the diaspora, Das and his dance have created a new node of Indian-ness, neither entirely Indian or American, but a particular form of being evident in the emergent culture of Chhandam.

Dancers, and here I refer to the disciples and senior students, remain cognisant of their status in-between America and India. Dancers are aware that the Chhandam lifeworld they participate in, is one that both echoes and contradicts aspects of life and dance in India. Dancers have started to talk about *'Chhandam's culture'*, or even *'kathak culture'* as social entities both grounded in India, and transcending India. While I largely refer to the Indo-American students throughout this chapter, the emphasis on 'Chhandam' culture also provided a way to incorporate those of non-Indian descent as membership in the culture was based on participation, and not ancestry. The unique confluence of Chhandam's Indian and American history was reconciled in the creation of Chhandam's own culture.

Dancers were aware of their position, between worlds in some sense, and explicitly discussed their involvement in the creation of a new culture that was neither here nor there, in the sense of being located either in India or America, but occupied a more ambiguous state, in which re-definitions of tradition and culture were common-place. Das and many

of the committed dancers of Chhandam were actively engaged in creating distinctions between their art and the art of others, and creating a niche for their version of kathak to flourish. In the latter part of this section, I describe the crafting of a new Chhandam identity – one that was differentiated from popular culture from India, other 'ethnic' dance forms, and other 'non-traditional' cultural practices. For the guru, his disciples and some of the more involved senior dancers, these points on representation and distinction mattered to their vision of kathak, and to their vision of India in America. A radical positioning against more non-traditional forms of dance and Indian popular culture served to establish a stronger sense of collective identity and culture amongst the dancers in Chhandam.

Before turning to the distinctions of Chhandam culture, I engage with other representations of kathak that also mattered to the broader base of students and Indian families in Chhandam. Kathak, like many other Indian artistic practices in the diaspora, was taken to be a venue in which children could learn about the aspects of their culture – where they could learn about India and Indian culture. While senior students did not express their own anxiety about 'losing' Indian culture (their anxiety was regarding the 'kind' of Indian culture that was being represented), the desire to teach 'Indian' culture to their children was certainly a motivating factor for many Indian families in Chhandam, as I will discuss. The crystallisation of Chhandam's culture around a re-invigorated notion of 'tradition' also responded to the concerns of many first, second and third generation Indian immigrants who sought to connect to the culture of their homeland.

Losing Culture: Immigrant Anxieties

The emergence of Chhandam's culture can be understood, in part, in relation to the particular genre of Indian-ness emerging in the Bay area diaspora and a growing anxiety around diasporic identity. Popular discourse in local Indian communities, and in the local Indian media revealed a community struggling with their own identity as Indians in the diaspora. The common phrase 'ABCD', American born confused desi, was used quite loosely to refer to Indians in the diaspora who seemed to be struggling with their transcultural existence[4]. This existence between two localities has contributed to an

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[4] Questions on Indian immigrant identity were heard in the public sphere, via local Indian newspaper, and Indian radio programs. Questions on Indian identity were also brought into focus by the well-educated Indo-Americans that were actively involved in the academic world, both students and professors. For example,

unsettling sense of liminality for many. In India, Non-resident Indians (NRIs) and other returning members of the diaspora are often outside the definition of being an Indian[5], while in America it is their Indian-ness that defines them as outside the majority. Lessinger describes the intensified debates on post-migration identity and cultural change:

> Both Indians and Indian immigrants in the Unites States are involved in endless discussion about what it means to be Indian as India itself changes, what constitutes Indian-ness, and whether one can remain truly Indian outside of India. There is an ongoing attempt on the part of those groups involved in NRI investment to break with a narrow, nationalist definition of *'Indian'* and to recast their identity in new, global terms. Meanwhile, people in India tend to see NRIs as no longer fully Indian, and to blame them for the social and spiritual dislocations inherent in the modernisation process itself. In some ways NRIs have come to stand for a whole category of India's urbanised, superficially Westernised *'new rich'* who have flourished with modernisation. (Lessinger 1994: 57)

This ambiguity in identity as insiders and outsiders exacerbates the idea that *'emigration inexorably involves loss of culture, a lessening of one's essential Indian-ness'* (Lessinger 1994: 71). In response to the fear of a loss of Indian-ness, certain cultural practices come to be consciously reflected on, and retention of culture becomes an explicit objective.

For many Indo-American families, an increasing awareness of the difficulty with teaching Indian culture, values and morality to their children being raised in America, motivated them to find other ways to maintain some degree of connection to the culture of their homeland. *'Having children in this environment precipitates a new set of instabilities. Without a collectivity that will automatically sustain the transmission of patterns to the next generation, it must now turn into a consciously undertaken project on the part of the individual'* (Ram 2000a: 263). For parents who began to see their own children losing touch with the culture from which they came, training in dance provided a way to fill some of the gaps. The following excerpt from a radio segment on Chhandam describes the reasons why parents take their children to learn kathak from Das,

> Journalist: Two decades later, this discipline is a key reason most South Asian parents enrol their children in the Chhandam school. One parent started their daughter here when she was five,

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University of California, Berkeley, had a developed centre for South Asian research. The university had an extensive program in South Asian studies, including a class taught in 2008-9 that was specifically on the Indian diaspora in Silicon valley.
[5] This is not entirely the case as there is always a 'call' from India to 'come back' – to return, to invest – for there is a true Indian supposed to be buried in every NRI.

Mother: There is a certain respect and discipline that they learn through kathak, and so we'd like to have her practice that in daily life
Father: We wanted to introduce our daughter to the culture and also hopefully help with a little bit of the discipline'
(The World: Indian Dance Guru, Public Radio International, BBC Jan 7, 2009 Jan Union City, California)

Das, and his Chhandam school was well-known for their strong adherence to disciplined learning in Indian tradition. This has been a huge drawing card for what this radio segment defined as 'urban middle class Indian professionals…seeking cultural immersion for their children'. More widely, Indian dance teachers have come to understand their role as the bearers or tradition, the communicators of Indian culture, and have come to see the role they will play in shaping immigrant children's understanding of Indian culture, and what it means to be Indian (Bharata Natyam artist, Lata Pada, personal interview, Toronto, 2004). Dance schools and dance training provided an ideal venue for socialisation into the basics of respectful behaviour. Chhandam, with its strict adherence to cultural etiquette, responds to the concerns of Indian families in the Indian diaspora. Another mother makes a similar comment,

Journalist: One parent says kathak is something she is also dedicated to because it is something she can share with her children that reinforces traditional values. She has been taking kathak here for a year with her daughter.
Mother: I don't know if you know that Beatles song, 'Get back to where you once belong', its like that. I know I can't go back, but the best I can do is to bring my India back here.
(The World: Indian Dance Guru, Public Radio International, BBC Jan 7, 2009 Jan Union City, California)

The ability for the dance to communicate Indian values and to evoke a sense of India is a major incentive for families at Chhandam. Yet, it is not simply about bringing all of India back, or experiencing all aspects of India to America. In the process of migration, elements can be discarded and others amplified. As bearers of Indian culture in the diaspora, Das and his disciples have been particularly attentive to the representations and experiences of Indian culture that are made available to their students. However, it is not all of India that they seek to replicate.

'Beyond Samosas and Bollywood': Culture as Distinction Making

It was not only loss of culture that motivated dancers of Chhandam. It was also the particular version of Indian culture that was being taken to represent Indians in the diaspora. Rina Mehta, company dancer of Chhandam published an article, 'Beyond Samosas and Bollywood' in the Californian paper 'India Currents'. In the article, Mehta eloquently articulates her own dismay over the kinds of Indian popular culture that are coming to define India in the west, echoing the concerns of Das and several Chhandam dancers. 'If the doors are opening now for India in the West like they never have before, if we have ahead of us real opportunities to forge cross-cultural relationships, am I content to let Bollywood and samosas be my cultural ambassadors?' (2008: 92). Mehta responds with an 'unequivocal "no"' before going on to describe the elements of Indian culture that she has learned through her journey in kathak under Pandit Chitresh Das. In positioning themselves as cultural ambassadors, Das and his senior dancers – in particular those who are very involved and invested in the community – are similarly critical of representations of popular culture, in particular Bollywood, that are increasingly coming to define the Indian diaspora, especially within the nations where they have settled. Bollywood is available, well-known, and may be one of the few points of contact that some Americans have with 'Indian' culture.

> No singular "thing" can claim to represent an entire culture, whether it be Bollywood or the Indian classical arts….but as the world opens up to all that India has to offer, we as a community have a stake and a say in what the world sees and what it doesn't of India and Indians….We have to ask what is being understood about us and what is being distorted or misrepresented as one aspect of our culture is popularised (Bollywood) and another (literature, the arts) remains under the radar. (Mehta 2008: 94)

A much bigger goal, that of helping to educate Americans on Indian culture, to refine the image of India held by the west, and to help the Indian diaspora maintain cultural standards was a defining feature of the emergent Chhandam culture. In establishing their own identity, and creating distinction for their community, many of the ideologies of Chhandam were set up against other more dominant practices in mainstream society.

Dancers, like Mehta, position themselves against these popular representations of Indian culture. As ambassadors of Indian culture, they present those aspects of India that provide what they see as a powerful representation of the richness of the culture, and the arts of

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India. Mehta states, 'in my personal search for cultural ambassadors to the new generation of Americans, I have arrived clearly at kathak and the Indian classical arts (2008: 94). The role as a cultural ambassador of India is one that comes into focus in the movements and migrations of cultural practices like kathak, but it is also one that reflects some of the earlier figures in post-colonial history. The post-independent positioning of certain dancers as ambassadors and representatives of the best of Indian tradition is a theme that has been carried into a neo-liberal global Indian modernity.

Positioned against popular culture, their task is a large one, but one that many have come to believe in. It is their role as facilitators and communicators of these less acknowledged aspects of India that gave dancers a basis from which to define themselves. In this sense, they are upholders of a particular version of Indian culture. This position as the 'under-dog' invigorates many of these dancers with a sense of necessity and urgency. Having a clear sense of the task ahead – to communicate the depth and richness of Indian culture in a world where it is frequently misunderstood motivates these dancers to passionately pursue this goal. In this sense, they can avoid the confusion other ABCD's might encounter as they gain a clear sense of their role as cultural ambassadors in the diaspora. Although Mehta and other dancers attest their own love for Bollywood and Indian food, they have also carved out their own mission as communicating that there is far more to India than mere films and food.

Kathak is thus promoted as 'tradition' – as we are taught, 'kathak is historical, mathematical, spiritual and philosophical'. Through learning kathak in Chhandam, one can come to learn all the best of Indian culture and tradition. Here, there is further distinction created between Chhandam and other classical or traditional Indian art forms that have attempted to modernise in ways that jeopardise the 'essence' of the art. Thus, Chhandam dancers distance themselves from versions of Indian cultural practices, in particular, forms of modern kathak (see chapter ten). Das's insistence on upholding the 'traditional' aspects of kathak, such as live musicians, improvisation, and the kathak solo also positioned his dancers against a growing trend towards choreography and recorded music, a point that served to further consolidate their creation of a distinctive Chhandam culture.

Chhandam further distinguished itself from other cultural groups and traditions in the Bay area. While Das acknowledged many other leading traditional artists within the Bay area, from both Indian and non-Indian traditions, there was still a distinction made between Chhandam's kathak and other forms of 'ethnic' dance. The notion of 'ethnic' dance was rendered problematic by dance scholar Joann Kealiinohomoku who put forward the argument that ballet was also a form of 'ethnic dance' (1969). Challenging the ethnocentric bias of western dance scholars, she argued that ballet, like other ethnic forms, reflected the cultural tradition from which it developed. For the senior dancers, the classification of 'ethnic' dance was seen as far from all encompassing and the idea of kathak as 'ethnic' dance was also seen as far from accurate. The issues raised around the classification of 'ethnic dance' were also raised by others in the larger dance community, discussed by other traditional dancers, and reflected in reflected in the platforms of organisations such as the Alliance for Californian Traditional Arts (ACTA)[6]. Chhandam sought to actively distinguish itself from what was seen as an inaccurate classification, and such distinction took the form of rigorous censorship over the appropriateness of performance events and venues. The issue came into particular focus during the annual Ethnic Dance Festival of San Francisco (EDF) in 2008. Chhandam, as a school and organisation, administrated by Celine Das Schein and other senior dancers, sought to differentiate itself from a field of ethnic dance groups that were community-oriented and recreational. They reflected Das's vision in their positioning, as he would often tell his students, 'kathak is not a hobby'. Kathak, as a classical dance form requiring years of intensive study was seen as quite distinctive from many of the folk dances and community groups that would be presented on the same EDF stage. In the past years, it had been decided that only the Youth company dancers would perform at such a festival. Classification also mattered to these dancers as it had important implications for the kinds of grants, funding schemas and patronage dancers were eligible for.

Part of creating a new platform for Chhandam's culture of kathak came through carefully crafting Chhandam's image, tending to appropriate representations, and finding a niche audience within the Bay area. Some senior dancers in Chhandam, such as Charlotte Moraga, ventured into the wider San Francisco dance community, trying to engage

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[6] For example, ACTA's mission is to communicate with and support traditional artists who are un-recognised or under-recognised by mainstream funders. Amongst other activities, ACTA organised meetings, presentation, and workshops for traditional artists to discuss their particular challenges.

contemporary dance audiences[7]. But Chhandam did not exactly fit in a wider field of the performing arts in San Francisco. In discussion and by comparison, Das and his senior disciples articulated an affinity with classical western art forms, such as ballet. Ballet was the perennial comparison used at Chhandam. Here again, the differentiation between ballet, taken to be a well-supported and funded classical art, and kathak, a poorly funded and poorly supported classical art, was also used to provoke the dancers. If the San Francisco ballet or symphony were able to secure such a large annual budget, why did the Indian community not support kathak in the same way? A constant sense of competition and a necessity for action was being cultivated.

Chhandam defines itself through establishing a set of distinctions – they are not Bollywood, and they are not modern kathak choreography. They are not 'ethnic' dance, nor are they a community-based cultural dance group. They are not recreational. Such forms of distinction, in Bourdieu's sense of the term (1984), were among the defining elements of an emergent culture that re-energised a notion of 'tradition'.

*   *   *   *

The experience of kathak in Chhandam did more than simply re-create 'India'. Students were guided into a whole way of knowing and experiencing that was about more than just Indian culture, because it was peculiarly Chhandam kathak culture. Those immersed in training discovered that Chhandam was defining its own culture, which was not rooted solely in India. It was inevitably also an American construction. The dance no longer spoke of a past life or experience solely in India, it spoke of a life between these two worlds. In the Bay area, and within Chhandam, there is a generation of Indo-Americans who reflect on, write about and discuss their own negotiation of what it means to be Indian in America. For many in Chhandam, the dance has given them a way to reconcile this status of in-between, by creating a 'place' for the living out of a kathak identity. The creation of Chhandam culture has been sustained by much of what I described in this chapter. But the effective continuance of this guru's work, the school, and Chhandam's kathak relies heavily on the community that surrounds the guru; it is to this wider ecology of the guru-shishya that I now turn.

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[7] In 2009, Charlotte Moraga was selected as a sponsored artist in the CounterPulse program, 'Performing Diaspora'. CounterPulse is a San Francisco based non-profit theatre, performance space, community centre and gallery.

CHAPTER 6

THE WIDER ECOLOGY OF THE GURU-SHISHYA RELATIONSHIP
THE COMMUNITY OF SENIOR STUDENTS

An artist is not made by one, he is made by many (Pandit Das)

As our school grows, it is not possible for all of our students to have a one on one relationship with the Guru as the tradition requires. It is indeed our job to facilitate this connection with sincerity to the extent possible. And as we perform more and more, we will be facilitating this connection between the audience member and Guru-ji as well. (Rina Mehta, disciple of Pandit Das)

As the one-to-one learning that characterises the traditional pedagogy of guru-shishya has become increasingly difficult to sustain, disciples are becoming intermediaries in disseminating the teachings of their guru. Although the ultimate authority is invested with the most 'authentic' source, the guru, in practice, the construction of knowledge and knowing is a shared process, involving exchange between all members of the community of practice. Disciples eventually must take up the role as teachers for the next generation of students, bearing the responsibility of passing on an intact traditional practice to newcomers. The next generation of teachers become critical to training the new generations of students and are often the primary agents of enskilment in the early years. Even for the senior students who study directly under their guru, their learning cannot be considered exclusively within this dyadic model. All students are engaged in a larger community of practice and participation within the community constitutes a large part of the learning process. In this chapter, I problematise the teacher-student dyad and the conventional view that knowledge flows uni-directionally from teacher to student by looking at how knowledge is constituted by the back and forth, the response and reaction, not simply between master and disciple, but amongst instructors, apprentices, peers, old-timers and newcomers. A closer look at this multi-layered and multi-generational interactional process of teaching and learning provides us with an overview of the 'ecology of the guru-shishya relationship'. I use this phrase, borrowed from Neuman's work (1990) to refer to the complex hierarchical web of practitioners, the multi-directional flows of knowledge, the negotiation of authority and authenticity among descendants, and the on-the-ground network of lived relationships that constitute this paramparic lineage.

Most of the ethnography within this chapter stems from Chhandam branches in America. This is for the reason that the school, community, and consortium of Chhandam has taken

on far greater proportions in America, while the Indian branches have struggled to maintain the same coherence. The different range of experiences available to dancers in both sites is in part a by-product of the Das's own transnational movements, his presence and absence in both sites, and the macro-structures that endorse seasonal movements. If Das stayed in India, there is no doubt that he would create a successful school. The growth and success of his school in the Bay area must be seen not only in light of his presence, but the unique socio-cultural milieu: a growing Indian diaspora, composed of middle and upper class Indian professionals, with comfortable incomes, in search of practices that connect them to their homeland. In this chapter, I highlight the American context, describing the workings of the networks and community of students who support the larger organism of the *parampara*. Echoing the place-making themes of earlier chapters, one sees that this moral community has the capacity to set itself up almost anywhere, with minimal requirements and given enough time. The life world of kathak, its own place-world, can be recreated in large part through the establishment of affective bonds and meaningful relationships, not only with the guru, but with the wider community. The emergence of 'di-dis', or older sisters, and 'di-di culture' modifies the concentration on the dyadic nature of guru-shishya, while reinforcing the centrality of hierarchy to practice.

The Primacy of Participation: Situated Learning

In educational theory, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger advocate 'situated learning' as a way of thinking about learning as 'increasing participation in communities of practice [that] concerns the whole person acting in the world' (1991: 49). Their view is in contrast to earlier normative western intellectual understandings of socialisation, and thereby of learning, which understood the 'transmission of culture [as] a mental code or script that exists prior to and independent of human activities, a recipe for action (a prescription) analogous to a book of grammar or a dictionary' (Palsson 1994: 903). Palsson finds this definition be 'highly ethnocentric – the product of western history and textual discourse, reinforced by the tradition of literacy and the institutions of formal schooling and disembedded training – caught up in the dualisms of mind v. body and learning v. context' (Palsson 1994: 903). The notion of learning rules and representations leaves out 'know-how', especially of the sort relevant to a movement discipline. While the emergence of discursive and more analytical modes of learning has certainly emerged in kathak with a shift to America and the adoption of elements of western pedagogy, it is not what learning

kathak was about. 'The novice becomes skilled not through the acquisition of rules and representations, "but at the point where he or she is able to dispense with them"' (Ingold 1993 cited in Palsson 1994: 903; see also chapter 7 and 8). At a recent workshop in Australia, a student asked Pandit Das if they could learn from him by video or on-line, suggestive of their assumption that one need only to know the rules, techniques, or grammar of the dance. He vehemently objected. Learning in such a way is impossible. It must be one-to-one, in person and communicated through moving bodies. His objections remind the students that learning is constituted through live interactions, face-to-face, not through rules or techniques observed in solitary fashion, but in increasing participation in the complete environment. At the same time, the normative dyadic model of normative learning theory, of one-to-one unilineal transfer of knowledge is also a highly problematic representation of learning. The nuanced complexities of learning reveal a shared production of knowledge (see also Harris 2007; Marchand 2008, 2010), which, although asymmetrical, still relies on a flow between learner and teacher. I explore this argument of a flow between teacher and learner in two ways – in this chapter, by examining the wider community, and in the following chapters, by focusing on the specific phenomenology of learning. Especially in Chhandam, learning must be situated in relation to the entire community or learners, destabilising many aspects of the master-apprentice model.

Palsson reminds us that a complete understanding of learning requires that we not isolate the acquisition of skills from everything beyond the boundaries of the body, but investigate the relationship between the master and apprentice which includes the community that supports it (1994: 901; see also Kohn 2011; Strauss 2005). The community that supports such artistic and cultural practices is vital to the transmission and continuance of such practices. Enskilment is a collective enterprise. The total environment for learning in Chhandam relies heavily on the larger network of practitioners, who are all, at some level, engaged with their guru, but at the same time, are engaged with each other. Learning relies more widely on the layers of shishyas, teachers, assistants and extended members of the community. Lave and Wenger describe apprenticeship learning, whereby 'succeeding generations of participants give rise to what in its simplest form is a triadic set of relations: the community of practice encompasses apprentices, young masters with apprentices, and masters some of whose apprentices have themselves become masters' (Lave and Wenger 1991: 56). The succeeding generations of participants in Chhandam necessarily take up new roles and obligations, widening the possibilities for the larger community of practice.

Learning in Chhandam requires participation in the wider community of practice, not merely attending classes, but contributing to all aspects of the organisations. Such participation is integral to establishing an identity amidst the network of students, and in the eyes of the guru, but also provides another path to a deeper level of knowing (see also chapter 7). Tamara Kohn writes on learning the Japanese martial art of Aikido as more than technique, 'it is also about how she interacts with teachers and students to the social and political environments where such training takes place. Identities are shaped through individual positioning within the formal social structures that shape and limit students' options' (2011: 82). The total education that has historically idealised the guru-shishya model is increasingly coming to require extensive engagement with the growing community of dancers, requiring a negotiation of status and roles, as dancers re-situate themselves within a hierarchy of practitioners.

The Community of Practice: The Hierarchy of Students

The Chitresh Das Dance Company (CDDC) is the professional dance company, directed by Das, and composed of his senior disciples. In 2002, the Chhandam Youth Dance Company (CYDC) was created as a program for serious young students of kathak. For the most part, we, the dancers, used the term more loosely and referred to the whole conglomeration, including the larger school, as 'Chhandam'. While there was distinction between these components, most dancers used the noun 'Chhandam' when talking about 'being busy with Chhandam stuff' or 'working for Chhandam'. Within this conglomeration, there were different levels of students with variable commitments to the dance, and thus, to Das. The more one became interested in becoming a kathak dancer, the more one became involved with Chhandam and a stronger relationship would develop with Das. More was given, and more was expected. Hierarchical tiers of students developed, with his closest disciples maintaining involvement for the better part of the year, and the rest of the community being mobilised at different times throughout the year. The 'consortium', as we were called, formed the closest group of disciples and committed students who were heavily involved with most aspects of the organisation, from administration to strategic planning to teaching, as well as their own dance.

Hierarchy was central to life in Chhandam. Position in the hierarchy was largely based on years of study under Das, although actual age and commitment to the school do play a part.
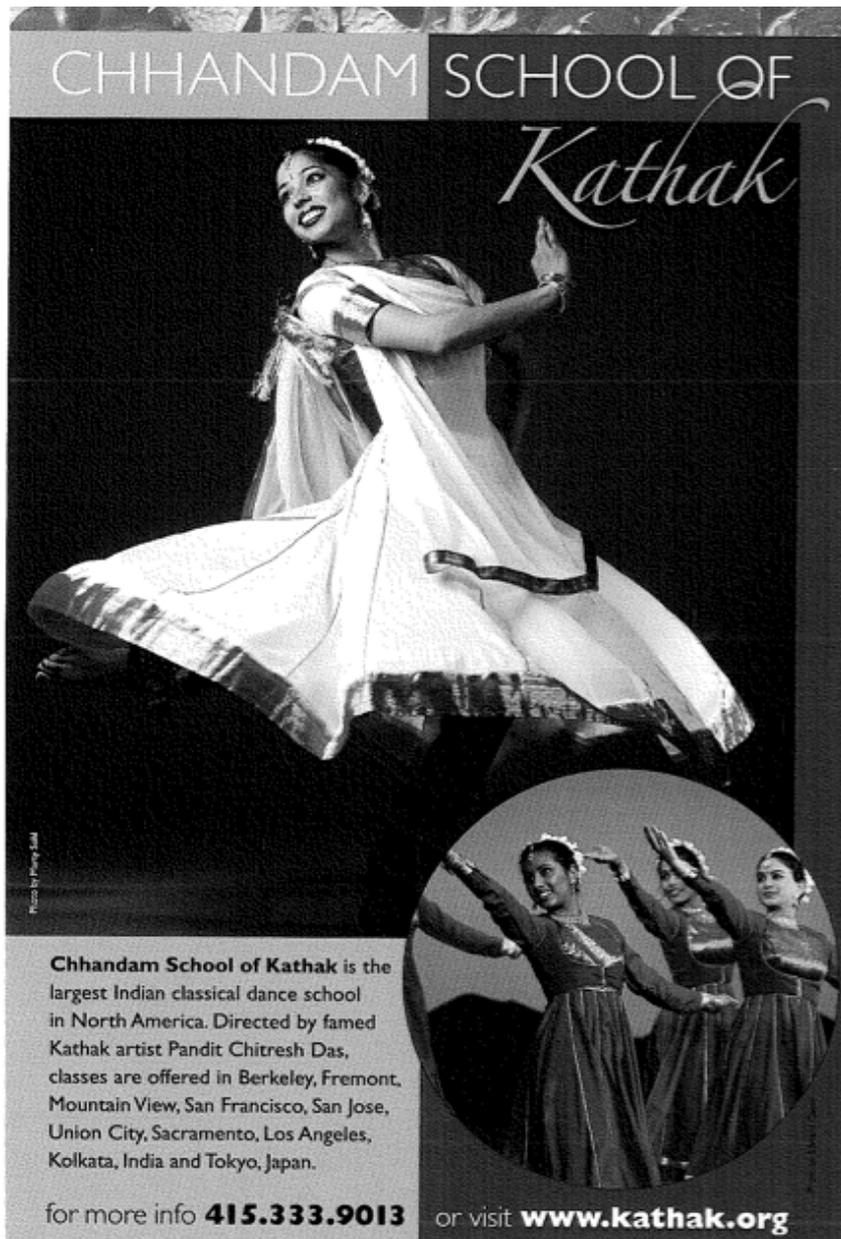
Figure 13: A popular image used for the school flyer. Above company dancer Anjali Nath, below dancers of Chhandam Youth Dance Company

Performance of status was displayed in many ways, from assignment of responsibilities to spatial arrangements, or speaking priority. During my time in the Bay area, Charlotte Moraga would figure as the most senior and prominent shishya, taking centre stage in her relationship to her guru-ji and her emerging role as a leader in Chhandam the school. This was not without considerable upset and drama, but her position as the most senior figure, and her adeptness of skill, set her apart from the others. Charlotte was not of Indian ancestry, but had committed her life to the art; in so doing she had intensively studied and read up on many aspects of the art, and was able to speak with great authority on matters, even in the presence of her guru. Charlotte was also a good friend to me, and our initial

encounters in a Hindi class at Berkeley set the stage for many more conversations on kathak, and on life more generally. She provided much insight into the culture of kathak, as she referred to it, and inspired many of the thoughts in this dissertation. At the time, Charlotte was trying to establish herself as a solo performer, while still being active with the company, teaching, and directing the Youth Company of Chhandam. She had studied with her guru-ji since 1992. Charlotte was also a school teacher.

The company dancers, as they were loosely referred to, were a group of eight females. These dancers attended the company classes with their guru-ji, performed regularly as an ensemble, taught or held a position at Chhandam, and had close relationships with their guru. They too were internally ranked, with the older and most senior being Seibi Lee, who had studied with Das since 1998. Seibi, like myself, had begun her studies in Canada in 1991, with one of Das's first disciples and had moved to California to take up full time study with Das. She was also the head of the Berkeley branch, and as such, was one of the teachers whom I worked with the most. As Berkeley was my home branch, I spent a great deal of time with Seibi, learning from her, helping out, and caught rides with her to almost every Chhandam function, giving us a great deal of opportunity to talk, or for me to constantly ask about this or that composition. Seibi was also a professional harpist and brought with her an incredible knowledge of music. She was also an extraordinary teacher and I learned a great deal from my many classes with her. Moraga and Lee, as the two most senior, and the most knowledgeable of students, provided the greatest opportunity for my own learning outside of time with Pandit Das. A great deal of material on teaching pedagogy discussed in chapters seven and eight draws on the strategies of these two, who were the next in line, so to speak.

Farah Yasmeen-Shaikh, Joanna Meinl, Rachna Nivas, Rina Mehta and Anjali Nath were also company dancers, and aspiring shishyas, having spent at least ten years studying with Das. All taught at Chhandam, and almost all were branch heads. Most worked for the Chhandam school, taking up administrative, fundraising and other duties[1]. Antara Bhardwaj and Labonee Mohanta entered the company, as apprentice members in the years

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[1] At the time of fieldwork, Yasmeen-Shaikh was a full time Chhandam employee and acted as the director of corporate giving; she was also Mountain View branch director. Nivas was the head of the Union City branch, and Nath was branch director at San Jose. Mehta had recently left San Francisco to open a branch of Chhandam in Los Angeles and was actively establishing a large base of kathak support in the LA area. All had worked in the Chhandam office at one point or another and were very actively involved with every aspect of Chhandam.

Figure 14: 'Sampurnam' Home Season Production of Chitresh Das Dance Company (2004)

I was there. Both were long time students of Das who had started as children close to thirty years ago in Das's first classes in Fremont. They had come, gone and returned to Chhandam, stepping up to a new level of involvement upon their return, becoming apprentice company members in Chhandam and teachers at the school. This group constituted the 'Chitresh Das Dance Company' (CDDC), the professional dance company, as it was described. However, it was not a dance company in the traditional sense, in which dancers are paid to rehearse and perform. Rather, it indicates the group of the most senior and advanced students, who were trained directly by Das, and actively performed with the 'company'[2]. 'Company' classes were held two to three times a week with additional rehearsals closer to larger performances. These classes were selectively opened to other non-company dancers, such as myself. In addition to this, company dancers may have privates or semi-private classes at their guru-ji's house, a desirable class, but one that was becoming less and less available as Das's performing schedule became busier and busier. Dancers were also expected to have their own riyaz, or personal practice, but there was much speculation around this (see chapter 8). In reality, for these dancers, much of their time was consumed by Chhandam, particularly in teaching, planning, and promoting.

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[2] During my research period, the CDDC toured an earlier production called 'Shabd' in conjunction with Das's own work of 'India Jazz Suites' (IJS) and premiered 'Sita Haran', a dance-drama that also included non-company dancers including Darlene Dhillon, Cimeron Ahluwalia, and myself. Both pieces also toured to India in 2010 and incorporated members of Chhandam in India. Each company member would also give a traditional kathak solo as a part of the 'Parampara Series'. There were numerous other smaller performances constantly ongoing.

Actual time dancing paled in comparison to the amount of time dancers devoted to other Chhandam activities. Most also had other jobs, but all tried to negotiate flexibility with their work so they could prioritise their dance. At this level, the responsibility to Chhandam and Das was immense, and often created tensions for students' other obligations, whether family or work related. Participation in Chhandam for this senior cohort was much more than a full time job. It was an all consuming way of life. Over time, dancers started envisioning a life sustainable solely through Chhandam, and several started moving toward this path. As the organisation grew, the economic viability of a career as a kathak dancer became a distant possibility[3]. For many, dependence on dance for financial security was not yet an option, but the possibility lingered as the goal that many desired.

While these were the dancers who constituted the current company, there were many who had come before. Gretchen Hayden was the most senior shishya, having begun study with Das in 1972. She had established Chhandika in Boston in 1992 and remained connected to her guru-ji. Gretchen-ji, as she was referred, the honorific 'ji' an indication of her higher status, had taken up a life dedicated to kathak[4]. She was spoken of often, in narratives of earlier years, but also remembered for her sensitivity to her guru. She was involved peripherally with the goings-on of the consortium in California, participating in group-email exchanges and important discussions on Chhandam matters. One of my first teachers, Joanna DeSouza began her studies with Das in 1978. She opened a branch of Chhandam in Toronto in 1988. She did not retain close ties with her guru-ji, a point that caused considerable friction in my early study with Das. Both women had trained together in the early years of Das, alongside several others, including Noelle Barton, and Amrit Mann (the only Indian student in the early company), both of whom had recently returned to Chhandam. Noelle-di and Amrit-di became heavily involved in the school during my fieldwork. Although not official shishyas, they were senior by age and experience, although not necessarily by technical expertise. They were always reserved a special place as more senior to the rest. Should they be in a class, the entire class would recognise their honoured status by saying *namaskar'* to the 'senior di-di's' as they were called, at the beginning and end of class. One other official shishya, Pratibha Patel, was present during

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[3] A career as a kathaka implied a great deal of teaching, administration, networking, sponsorship seeking, and a lot less dancing and performing than most had hoped. While the dream of having a paid professional company that could devote itself solely to dance training existed, the practical realities, and lack of funding did not allow for it.
[4] Other senior dancers have the suffix 'di' added to their name.

my fieldwork and had recently opened a branch in Sacramento. While she was not herself a company member or performer, she was a shishya who devoutly carried forward the work of her guru-ji. Seniority in hierarchy is not about adeptness of technique. It is based on commitment, longevity and involvement. I also mention here, Jaiwanti Pamnami Das, a devoted and often remembered shishya of Das's who had been a principal dancer of the company. She passed away in 2007.

The above dancers comprised the inner core of Chhandam and the nucleus of the 'Consortium'. It was an exclusive group, although in many respects, membership was open to anyone who was willing to commit to and contribute to the vision of Das[5]. Beyond this core group, there were a number of advanced students who had been around for many years, who taught and who for a variety of reasons elected to maintain a distance from the core group, due to the high demands of participation. Other junior students were heavily involved in individual branches, working closely with the branch directors, and still developing their relationship with Das. These other groups of peripheral students would be mobilised and included at certain times, and specific events[6]. At its height, the community would come together like a finely-tuned machine, coordinating grand-scale events, such as two large international Indian dance festivals in 2006 and 2010. There were numerous other faces and personalities that came and went and occupied unique places in the school, some who had just been around for so long that they were consistently included. There were others still, who had moved away but retained a connection, such as Dr. Sarah Morelli, ethnomusicologist and kathak dancer, who studied under Das, and whose research I rely heavily on. Many dancers, like Morelli, would return for certain events and performances throughout the year. The Chhandam Youth Dance Company was also a feature of the larger school; and offered pre-professional training for serious youth dancers. Beyond them, there were many other students, parents, and extended members of the community who contributed, volunteered, donated, and assisted with Chhandam. The majority of the students were female. Ages of students ranged from young children of three to teens to adults, into their sixties. Students would enlist the help of husbands,

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[5] Other long-time students Cimeron Ahluwahlia, Leah Brown, Darlene Dhillon and Shipra Shukul were also included.

[6] Working with them was a range of other dedicated students who also took on teaching roles, assisting roles, and administrative roles within the branch. Every branch had a group of dancers, mostly volunteer, who made sure that the school ran effectively. Typically only the more senior students with adequate experience teaching were remunerated; the rest received discounts on tuition fees. Thus, it was expected that devoted and senior students volunteer a great deal of time to assisting with the running of the school, whether that was teaching or administrative duties, both of which could be loosely categorised as seva or service.

parents, extended family members and friends, who would often become drawn into the world of Chhandam.

Outside of America, there were students in India who also had close relationships with Das and had roles within the American community of practice. They also had positions in the existent hierarchy when the two worlds should meet, as they did from time to time. The most active was Seema Mehta, who recently opened a school in Mumbai and was integral in organising many of Das's trips and performances in India. Kasturi Mishra, the daughter of Das's guru brother, Bachanlal Mishra, had been integral in the running of Chhandam Nritya in Kolkata during my first period of fieldwork, but had since married and moved to Canada[7]. Mishra had opened a school in Ottawa, Gharana Arts. Although the school is not directly a Chhandam affiliate, she maintained close ties with Das[8]. Indrani Mallick, the main teacher and director of Nritya Bharati in Kolkata, continued to run the school with a number of assistants, many who would come and go. Of these there were two male students, Maneesh Mishra, brother of Kasturi, and Rudrava Niyogi, who had played important roles in the school in Kolkata at different times.

These were the students who remained closest to Das, who diligently did the work of Chhandam, who taught, and performed, and carried forward the legacy of Chhandam. Over the years, people shifted jobs and the organisation changed. It seemed that at some point, every senior student had been involved in every aspect of the organisation, and each had a trial in most of the school's positions. All the senior students were teachers. The disciples were the mediums for their guru's teachings and had the responsibility of teaching the next generations. The five hundred or so students in the Bay area depended on them for their initiation into kathak. While performances and festivals facilitated interactions with the extended community and dance audience, teaching in the classroom was the main inter-face with the community of practice. Meanwhile, the duties of administration and planning provided the basis for much of the informal interaction amongst the members of the consortium, who lived dispersed throughout the greater Bay area.

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[7] The situation was highly indicative of the transnationality of the lineage. Misra was my first teacher in India. When I returned to Kolkata on later visits to study kathak, I was struck by the fact that she was now resident of my home country, while I traversed the streets of hers'.

[8] I here include a link for an excerpt of the short documentary film 'Krishna's Dancer', directed by Dirk Hilbert in 2007. The excerpt shows Kasturi Mishra training in Kolkata, under her father and guru brother of Das, Bachanlal Mishra. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awhpzFRIqyI

A Decentralised Network: The Workings of the Consortium

Chhandam, as a school and larger community, was unique in that it had no permanent home. There was no centralised school, no community hall, no spatial focal point for the community[9]. It sustains my point that it was not geographical space that the culture relied on. The guru and his teachings provided the central focus and his own charismatic authority supported by the work of his disciples had a centripetal force that made it possible to sustain the community without a fixed site of practice. The mobility of the guru in the Bay area, and the trans-locality of the community in America resonated with the larger transnational dynamic of Chhandam. A condition of nomadic movement underscored this community, a movement which is itself a form of place-making. This movement reasserted the guru as the central source of authority and power. The guru was the centre and the place of importance for the students. The site of practice was secondary.

The seemingly unmoored school also existed in this way out of practical necessity. The Indian communities in the Bay area were far flung, and dancers lived throughout the wider region. The decentralised branches catered to these disparately located communities. And the practice of revolving locations for meetings, gatherings and even dance intensives served to provide equalised access and commute times for all. The cultural demographics of the Bay area endorsed the decentralised nature of the school; if they were to have a central building, it was hard to come up with a logical location. The practical reality was that teachers would commute to these communities, as Das used to, and bring the dance into the already established Indian immigrant communities. Das's own mobility was a necessity in order to promote his teachings widely. The construction of this mobile nucleus of authority was not only endorsed by such philosophical beliefs on guru-ship and embodied divinity, but by the spatial realities of the pedagogical region. His own role as a highly mobile guru and his extended authority was endorsed by the decentralised nature of the school, which was itself a response to the needs of the geographically distant communities. The physical disparateness required more work to be done to establish a coherent community – building and sustaining ties became more critical when a central point of meeting and practice was not there. A more active shaping of the community was required; the necessary moulding of this community of practice provided a fertile

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[9] There was talk of one day having a centre for Chhandam, although the funding for this in the near future was unlikely. I only ever heard one conversation about acquiring a building and it did not seem a priority, although this was largely because of lack of funding.

opportunity to manufacture an ideal. The community was built in relation to Das's changing vision. The taken for granted presuppositions and Indian cultural values embedded in the dance needed to be made explicit; the American context required a more active approach, and an over-compensation for the missing variables.

The 'Consortium', as the nucleus of this community, was a major constituent of this mobile nucleus of authority. At the core of this, next to Pandit Das, was Celine Schein Das, the executive director of the school and company, and wife to Chitresh Das. As Guru-ma, or wife of the guru, she was the next in power to her husband. She was a key member of the consortium, and in Das's absence, important decisions would defer to her. Schein adeptly managed the school and company, but was always careful to respect the wishes of her husband, and to act in accordance with Indian cultural etiquette. Schein, not of Indian descent, had general fluency in Bengali language, etiquette and culture. The one centralised location for Chhandam was in fact the Chhandam office, although at the time of fieldwork, the small office was only used by those employed as administrators[10]. For the consortium, much of their interaction was centred on the administrative duties of the schools, and meetings provided the best opportunity for contact amongst its participants. The frequency of meetings was dependent on the calendar of events; in the busy times, we might meet more than once a week. This was supported by endless phone conversations, group emails and conference calls. The consortium needed to be in constant contact. And they all needed to be immediately reachable, and ideally, available. The constant contact, accessibility, and frequency of interactions provided a necessary foundation for interacting in lieu of a central place of meeting. The guru's own house did provide some focal attention, but it was only infrequently used for meetings or gatherings. The consortium was idealised as a close-knit highly effective power house of education, promotion and preservation of kathak dance. The clash of egos and conflicting opinions, especially in light of the varied interpretation of the guru's wishes meant that it did not always work this way. But the sense of a core group moving forward with momentum was certainly mounting during my time in America.

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[10] Working alongside Schein were the other members of the consortium, and full-time office staff who were also dancers, including Darlene Dhillon, tireless coordinator of everything Chhandam. Other dancers worked in the office occasionally. Junior students are often also brought into the 'office' as interns in Chhandam, to gain work experience and help with the giant task of running the school and company. Chhandam, as a non-profit organisation, also had a board of executives, including affluent individuals with connections to the art, to India or to Das. In theory, major decisions were made and passed by all members of the board.

Fundraising campaigns, marketing ploys, ideas for 'branding' were topics of conversation and efforts were consistently made to broaden the base to attract new students and new supporters. With the financial crisis of 2008, competition for funding was high with cuts to arts funding. The preservation of kathak depended on securing funding. While Chhandam offered a way of life, rooted in Indian spirituality and philosophy, it was also a business and participated in the global capitalist economy. For dancers, the business aspect of their art was never far from their work. Building an audience, selling tickets, cultivating new students, finding sponsors, finding opportunities for paid performances, writing grants, getting grants, and more generally 'energising the base' as Das referred to it, were all part of the day-to-day work of these dancers. So much so that it often took over at busy times of the year. Dancers often lamented the lack of time they had for practice and attending classes with so many other duties on their plate.

When it came to performances and major events, senior students would be responsible for coordinating everything from ticketing to props to lobby displays to volunteer coordination. During 2008-9, there were a series of traditional solo performances put on by each member of the company, for which each dancer was responsible. She would call into action all of her guru-sisters to assist, and in the weeks before, the 'consortium' would mobilise around these events. Certain individuals would assist with musical accompaniment, and be 'on the rug', either reciting, playing manjira, harmonium or on vocals. Others would be in charge of ticketing, ushering, setting up displays, helping with the reception, and a range of other small tasks[11]. The support of the guru-sisters for one another, on and off the stage was immense.

The work of these followers was mighty. It was through the work of these 'foot soldiers', as I once heard them referred to, that Chhandam took on the scale that it did. This large community of workers would crystallise at certain times of the year, coordinating large events, such as the end-of-year production of the Ramayana in 2009 which involved three hundred students[12]. In 2009, the professional company staged 'Sita Haran', an excerpt from the Ramayana. Other large-scale events that involved the wider Chhandam community included 'Master of Tradition', Das's traditional kathak solo in 2008. Most

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[11] Qualifications were not of the essence here, as I would quickly discover in my range of assignments, which included ticketing, organising front-of-house, sound tech assistant, set designer, prop assistant, lobby displays and almost any other small task one could think of.

[12] I include the following link to selected excerpts from Chhandam's school show of the 'Ramayana' in 2009, http://www.youtube.com/user/chhandam#p/u/0/CqzP2MAEFss

notably, the community came together to host two international festivals of Indian dance, 'Kathak at the Crossroads', and 'Traditions Engaged' in 2006 and 2010, respectively. The list goes on. During these times, a mounting frenzy of activity would occur, carrying more and more participants along as momentum was built. When the event would finally occur, everyone would hold their breath, hoping their guru-ji would be pleased, and for a moment, enjoy the elation that comes out of such a production, finally breathing a sigh of relief, until before we knew it, the whole thing would happen again. During the more mundane times, the more involved members could still be seen throughout the branches, involved with some aspect of teaching, administrating or coordinating a smaller branch event, such as a 'school showcase'.

It is this ebb and flow of involvement and participation that defined this network of dancers and students. This fluctuating scale of participation that arose from the variety of events created a dramatic effect. High crescendos of participation, including high levels of stress and fatigue, were followed by experiences of elated relief, periods of dormancy and hiding out. The most devoted dancers hardly had any 'down time', and the day after the closing of a major production, Das would call a rehearsal for the next show. It was like this. All of the time. One thing to the next, hardly a chance to catch your breath. This defined one's life in the 'consortium'. This inner group bore a huge responsibility. They were the next in line and a lot of the work fell upon them. Should things go wrong, they were the ones immediately responsible. The core group of the 'consortium' were critical players in the community and major constituents of the ecology of the system. For many students, they were the face of Chhandam: they were the members of the company, the teachers and the 'right hands' to the guru. And many students would spend their first few years studying under one of Das's disciples.

Enculturation into Chhandam: the 'Di-dis' of Chandam

It is our role to train students to train with the master. (Seibi Lee)

Any new student arriving at Chhandam will likely be greeted by an array of 'di-di's' or older sisters, who will facilitate their early stages of learning and aid their socialisation into the culture of Chhandam. Any neophyte at the school is typically 'oriented' by one of the branch assistants before they even enter the dance space. New students are told about the

most fundamental aspects of respectfully participating in the dance space: shoes are removed before entering the dance space and always left outside, one must *namaskar* or bow in silence in respect for the dance space and one's teachers before they enter the room, and they must be careful to never show the bottom of the feet as this is considered disrespectful. In higher classes, it was still the senior students who would be the ones to whisper to you in a class, reminding you not to tap your feet while guru-ji was talking, to hold your hands in *namaskar* position if you are being praised, or reminding you to keep tal. A lot of the preliminary and essential knowledge of etiquette was taught in this way, from the sidelines, so to speak. If the guru was present, newer students would simply try to follow along, with senior students quietly correcting, and Das occasionally making an example of someone's mistake. But for many new students, it could be some time before they met the guru of Chhandam.

The beginner classes, for the most part, are no longer taught by Pandit Das. When he began his career in America, he taught every class, from children to adult, from beginner to advanced. But with over 500 students, and a full performing schedule, this was no longer possible. On any weekend day, Das would typically visit one designated branch; the days of the guru's visits were significant and much anticipated at individual branches. The sight of Das's tabla table at the front of the room was usually indicator of his arrival, and when students knew that 'guru-ji was coming today', there was always a buzz of excitement. Students revered him, feared him, and adored him. When Das arrived, usually several senior students would greet him at the door, assisting him and escorting him in. The class would stop. Everyone would face the door and stand in silence, greeting him with a *namaskar*. Das's arrival meant students would be pushed further, would sweat, work hard and come out feeling good. This came to be expected, and the production of this mode of experiencing was Das's speciality. Das was quoted by his disciple, Seema Mehta as saying, on her first day of teaching, 'make sure whatever you do, they have to feel happy and high at the end of every class' (face book post, April 5, 2010). And while senior students tried to replicate certain experiences for their students, none produced the same sensations and pleasures as a class with the guru. The experience of *anand* or joy through dance most often came from the guru.

For most students outside the core, these infrequent visits by the guru were their only experience with him. The several weekend intensives and one-week dance retreat were an

opportunity for all students to have access to training directly from the source. But for the most part, the larger community of students interacted with the next in line, the disciples and other advanced students who took up the role of teachers. They were the primary agents of socialisation for students, although the long-term goal remained – the eventual study with the master. While attempts were made to educate students on the guru who headed the school, and to introduce students to him, through workshops or special events, it was possible for a student to attend Chhandam classes for months without meeting Pandit-ji, if they made no attempt to do so. Das himself is aware of this widening gap and the difficulties it presents. With a rapidly growing school, there is a need for disciples to take on such intermediary roles. For them, it became a balancing act between playing both the role of teacher and student, and carefully navigating the authority they were given in the face of their guru.

A key tenet of apprenticeship is humility before the master. You are always an apprentice to your master, no matter how skilled or successful one has become. As students develop, enjoy their own successes, take on the role as teachers and performers, they start to gain a sense of their own selves as artists. In their new capacity, their own authority as an emerging artist can occasionally come into conflict with their prescribed ideals of humility and deference to the guru. Or rather, their own growing sense of self and the extended authority they gain endorses a forgetting of the key tenet, and teachers occasionally fail to calibrate the shifting conventions of the field in the presence of the guru. The role of being a teacher and a student precipitated the occasional error on the part of the disciples. Conflicting duties, of being an authority in one instance with the obligation to teach the juniors, and in the next, being a student under the authority of the guru, caused some confusion. The guru's presence shifted the rules of the playing field dramatically, and teachers needed to adjust accordingly. While they may be the head of a branch, or a class, and therefore retained a considerable degree of authority and even autonomy, when Das was present, their authority was trumped. Exactly what role they were to play, especially in situations where students they taught were present, was shrouded in ambiguity. The kathak retreat highlighted the conflict in these dual roles, as senior students were there to study and learn, but were also expected to be assisting and teaching at all times. One of Das's disciples noted, 'now that the retreat has grown, it is difficult, because I am both a student and a teacher'. The disciples were criticised for lapsing too far into one role: either for becoming too self-absorbed with their own dance when they should be assisting, or on

the other hand, trying to instruct a student when they should be listening to the guru. And the 'rules' were never the same. Teachers of a class may take the back seat when their guru arrived only to be chastised for their apathy. Das often had the teachers lead the junior students even in his presence, but at some opportune moment, stop them to demonstrate a move himself until he slowly took over the teaching role, while the senior instructor and disciple stepped onto the sidelines. Typically, those teachers would remain at the front of the class, to demonstrate and assist, and would be called upon from time to time, or told to go assist. Over-eagerness in teaching in front of the guru was also admonished and so teachers needed to carefully gauge the situation to determine which role was appropriate and when.

Their own fluctuating authority in such contexts was mediated by the guru, and was tantamount to a mediation and monitoring of egos. Senior dancer, Noelle Barton commented that Das built students up if they appeared to lack confidence, or squashed their egos if they were becoming exceedingly arrogant. The recognised pattern of assumed authority and a forgetting of principles of humility led Das to deliver ongoing critique of 'di-di culture' as it was henceforth named during the retreat. 'Di-di culture' would refer to the growing hierarchy of esteemed senior teachers who were in some instances, being accorded much respect and authority from juniors, and who assume an unacceptable authoritative role in the presence of their guru. They were thus accused of forgetting their guru. The slightest slip, a momentary lapse into role as a teacher, assuming a familiar pattern of interaction with your own students, could be cause for such a critique. The running critique around 'di-di culture' and senior instructors' assumption of status emerged to remind even the most senior teachers of their own relative position in the hierarchy.

While senior teachers do become adept at quickly sensing the shifting conditions, and fluidly moving into whatever role was required, this was not usually the case for newer students. Newer students remained far less aware of how the rules of the game shifted in the presence of the guru. Junior students, familiar with their own role as a student, in a hierarchically inferior role to their 'di-di's', and accustomed to a pattern of interacting with their teachers, were often the perpetrators of a misrecognition of authority in the face of the guru:

Figure 15: A young dancer receives her *ghungru* from Pandit Das. Her teacher, Farah Yasmeen Shaikh looks on.

At the ghungru ceremony this past weekend, one of the young students received their bells, and immediately proceeded toward one of the di-di's, her instructor, to touch her feet, and show what she thought was the requisite respect. Immediately the teacher deflected the student's attempt, redirecting her toward guru-ji and her parents, but it was too late, Dada had already seen this. This was to become a point he fixated on later, a point that caused much irritation. That students did not even know he was the guru highlighted a flaw in the current system, and a break down of the parampara model. (field notes 2009)

The playing field can change drastically from one point to the next depending on who is present. Neophytes' limited interaction with the guru did not provide enough experience for them to always know 'right action' in front of the guru and senior shishyas would try to circumvent their errors. Senior instructors became aware of this lag in understanding, aware of the routine behaviour of students, and cautioned them, 'when Dada is here, you do not *namaskar* to me, you *namaskar* to him'. For new students to recognise a senior student as the authority on the dance in the presence of the guru, the ultimate source of their knowledge, was a grave error. This tension between emerging sub-authorities and neophytes' untimely recognition of their authority, was a by-product of the implicit contradiction of the school, that it is based on the idea of *parampara*, but that the

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parampara cannot be upheld for all students. But it was also simultaneously a lesson for all students to respect the hierarchy, and to constantly be on guard. One slight mistake off the stage was a bigger offence than a mistake on the stage, and both were constantly scrutinised. Of course, teachers did find ways to negotiate their status in front of their guru. In one branch visit, Das spoke to his own shishya, Pratibha, in front of the gathered group of dancers and parents, directing a comment to his shishya, '*your* students…' he began. She mildly interjected, 'no guru-ji, *our* students'. He seemed pleasantly surprised by the correction his shishya had offered, commenting, 'see, that is why she is a shishya'.

Das reiterated this point by subsuming his own role to his guru, often responding, 'it is not me, it is the teachings of my guru'. Seibi Lee explained to me that she saw it as her role to prepare us to take up study with Das in the future. She was an intermediary step, facilitating the realisation of the relationship with the guru. I asked another senior instructor, Farah Yasmeen Shaikh about her perceptions of her role with the students she taught,

> *Monica: Since most new students do not have close contact with Dada, you are their first and primary contact. What kind of role do you have with them? Do you attempt to emulate that relationship with them?*
>
> *Farah: No, I don't try to emulate the position that he holds, for me, with the students that I work with. We have this weird unique situation where we have this school that adheres to a Parampara, but that actual aspect of the tradition, as far as the one-on-one, is not something that we can uphold, just by the nature, the size, and his availability and so on. So we become these, we are like the next step – we're like him, many phases removed, to the students. So if anything, I think it is our responsibility to… I think it is important and I do state this whenever there is a lesson that comes in that connects to this point, he has put me in this position for a reason and it needs to be respected as such. For example, if a student asks a certain question, or if they're late to class – I'm like, look, I'm here giving my energy and I expect to be respected for that. I am not at all equating myself to guru-ji, I am not guru-ji, I am not even anything in the sense of a guru to you, but its about respect for him, his teachings, and thus the tradition. So those are the lessons, but in addition to that, the added responsibility in addition to teaching the movement, the history, the philosophy is connecting them to him, even when there is not a direct connection. We have to become that conduit in a way that is back and forth – so engaging people in coming to the intensives and the retreats, making sure they are there when he comes to classes. But you know with some of those beginning students, it is just not possible – he is just not going to come to Mountain View at 9 o'clock in the morning. Its just reality. Its all in the way we talk about him – who he is, and not just who he singularly is, but what he represents, and why its important to have that connection and acknowledgement of all of that, so that's the role that we play. That's my feeling. And again, we have to lead by example. All of those things that we have to say and do in front of them, but it's a total practice what*

you preach, so if we're going to tell those students to practice – well, we better be doing it ourselves. And I'll say that, look – I have to do this too –yes, its all relative, I'm at a very different level, but if I don't maintain, I can't show up to class and expect to be able to keep up. You kind of have to be able to make yourself a little vulnerable in these situations, because we are establishing ourselves as the authority, but there has to be that degree of humility and vulnerability , because I think its important for the students to know that we are all still at this level – its not at all to downgrade ourselves, or belittle, or to make ourselves come across as amateur, but, there must be a distinction made between ourselves and guru-ji.

As the school grows, the role of these intermediary teachers becomes greater as they became increasingly involved in the shaping of junior students' experience. Their own responsibility to pass on his teachings needed to be accompanied with an education on who the guru is, especially in a cultural context where understandings of gurus were highly variable. But as the gap between the guru and the rest of the student body of Chhandam widened, teachers' domain for authority was continually extended, and an increasing amounts of work was required to ensure that students understood the fluctuating assignment of power and authority, and the role of the guru. The 'di-di's' always had to work to ensure students understood this shifting hierarchy.

Consensual Authority: Systematising Knowledge

Ultimately, the guru is the living source of knowledge and the most direct line to the tradition. 'The guru is like an ocean' with all tributaries leading back to him, as I was told. Subsequently, students deferred back to their guru for accuracy and for the final say, an act that served to extend his authority. Yet, in the guru's absence, disciples became the temporary authority. And for every disciple there was a different interpretation of the guru's vision and his teachings, and a different performance of authority. Teachers offered competing versions of authentic knowledge, a point that led to disagreement, conflict and required a negotiation and consensus in the guru's absence. As students went out to teach, it was recognised that although they were from the same lineage, considerable discrepancies in know-how existed. Teachers and the guru were aware of the associated problems of having a dozen different teachers passing on the teachings of one guru. The recognition that the corpus of knowledge took shape and form differently in each disciple precipitated the explicit articulation of certain tenets for learning, and the creation of curriculum. At points of potential break down, an explicit pedagogical model was laid out

to unify the consortium in their approach, to systematise the teachings and ensure that students across the board were receiving the same training.

Through the many years of Chhandam, a curriculum was developed, the formalisation of which was partly inspired by Das's teaching position at San Francisco State University (SFSU). A curriculum and course materials were devised, a necessity that resulted in the Chhandam reader. Within the school, a tiered system of classes developed, with levels 1A, 1B, 2, and 3. Classes 1A and 1B had a very clear curriculum outlining precisely which compositions, what speeds of *tatkar* footwork, which *kavitas* or poems needed to be learned before advancement to the next class. Children's classes also had a fixed curriculum. Level 2 also had an outline of material, although as one moved along in levels, the fixity around curriculum and materials waned. Das was typically more active in the higher level classes, such as the level 3 class, and where Das was involved, no systematisation or adherence to curriculum occurred. As the guru, he would teach what he wanted, when he wanted, and to whom he wanted. Sub-teachers did not have this liberty, and most were very careful not to teach or show something in advance of the designated time. There were limits on what knowledge could be passed and under what circumstance.

Despite ardent attempts to systematise teaching, idiosyncratic approaches were inevitable. Although the end product, composition, technique or floor pattern would be similar, the process by which students were led along to get there was highly variable based on the teacher's own experience and bodily history. This meant their own kinaesthetic understanding of the skill might be highly variable depending on the path they took to get there. Some students, like myself, were able to take classes at multiple branches and from more than one teacher, indulging in a multitude of approaches to teaching and learning. Certain teachers' strategies might resonate more strongly with our own preferred ways of learning, and we may engage heavily with different aspects of each persons training. As a student, I preferred and learned much from one teacher's approach for her emphasis on understanding music and *tal*, while yet another for her finer attention to the details of our hands and arms. A student from one branch should theoretically be able to attend class of the same level at another branch and participate quite fully. While the backbone of the material was the same, and the progression of the class similar, idiosyncrasies in teacher's individual styles and pedagogical tools always created mild confusion for the novice dancer, who is still gaining familiarity with the fundamentals. Beginner students did not

cope well with inconsistencies. Live moments of teaching, such as the teaching of curriculum by the varied group of teachers, required a more in-the-moment response to the students.

Efforts to systematise curriculum and create a unified pedagogy emerged as teachers tried to adhere to the teachings of their guru, keeping the tradition intact. Teachers also adapted to the needs of the students, who in many instances, lacked basic cultural knowledge and relied on more explicit articulations. But this also bled into general teaching of technique; teachers tended toward breaking down segments, analysing, especially verbally, aspects of the dance. While this adaptation was intended to assist the learning of students, it was also a pedagogical strategy that reflects the normative western pedagogies for learning, and in that sense, was in tension with a tradition which privileged practical and contextual knowledge (see chapter 7). While helpful in some contexts, it also created an 'intellectualising filter that stops the flow of training, or places it into a different ambiance of mentalised physicality' (Kohn 2011: 80). The 'intellectualisation' of embodied practice was occasionally used, but mostly critiqued by the guru. The establishment of curriculum and the differentiation into levels also existed in tension with the ideals of the guru-shishya model. Das would enter almost every beginner level class: 'What class is this?', he began, then playfully mocking the tiered system, '1A, 2B, ', in an exaggerated manner, dragging out each syllable, a performance which always elicited laughter from the students. 'My guru-ji never taught like this….', he would state. Das often used this rhetorical device, acknowledging the current practice as a break in tradition, at the same time that he recognised its necessity. He would often proceed, asking to the teacher, 'what do they know', 'show me'. In this way, Das also monitored and acted as a sort of quality control, observing the results of the work of his disciples, correcting when necessary.

Curriculum, class schedules, enrolment and tuition fees all stood at odds with narratives of past gurus. Much of the established Chhandam infrastructure took on a life of its own, well beyond the guru's purview and even in direct conflict with it. That class 1A ran from 11 to 12, and 1B ran from 12 to 1 was of little concern to the guru, and he never bothered himself with such details. Every time he walked into a class (no matter how many times he had been there before), he would ask 'what class is this?'. While it is likely that he did not know, he also did not concern himself with these details of administration. The tiered system and curriculum design of the school were something he adhered to out of necessity

of teaching in the 21st century, but where he could evade these controls, he most certainly did. His teachings and direct relationship with students were the foundations of the entire school and almost always took precedent. Yet, the need to efficiently run a school, especially when one catered to a high number of students and families, trumped the guru's power on rare occasions. And of course, it was often up to the disciples to try to enforce the infrastructure, to stick to curriculum and scheduling, and remind their guru to do so. Such challenges to the guru's authoritative domain presented a very awkward dynamic for the disciples, who needed to temporarily violate some of the convention of their relationship with their guru. Students understood the inappropriateness of their interjections, but also had to respond to the practical realities of running a business. Senior teachers gently reminded him that the scheduled class was over, or pointed out that students had not yet learned certain dance material. Typically he would offer a disgruntled comment, on some occasions teasing the culprit, 'who are you?', highlighting the inappropriateness of their request. During one of the kathak retreats, which the disciples had vigorously campaigned for by encouraging new students, tension arose because the experience that Das was creating in the moment of the retreat was not what had been advertised to students. Students had registered and paid for a retreat which advertised a set number of hours of dance a day, yet, as Das proceeded through the days, some of the newer students were dancing less than expected, and more time was spent listening to lectures or watching seniors dance. Several branch heads felt they could not have students sitting for such long periods of time when they had marketed it as so many hours of dance. This point caused a lot of conflict. In an environment that was intended to emulate the *gurukul*, Das was less willing to adhere to such requests and appeared very irritated by this discussion that went on behind the scenes. As the guru, he taught in the moment. There was no guarantee, no timeline, no schedule. But the disciples who assisted greatly in the running of the school were obliged to ensure its success, and in many cases, this presented a conflict of interest between making the school financially viable and successful and to adhere to the ideals of the *parampara*. The traditional ideals often confronted a social reality that would simply not support it, and this was never truer than in the case of payments, tuitions and fees.

The Economy of the Guru-Shishya

Monetary exchange between guru and shishya is said to have not existed in the past. However, the economic realities of the 21st century global capital economy, and the more localised market for traditional arts in the Bay area, could not support this ideal. The viability of the school and the art depended on securing an income for the artists. Tuition and fees were a source of discomfort for Das. For an idealist such as Das, the teachings could not be commodified, and no price tag attached. The mutual reciprocity of guru-shishya prescribed a different non-monetary type of contribution, service to the guru, which was never to be mistaken for payment. The notion of guru *dakshina*, or gifts for the guru, was the only kind of material exchange, and if given, 'the gift was simply to please the teacher, not as an equivalent of knowledge received.' (Antze 2005: 30). This ideal was based on the belief that 'knowledge was so sacred that even when a guru taught a single letter of the alphabet, he could never be adequately recompensed with worldly wealth' (Antze 2005: 30).

In America, with the elaborate network of Chhandam school, tuition fees were clearly marked out, as in any dance school one might encounter in California. Branch directors, teachers, and administrative assistants would be enlisted to collect tuition fees, which were clearly set out and worked on sliding scale; the more classes you attended, the less you paid per class. Chhandam Nritya Bharati had minimal fees as well, although, there was more variability in regularity of payments from students (as there was also more variability in attendance). Ideally, fees were clearly marked, promptly paid and the services rendered to the client. Of course, this was often not the case. While the fixed payment scale worked for newer students without much connection to Das, a growing relationship to Das usually complicated the matters of payment. Most senior students, teachers and disciples paid for the classes they attended. But some concessions were often made, especially for students who struggled financially. A student of the older generation informed me that she never paid anything to Dada for the years of training she received. One devoted student in Kolkata who only earned a limited income confided that he 'never paid one cent to Dada-ji', despite years of intensive study. However, this was the exception, and most students paid, even though Das made every effort to circumvent discussions of money and payment. If it was necessary, it was always done discreetly. Even in the case of splitting bills at

restaurants, a constant source of annoyance to Das, this needed to be done very inconspicuously.

As with the enforcement of curriculum, it was easier to enforce these kinds of rules with newer students, more unfamiliar to Das. And while most of us at intermediate and advanced levels still paid tuition, there was more variability. Exceptions could be made. For students who spent extended periods near their guru, and had a close relationship, the discussion of payment was even more inappropriate. There were no clear answers here. There is no monetary exchange that would compensate for the knowledge passed on. Nor should there be. The feeling was that it would be like paying your father for raising you. Yet, both guru and disciple were participants in the market economy and as such, adhered to the wider economic principles to some degree. Even teachers paid tuition, paid for workshops and paid for the retreat, although many received substantial discounts for their volunteer or teaching work. The more senior students were permitted to have classes outside of regularly established hours. For those that had private or semi-private classes, students would bring payment for Das (I was told $50 US was the norm), placed inside a card, often with a flower. It would be left for Das at the front of the room. Sometimes he would not take it. If he felt he did not really teach on that day, he would not take it. If he knew the student had financial difficulties, he also might not accept.

The practice of guru *dakshina* did come into play. While theoretically it was a gift to please the teacher, within the current economic structures, an interpretation of payment was more likely. Thus, additional monetary payments also came in the guise of guru *dakshina*. The disciples would, of their own accord, give guru *daskhina* of an undisclosed amount at certain times of the year, namely, Guru *Purnima*. Disciples would also petition the rest of the student body to contribute something for guru *dakshina*, even where students did not have personal relationships with Das. In an email sent to Chhandam families it was explained:

> Guru Purnima is on July 18th. In the guru-shishya parampara, it is the tradition to take that day as a time to remember and honour the guru who is passing down the priceless knowledge and wisdom of the generations who came before. Traditionally, Guru Dakshina, an offering most often in the form of a monetary gift, is given to the

Guru….Guru-ji is going to India on June 23rd to work with the New Light students[13], and to continue to promote Kathak in its true form throughout India. We would like to give students in the school an opportunity to participate in honouring Pandit-ji on Guru Purnima by contributing towards a special gift of his travel coverage. If you feel a connection with his vision and belief in Seva & Tyaag (selfless service and sacrifice), and would like to make a contribution, please give cash or a check (made out to 'Pandit Chitresh Das'), to your teacher. All of the contributions will be listed in a card from each branch. We would like to present this gift to him before he goes to India, so please contribute by June 22nd. Thank you for being part of our Chhandam community. (Chhandam group email communication, June 2009)

I do not know if Das knew about this email, or if he would approve. But such requests continue to be made by his disciples, and contain all the contradictions of an idealised system running head-on into the practical necessities of financial stability. In another instance, senior disciple and director of the Youth Company asked the class of advanced teens, 'who called Dada for guru *Purnima*?' Moraga told them they should; 'it is your responsibility as Youth company members to do this'. 'Would you forget your mother's birthday', she asked. She explained that since he takes care of them, they must reciprocate. For these teenage Indo-American girls, the protocol around guru-shishya was unfamiliar, and such explicit direction was needed. The more time they spent with him, the more they understood the expectations. But a considerable amount of prodding and coaxing was required by the senior di-di's, both to teach them the appropriate behaviour and to encourage an action that would bring joy to their guru. It was also the tradition that after a disciple's first solo performance they would give guru *dakshina*. Such gifts ranged from an I-pod to a woollen shawl. But while Das did what he could do to bypass monetary exchanges, while the executive director, and his wife, took charge of most financial negotiations, asserting the financial framework of the school more rigorously than he cared to do. As mentioned earlier, other sources of income came through grants, sponsorship and donations[14].

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[13] Contributions are clearly linked to his own seva and tyaag in India, and his work with the underprivileged students of the New Light Foundation. Das's work with the New Light students was often invoked in America to encourage donations and gifts from students, audiences and the wider community.

[14] Massive campaigns were taken up to raise funds for the entire non-profit organisation of Chhandam. Students, families and extended community members could also donate to the organisation, becoming a recognised donor. New strategies were developed to access the particular community, targeting, the Indian diasporic community. Executive director, Schein, described the new models: 'We found the old models of involving communities related to heritage did not work. Many were new immigrants, and while prosperous and sometimes wealthy (they) did not have the tradition of giving. They came from traditions where the arts were patronised by the government and they were not committed to giving for the arts. We now find we are doing new ways of cultivation in these groups. Instead we are hosting smaller events, with 15 people at a time, and these are low tech and intimate. We are cultivating the community slowly, and it has yielded results. We also have a professional youth company and we finding parents now becoming engaged. (Celine Das, quoted in Dance USA Journal, April 2009). Focus groups, 'cultivation events' in people's homes,

In India, the monetary and non-monetary exchanges are of a different nature, which is in part due to a very different demographic profile of students. Students of Chhandam Nritya Bharati in Kolkata are mostly from lower or middle-income families. Fees are kept low, even by Kolkata standards. Chhandam Nritya Bharati was not being run to generate income; Das had wanted to reopen his parents' school in the city he was born. As the school generates little income, Das and the organisation fund the school in Kolkata, and provide minimal payment to the teachers. One of the male dancers in Kolkata recounted his story of coming to study with Das, and receiving his *ghungru*. When dada-ji gave the *ghungru*, he asked for guru *dakshina*', but the student had little money and could not give anything. The student re-enacted the scene, looking toward an imagined Das with his expressive eyes, and then recounted Das's words 'give me 5 rupees. And when you dance, this will be my guru *dakshina*'[15]. His repayment came in the form of service to the guru, through doing his duty to make sure Das was looked after while he was in Kolkata, as well as teaching at the local school. For the most part, senior students in India adhered more to the guru *seva* model, assisting with running the school and coordinating much of Das's activities while there. Das's students from America did not during their stay in India, directly pay Das for their classes. The rules of the game shifted slightly for them, with transition to India. However, in lieu of direct tuitions, students would often cover a large share of the expenses for car and house rental in Kolkata while there. It was assumed that in lieu of payment for classes, we would cover expenses. Some haphazard system of tracking expenses was implemented, and money would be gathered in the end, a task made infinitely difficult by the inconsistent time frames in which dancers would stay at the house. And while the American students contributed large portions, the Kolkata students did not. It was unreasonable to expect them to pay for such things when their resources were limited, and incomes far less. However, several of the Kolkata students would stay, and would be expected to stay in the share house, for extended durations of time, from a week to a couple of months, depending on Das's stay in Kolkata. Aware of their own inability to cover their portion of expenses, as well as the fact that their guru-sisters were having to contribute on their behalf created a slight discomfort that served as an ongoing

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individual requests via Face book, donor cards handed out to audiences, all were new tactics to raise funds for the organisation. Many dancers and non-dancers contributed in this way.

[15] Roughly 10 US cents, such an inconsequential contribution suggests of the lack of importance of the monetary contribution and emphasis on personal obligation.

underlying reminder of the discrepancies in the global economy and their marginalised position within it.

Contributions made by students were endorsed with the cultural principles of *tyaag aur seva* or sacrifice and selfless service, which also appeared within the nine principles of Chhandam. There were no prescriptions on how one was to contribute but the expectation was always there. Giving to the school was in some ways a form of guru *seva*, and students could be brought in to assist with several things, under the banner of guru *seva*[16]. Especially for those more advanced, who were privileged to attend the first-hand teachings from Das on a regular basis, or for those privileged to attend the senior most classes, there was considerable expectation that they would be contributing back to the school and to Das in a major way. Despite payment of tuition for participation in these classes, at a more advanced level, monetary contributions were irrelevant. Often Das would say, 'I don't want your money', and give back the payment to students. The more involved and the closer to the guru you became, the more your obligation became less monetary, slightly more intangible, but far greater and all consuming. The moral framework that students began to participate in as dancers had within it ideas of moral obligation, and this was worked as the cultivation of the ongoing indebtedness.

There are multiple economies at work within and surrounding the guru-shishya *parampara*, including participation in the market economy, the economy of Guru-*Dakshina*, gift exchange, *tyaag* and *seva*, as well as non-profit donorship and patronage. Selective affiliation with one or another of these competing economies can strategically position practitioners and community members, a topic requiring further research. For dancers, participation in the market economy, paying of fees might suggest less contribution in the way of guru *dakshina* or guru *seva*, depersonalising the relationship through monetary exchange. Although money is far from any kind of substitute for knowledge received, for neophytes of the cultural tradition who are most familiar with participation in a market economy, the mutual obligation of guru and shishya may have been initially foreign. Students participated unevenly in these competing economies. But ideally, it is mutual responsibility that is privileged over participation in other economies.

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[16] Guru-Seva continued to be a primary way students contributed to the guru but ambiguity existed around this, especially where Chhandam related expenses could be claimed or reimbursed by the school but were subsumed under the seva discourse. Students felt uncomfortable to request repayment from the organisation. It was a fine line and some were better and worse at navigating it.

Responsibility and Reputation: Positions of Privilege

Before she began her solo, she explained, 'for anything good that happens tonight, this is because of my guru*, for any mistakes, these are all my own'. (field notes 2009)*

The mutual obligations between guru and shishya were evident in the fierce responsibility each felt toward the other, the sharing of reputation, and the extension of positions of privilege. Students felt strongly compelled to represent their guru's work to the best of their ability. They also felt compelled to ensure others were representing Das' work appropriately. An excess of filters were placed on junior students to ensure accuracy of tradition. Students all had a vested interest in preserving and enhancing the reputation of their lineage by ensuring a high calibre of dance was presented. In a system that is modelled on Indian kinship, the reputation, honour and status of each individual is based on the collective reputation of the lineage. Misrepresentation by one student reflected poorly on the others, and disciples took this very seriously. Since reputation is shared amongst the lineage, senior students took on much responsibility for the acts of juniors. A mistake by a junior reflected poorly on their teacher. My own mistakes in the early stages of my training with Das always elicited criticism of my teacher in Canada, who was blamed for not having taught me properly. After an event in which a senior student had fumbled excessively in her introductory speech, those senior to her were blamed. Why did they allow this to happen? Why didn't they have a back-up plan? Did they want their guru-sister to fail? The blame was swiftly re-located on the two senior students present. Her mistake reflected on the entire organisation, on the other teachers and on Dada. Patterns of Indian kinship are reflected in this cultivated responsibility: students have to look out for each other's actions. In another instance, two young students entered the classroom while the rest of the students were saying *pranam*, ignorant of the inappropriateness of their actions. They should have waited until the invocation was completed, and then enter. Das, irritated by the mistake asked sternly, 'whose students are those?', searching for the culprit. And then he paused 'no, it is my fault for not teaching you'. The responsibility for the actions of other ascended the hierarchy and fell squarely on the guru. The guru holds the ultimate responsibility for the actions and mistakes of his students, and where they have erred, he will feel responsible, and be held accountable. And in India at least, others will see the disciples' actions as a direct reflection of their guru and his success or failure in teaching. Mekhala Natavar points out that students ideally reflect the style and depth of knowledge of the guru, as an extension of the guru (Natavar 1997: 187). Students'

successes reflect their guru, as much as their failures. Aware of this, a student will try to redirect the responsibility for their own errors back upon oneself, as in the opening quote. However, they would never do the same for their accomplishments. Students own successes, when met with praise, were addressed with, 'it is how guru-ji trained us', a phrase that Das also uses in regards to his guru.

Reputation and even charisma, was inherited, even in a non-consanguinal lineage. By associating with even the name of a guru, a student thereby takes part in and acquires some of the prestige and honour their own guru has acquired, as if it were a transferable substance. The idea of individuals being constituted by transferrable substances reflects beliefs about the body from both the South Asia Hindu (see Marriott 1968, Daniel 1984) and Sufi Islamic traditions (see Mills 1998). In Hindu beliefs, such transfers are mediated around ideas of purity and pollution. Particularly in discussions of honour and family reputation, the prohibitions, and control especially on women's movement reflect a concern for preserving the shared substance matter of a family. The significance of this became clear to me on my first experiences in India; one of the first questions I was usually asked was, 'who do you study with', to which I would respond, 'Pandit Chitresh Das'. This was despite the fact that at the time, I had still not met him and was connected to him only through his students. The affiliation with a guru of his stature did well to situate me in the larger field of dance, and ascribed a certain status to my previously anonymous self. The realisation of my new found identity and status within this unfamiliar network in India tangibly highlighted for me the importance of reputation and lineage. The illocutionary force of the statement, 'I am a student of Pandit Chitresh Das', is very different in India than in America, hinging directly on the understandings of the interlocutor. This is not merely because he may be better known as an artist in Kolkata, but rather, because the statement carries with it an implicit understanding of social relations, that he is a guru, and I, a student. With that comes an understanding of the duties of the associated roles, and the weight of such assignments. The same understanding of this relationship is often not there when I say this phrase to non-Indian people in America, even if they know his name. Much as when I explained to a traditional European folk dancer that I studied with Pandit Das; she responded, 'yes, he's quite famous around here'. The potency of the statement is far greater in India because of the rich symbolic understandings that it draws on.

With the accrual of symbolic capital through status, honour and reputation, as well as cultural capital in the form of skills, knowledge and qualifications to be a dancer, the students also inherited a great responsibility to the lineage. The flip side of this benefit of status was responsibility, which often resulted in an implementation of strict standards and a censorship around representation. The concern for preserving honour and reputation often manifested in what felt like, to me at least, an over-censorship of our actions by the senior di-dis. On one hand, they were concerned to 'represent' the lineage in the best way possible, but as a teacher, they also wanted to cover their own back as they knew blame would come to rest on them. A dancers' conduct, both on and off the stage, was subject to harsh criticism, often by senior disciples, for they had a vested interest in protecting the way the lineage was being represented. If one was representing Das and the lineage, there were often layers of checks to get through to ensure accuracy in representation. If one was performing, the performance needed to be cleared by not only the guru, but often one needed to work closely with a senior-di to ensure accuracy. This applied not only to the dance but to what one said, and to how one comported oneself. When you danced, there was the sense that you were dancing for the lineage and for the guru. It was never a solo affair, despite the required solitude of practice or *riyaz* and the traditional performance style. One student told me that they rarely sought outside performances because it ended up being such an ordeal, one had to endlessly prepare all the details of the performance, show it to the di-dis, take the criticism, and it ended up being an immense amount of work. The many controls over representation resonated with the larger understandings of family and symbolic capital available to participants in Kolkata that emphasised the honour, reputation and distinction of the larger social unit of the family through controls over individual members, especially over females[17].

The responsibility one has is directly proportional to the status one holds: the more the responsibility the higher one's status. The hierarchy between senior students is signified in many ways, both discursively and non-discursively. Senior disciples sit next to the guru

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[17] Historically, many restrictions were placed on the mobility of Indian woman within the symbolic logic. The standard interpretation, anthropologically speaking, is that women symbolically stood for the purity and honour of the family. The prestige, honour and reputation of the family was directly related to the actions of each family members. And where the inappropriate actions of the daughter could have such severe consequences, and jeopardise the moral standing of the entire family, she was controlled in obvious ways. There still exists considerable control over women in Indian society, although this is variable and cross-cuts with notions of class, regional identity, and age. While I do not simply assume that this familial ideology on honour and reputation applied directly to the lineage of dance, there are obvious resonances with the dynamics of representation in the dance lineage. As dancers take status and agency from their role as guardians of the tradition, so too do women take on a certain agency from the notion that they are the guardians of the family's honour (see also Ram 1998).

and are given preferential treatment in conversation. Spatial hierarchy is often marked by proximity to the guru, whether that be dancing at the front of the class[18], or sitting next to him at the table[19]. Being recognised at public events, or called upon in front of others as a disciple and given the authority to speak, especially in front of the guru, is strong evidence of high status in the *parampara*. Recognition of the hierarchy is crucial in perpetuating its structure, but also in endorsing the fulfilment of obligations. Status is the reward for responsibility, and responsibility often translates into 'work'. Performance privileges are also highly indicative of status, and as emerging performers, opportunities for the spotlight on stage are certainly coveted.

Social relationships, responsibilities and duties are critical in establishing people's identity, individuality, and conferring status. On certain levels, a person ought to comply with the interests of family and caste. While this may be in part accurate, anthropologists such as Mattison Mines have also highlighted the importance of individuality within this framework of collective interest, challenging Dumont's view (1970) that 'Indians…value collective identities, the identities of caste and family, not the identities of individuals' (Mines 1994: 2). The importance of collective interests is often held up over the importance of personal desires, evident in such practices as arranged marriages, where constructing alliances between families and lineages is more important than the personal desires of individuals (see also Wadley 1994, Fruzetti 1990). Social responsibilities and duties are primary in the construction of identity and also in the decisions people make. Yet as Mines points out, individuality is at the crux of an individuals sense of self (see Mines 1994)[20]. While dancers clearly act with the collective in mind, this is still done with an understanding of their own position and objectives. Their attention to collectivity was always tempered with the individual pursuit of becoming a kathak soloist.

A cultivated sense of duty, to carry forward the vision of the guru and to fulfil the obligations of your role as student, facilitated the continual passing of knowledge. A duty

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[18] One disciples transgression of guru-shishya etiquette resulted in her being required to dance at the back of class for an indefinite period of time

[19] Interpreting this in terms of Hindu philosophy, the proximity to the guru also enhances the possibility for darshan, the exchange of sight between a deity or guru and devotee, thereby enhancing the affection, love and connection between guru and shishya. Close proximity also enhanced the opportunity for an inheritance of the charismatic energy the guru possessed. Despite the non-consanguinal nature of the relationships, an exchange of substance, 'energy' as it was talked about, was believed to occur between guru and student.

[20] Mines argues for a contextualised view of Tamil individuality , whereby the individuality of persons is recognised within the context of groups where they are known and within which they have a known set of statuses and roles – where eminence, civic individuality, reputation social trust, and goals are important features of the contextualised individuality (1994: 21).

to teach students what the guru has given is certainly primary, and is seen as the principle means to ensure the preservation of the art. Embarking upon the study of kathak in Kolkata, I was initially startled by the fervent commitment senior students demonstrated toward ensuring that I would receive adequate training. Responding to my gratitude for their guidance, a senior student answered, 'It is my duty'. Duty or *dharma* is integral to traditions of Hindu values that we were being inculcated in. In this framework, individuals have a duty to fulfil based on their position in the larger cosmological order. I too would begin to feel a duty to pass on the teachings I had received, and this was a large motivator in my own forays into teaching. The rhetoric of duty was engaged by those in India more explicitly although it also infused students' actions in America. The existing cultural understandings of dharma carried more weight in India, and I argue, were a stronger proponent in motivating students' actions in India. Students in America were very devout and compelled to carry forward the vision of their guru, but I suggest this also came with a larger sense of the transformational power of his work. While in America we share in the honour, reputation and status of our guru, we are also subject to the rigours of such a privilege. Strict standards, censorship and controls on behaviour, especially in the public sphere, were manifest in the way we represented ourselves. Inherited status in India took on a different flavour through the lens of Indian kinship; in America, at least amongst the larger dance community, while affiliation with a well-known artist was certainly beneficial, the significance of it was very different. Dancers in America certainly use the connections to artists they have worked with as collateral in creating their own status and reputation, but I argue, it was not the primary constituent of identity, such as in the Indian model.

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To take a decentred view of master-apprentice relations leads to an understanding that mastery resides not in the master, but in the organisation of the community of practice of which the master is a part. (Lave and Wenger 1991: 56)

Learning in guru-shishya today is constituted in part through participation in the extended community of practice, within which the guru-shishya relationship is situated and sustained. Early learning theories, which stress the conventional dyadic, uni-directional models for learning, failed to recognise this integral aspect to learning, namely, the total environment, which includes not only guru-shishya, but the multitude of relationships with

other practitioners within a place. The larger community of practice is evidently composed of intersecting networks of people, hierarchies and economies, all of whom come together to sustain the vision of one man, Pandit Chitresh Das. It is participation in the larger ecology of the guru-shishya *parampara* that establishes each dancer as a member of the community, a crucial step if one desires to become a dancer. Learning is facilitated by these networks as intermediaries become primary agents in the early stages of socialisation, a shifting of roles that also continually creates tension amongst the ranks. While the confrontations between an idealised one-to-one learning relationship and the practicalities of learning within a hierarchical network of teachers occasionally erupt in heavy critique, they are constantly being mediated, mostly under the surface, and it is the occasional mistake that reminds the guru and his disciples that the ideal is changing. Yet, as the guru and his followers adapt to the inevitabilities and contradictions of operating a large dance school in current times, they sustain the minimal requirements of the traditional relationship, creating a sense of place and a total environment in which learning can occur.

CHAPTER 7

Ways of Knowing: The Shared Production of Bodily Knowledge

We began as a class, reciting the composition together... 'Dhere kita taka ta dha Kata ghe ghe dhin....', and then danced the composition through together several times as our guru-ji played the tabla. All of us fluidly moved together through the composition, in relative unison. And then he stopped – to call us each, one by one to the centre of the room. The room went pin-drop silent. Except maybe for the sound of pounding hearts. Being called upon to dance before your guru is always one of the toughest tests any dancer will face. But it is also a test that is meant to prepare you for performance, and more generally for life. First, one of the junior students was called upon, stepping forward. Forgetting to namaskar as she stepped forward, she was sent back without even beginning the composition. Another student was called upon. As often happens, she sped her footwork up ever so slightly so that she ended up off tal (or off the main beat of the rhythmic cycle). Another student stepped forward. At this point, guru-ji changed the laya (tempo) to an excruciatingly slow speed, making it almost impossible to kinaesthetically figure out where the footwork falls in relation to the main beat. One by one, each dancer was called to the front. One by one, each dancer failed. (field notes 2009)

What had happened? Minutes earlier, the class was easily moving through this *same* composition as an ensemble, but independently, each dancer failed on some level to execute the composition adequately. Nerves and the pressure of dancing before the guru certainly played the part. The guru masterfully creates an atmosphere thick with apprehension and anxiety, even for advanced students. But this is part of the test. The level to which students know the composition is tested by a manipulation of key variables. With the added pressure of an unknown variable, a millisecond of hesitation, or a slight increase in tempo, the dancer can be easily thrown off. The student would be reprimanded. 'Does not know it', Das would say. The point: no one actually 'knew' the composition, at least under the criteria of 'knowing' as defined by the guru. A dancer needs to be able to dance the composition independently, and under all circumstances.

Nicolas Bernstein states, '[P]ractice ... does not consist in repeating the means of solution of a motor problem time after time, but in the process of solving this problem again and again by techniques which we change ... and perfect ... from repetition to repetition' (1967: 134; see also chapter 8). This is exactly what the Guru was exaggerating in this context, requiring students to solve kinaesthetic and rhythmic problems around a set skill, and in each case, assisting an even deeper level of knowing. Or at least he created the conditions

for this kind of individual problem solving. Through his own reflexive teaching strategies, he devised situations and problems that would test his students on their level of knowing.

The guru's testing of his disciples highlights several key points that I will address in this chapter. Coming to know something is not a finite process. As Trevor Marchand points out, 'knowledge is always in process' and 'the state of 'knowing' is one of constant flux, update, and transformation' (Marchand 2010: 11). Dancers do not 'acquire' skills per se, but engage in an ongoing process of rehearsing and repeating a skill, coming to new understandings and a deeper level of knowing. As I have heard from my kathak teachers many times, 'there is no end to learning'. There are infinite ways any one skill can be rehearsed, refined and created.

I examine this multi-layered process of learning and teaching, highlighting its shared nature. Not only is knowledge created by all participants in the community, challenging the conventional dyadic model, but the process is far less unidirectional than often perceived. While the directional flows might privilege the transfer from the adept to the neophyte, efforts to educate also involve students' reaction and teachers' response. Participants engage in an inter-subjective collaborative and creative process. Imitative learning is a base for the transmission of cultural knowledge and enculturation. However, understanding the full process in which we come to 'know' requires a more nuanced look at imitation and repetition in both successes as well as failures. Mimesis is an imaginative process, assisted by more knowledgeable others. The process of learning, getting better, and coming to know the dance involves ongoing problem solving, reflective assessment, and discovery – a process that is at once self-driven and facilitated by the teacher. Reflexive adaptations of the teacher facilitate the students' learning in a process that educational theorists have come to refer to as 'scaffolding'. Pedagogic techniques devised to assist learning are referred to as 'scaffolding'. Building on the work of educational theorist Lev Vygotsky, scholars such as Wood et. al. (1976) coined the term 'scaffolding' to refer to the ways in which neophytes are guided by those with greater skill and expertise. 'Scaffolding' is the aid that allows a learner to perform tasks that are initially beyond his or her ability alone (Downey 2008: 206; see also Bliss et al. 1996). In this ethnographic case, educational devices originally designed to assist learning have since become incorporated into the lineage's corpus of knowledge. Shared knowledge making, evident in scaffolding techniques, produces new forms of knowledge that have their own value.

Understanding Transmission: Problematising Imitation

Majority of the learning happens by watching, listening, observing and riyaz.
(Charlotte Moraga, Senior Disciple of Pt. Chitresh Das)

My inquiry begins with the simple question: how is bodily knowledge passed on and reproduced? What does the process of transmitting the knowledge entail? In movement forms, and especially in dance, students are requested to follow along, copy and replicate the movements of their teacher. Anthropologist and apprentice carpenter Trevor Marchand echoes the words of Moraga above, 'in the beginning, learning is achieved through a variety of ways, through observation, mimesis and repeated exercise' (2008: 245). This is a standard explanation. Educational theorists have long since looked to imitation as an important model for learning. Imitation is often presented as the main mechanism of cultural propagation (see Sperber and Hirschfield 2007) and is relied on heavily in discussions of learning bodily knowledge, especially of dance. In the traditional arts, the idea that a student learns through imitating the master has been presented unproblematically, starting with early ethnographies of south Asian dance forms:

> Dancing of whatever kind is done almost entirely by imitation, the pupil dancing behind an older dancer who has become a teacher, as well as behind or in front of her guru. It seems almost impossible that such intricacy of dance movements and accents should ever be memorised, but it is astonishing to see with what rapidity they feel their way into the long series of complicated movements. Nothing is explained, the dance is gradually absorbed, rather as we might imagine a dog to receive his training, by receiving the impress of his teacher. (Spies and de Zote 2002: 29)

An entire tradition was imagined to have been received through observation, absorption and unproblematic replication without any explanation. This simplistic idea of learning dance has stuck with us and appears in more recent scholarly work as well. On learning kathak dance, Chatterjea writes:

> Intricacies of the art form were traditionally taught through imitation of the master, with technique ingrained into muscle memory by rote repetition though daily practice (riyaz). Perpetuation of the subtleties of style and compositions passed down through the generations was ensured by exact imitation. (Chatterjea 1996: 79)

The precise imitations of the teacher were also believed to secure continuity in tradition, sustaining historic lineages, and giving credence to artists' connections to ancient

ancestors. The complete absorption of a corpus of work legitimated future generations of performers, as they alone held the entire teachings of the predecessors. Understanding the imitative learning process as exact has endorsed this inherited privilege. Absorption and imitation have often been linked to an unthinking subject, subservient to the teacher (see also chapter 10). A picture emerges of a very unidirectional and non-interactive process.

These simplistic descriptions fail to adequately capture the nuanced learning occurring. The long-term goal of apprenticeship was not to imitate the guru. In our lineage, the idea of replicating the guru was regarded by students as entirely unachievable, especially when enacting dramatic elements where the guru's explicit words were, 'do not do as I do' (see chapter 9). My own suggestion of such imitation of the guru was met with his reproach, 'you show me one student who dances like me'. He was absolutely right; there was no one. Individual style was expected from a mature dancer, not the replication of the guru.

Most dancers and scholars would likely agree with this statement, but what some might fail to recognise is that the idiosyncrasies of style are generated from within this early process of 'imitation, absorption and replication'. The very attempts to copy, mimic and reproduce are a rich site for the dynamic and multi-directional relationship that constitutes learning dance. On the surface, it may be, as Bourdieu notes, that 'very often, all you can do is say: 'Look, do what I'm doing'.' (Bourdieu 1990b: 166). But the inherent variation in reproduction that occurs, and the acknowledgement of this by the guru, run counter to ideas regarding simplistic and unproblematic reproduction. Bernstein's (1967) understanding of repetitions as inherently improvisatory is relevant here. Repetitions require individuals to intelligently mediate a solution to immediate motor problems. Hallam and Ingold are similarly critical of any simple notion of imitation:

> Copying or imitation, we argue, is not the simple, mechanical process of replication that is often taken to be, of running duplicates from a template, but entails a complex and ongoing alignment of observation of the model with action in the world. In this alignment lies the work of improvisation. The formal resemblance between the copy and the model is an outcome of this process, and not given in advance. It is a horizon of attainment, to be judged in retrospect. (Hallam and Ingold 2007: 5)

What is reputed to be the basic mechanics of learning actually requires a nuanced attention, assessment and reorientation of the learner's body. Through these micro-processes of cultural transmission, the very stuff of culture is created; improvisational acts occur (see

chapter 8). To investigate this productive alignment of the copy with the model, I begin with a description of the pedagogical strategies devised between teacher and student.

Scaffolding Imitation

In the context of a beginner kathak class, wide-eyed students gaze upon the teacher at the front of the room, attempting to replicate her movements exactly. The teacher on the other hand, aware of the gaze of the students, attempts to be as precise and clean in showing the movements, slowing them down, in order for the novices to get a clear view of what they should be doing with their bodies. The progression of the class relies on this exchange between teacher and student, as the teacher demonstrates, monitors students learning, assesses, gives corrections and reformulates her pedagogical approach.

> *Seibi-di stood before the beginner class and began explaining the pattern, 'tatkar is an eight step pattern', showing the footwork while reciting, 'right, left, right, left - left, right, left, right'. She proceeded to show this very slowly. She faced them. I am certain the students remained unaware of the mirroring process she relied on, producing the kinaesthetic reverse of what she was asking them, a skill teachers must master early on. Students stared intently at her feet. The students then attempted to reproduce the movement, guided by both visual and oral stimulus presented by the teacher. She continued guiding them by emphasis of the pattern through her voice, and through the movement and sound of her feet. Students watch and listen, and then attempt to reproduce the pattern. She continues to emphatically mark steps 1 and 4, 5 and 8, anticipating the errors students will make at these points. Some students respond to the assistance of her voice and the clearly articulate bol pattern[1], others rely on the assistance of her precise and exaggerated demonstration of footwork.*

The specific aids, such as the exaggerated counting, responded directly to the difficulties of the learners, and the perceived limitations in their understanding.   Through such scaffolded learning, pedagogical approaches are designed that 'explicitly provide support for the initial performance of tasks to be later performed without assistance' (Pelisser 1991: 81). The reduced speed, emphatic recitation, and exaggerated demonstrating are tactics used in the initial phases of learning. Assistance can take many forms, drawing on the student's sonic, visual, and kinaesthetic fields; teachers can emphasise aspects of a rhythmic composition in recitation and fluctuations in voice, they isolate a rhythm into smaller more manageable pieces, they may and often do exaggerate the mistakes made by

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[1] Bols refer to the abstract syllables that comprise the language of the dance, drum, and music. While the term can refer to each individual syllable, it can also be used to referred to the complete composition as recited using bols.

Figure16: Pandit Das leads the students in Kolkata in practice of footwork. He plays tabla while doing footwork at the front of the class to guide his students

students, and break down movements into step-by-step instruction, adding specific verbal instruction and directing students to focus on certain aspects of the movement and its initiation (see also Downey 2008). The basic task of mimicry now appears as a product of interventions, based on teachers' pre-understanding of basic problems and difficulties, made in response to the students shifting abilities.

The assessments, diagnosis of problems and corrective measures of a teacher require a honed ability to perceive potential and ability. Scaffolding can take place in and characterise what Vygotsky described as 'the zone of proximal development' – 'the distance between the actual development as determined by independent problem solving and level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers' (1978: 86). The teacher must make individual assessments as to the range of their students' zone of proximal development. The teacher is already always engaged in a process of sensing, predicting and adapting his or her demonstration, explanation or assistance to the perceived capacity of the students. The guru was idealised for his ability to assess accurately the strengths and weaknesses of each dancer, sensing their potential and devising ways to teach to each student. Das, amongst other things, was adept at estimating students' proximal development and

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engaging the emotional dimension of experience to extend this zone beyond students' perceived limitations (see chapters 3 and 10). In this sense, he was able to scaffold students' confidence as much as their actual skills. That is, with his support, they had the confidence to push their zone of proximal development and actively enter it. He was also more willing than most to envision the furthest outer limits of this zone and push each student toward it. The fatigue of students, their resignations, and 'blockages' were no match for the fervent assistance of the guru. Novice teachers appeared more inclined to teach within a closer range of the students' proximal development, while experienced teachers and gurus like Das would take greater risks in pushing their students. One student even spoke of her relationship with Das as being a constant 'push and pull'. An adept teacher is able to push students toward the outer limits of their competency, and perhaps just beyond, and then similarly reel them back in, to a more comfortable space of knowing that reassures the learning process. If a student is continually directed to tasks that are beyond their capacity, the learning process can be easily stalled. Where this process of being pushed beyond one's zone is balanced with a returning to its inner limits, the students' own perception of that range can be extended. On an occasion of learning double pirouettes in a more advanced class, our instructor had us attempt triple pirouettes at one point, despite the fact that most of us were struggling with the doubles. As she noted, the attempt made the doubles seem that much easier.

The Case of Tatkar: Producing Rhythm

A rhythm does not sound right if the strokes are sloppy (see also Lindsay 1996). In tatkar, achieving symmetry of sound and producing eight full sounds for each set is the ideal.[2] In its basic form, the eight-step pattern of tatkar is quite simple. The many things you can do with the pattern are not so simple. In the ten years since I started learning kathak, we have practiced tatkar in every single class I ever attended. There are infinite ways to make the rhythm more difficult, using different speeds, different time cycles, dancing off beat and so on. While most students will initially learn the pattern by watching, at some point, they learn that to progress, they need to draw on sonic channels and pay attention to the sound of the rhythm. Students are usually quite startled when they are singled out and called upon

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[2] Different footwork patterns obviously produce different sounds, some privileging the flat footed strike of the foot (achap), the toes (punje), the heels, the side of the foot, the ball of the foot, or various combinations and permutations of these approaches to the floor. For example, the foot work of 'Ta re ki ta' is usually danced as 'ta' (right full foot) 're' (left heel) 'ki' (right full foot slap) and 'ta' (left heel).

Figure 17: Students in Kolkata practice tatkar, being lead by Pandit Das

to demonstrate footwork. The sound of one's own feet is often different than imagined. To look in the mirror, it appears that the body is enacting the pattern; to hear the collective rhythm suggests a unity in sound. But producing a clean, sharp and consistent rhythm with eight clear sounds is an ideal that is very difficult to perfect, particularly at high speeds.

The physiology of the foot has the power to shape the quality of sound produced. The quality of sound coming from the foot strike has a great deal to do with flatness of the foot. Some dancers seem 'naturally' gifted and easily produce clear, defined sounds, while others, often the more arched foot dancers, struggle to get more sound out of their feet. More often than not, dancers in India come by sonorous sound production more easily than their counterparts in America[3]. While some dancers are exceptions, the material world of India plays into the relation between feet, floors and sound production, lending to a flatter foot, a different relation to the floor, and a more aesthetically pleasing foot slap. A lifetime of traversing the non-carpeted marble or concrete floors typical of Indian homes, spending

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[3] While studying in India I became obsessed with the sound of my feet. Compared to my peers, my feet produced whispers while theirs summoned crisp loud slaps. On several occasions, I observed new young students come to a kathak class in Kolkata who seemed to possess the 'natural' ability to create the sounds I so desperately sought to produce. This incited further attention to the conditions, which produced this predilection. Such taken for-granted elements in the learning of a dance form become more obvious to outsiders like myself, who, unlike the Indian students, did not grow up in that world, and therefore must struggle to reorganise our body in order to achieve the requisite sounds.

a great deal of time barefoot or wearing *chhapals,* open flat-footed sandals, were all aspects of the material world in India that reinforced a particular relation between the floor and the foot, one that was conducive to a better quality of sound from the foot in kathak (see also chapter 4).

The 'how to' of hitting the floor was not often verbally articulated, or very minimally so; the furthest extent of explanation was being told to 'relax the foot'. A tense and tight foot is sure to produce no slap. Shawn Lindsay's study of learning hand drumming contained similar assessment and advice for rhythmic production, 'You have to relax' - an essential aspect of feeling the rhythm is being able to relax your entire body (Lindsay 1996: 208). On the other hand, teachers often gave corrections for the production of the complete pattern, as opposed to individual foot stroke. A dancer can be unable to produce the correct pattern for a number of reasons: foot strike, including differing strengths of the right and left foot and subsequent disparity in sound production from each; not grasping the rhythm and the necessary gaps and pauses; the tendency to speed up rhythms (common even for advanced dancers); or not having the dexterity, the muscle control, or the stamina and strength to lift the foot.

Teachers try to assess students' problems, redirecting focus, suggesting other points of initiation and ways to practice. For each problem a student encounters, teachers swiftly provide a range of scaffolding techniques to assist the neophyte's learning. The tendency for students to 'cheat' the eight sounds, especially the case when students become fatigued and do not lift their feet, resulted in a number of strategies to circumvent this trend. Humorous characterisations and gross exaggerations of such 'cheating' and students' mistakes were the most frequent strategies to bring awareness to these errors. Das would imitate his students with a strained grimace and a display of feigned fatigue; he performed 'ta thei 'Pat' a thei 'pat', an exaggeration of the muffled footwork that dancers produce when the fourth and eighth beats are not sufficiently pronounced. Humour was integral to his approach, especially with beginners, and laughter seemed to have the ability to diffuse students' fatigue and frustration.

One of the most common exercises to improve evenness of footwork was the 'accent' exercise of tatkar. In this exercise, students were asked to accentuate different steps of the tatkar pattern, for example, step two and five, or three and six, producing a very different

sound, but training the dexterity of the feet (see also Bernstein 1996). Teachers learned to look for frequent mistakes and the places in the dance, which were susceptible to 'cheating'. An experienced teacher could predict what would cause difficulty and learned to supplement the difficult parts with planned or improvised measures of intervention. Instructors also became experts at diagnosis. Such interventions always occurred in relation to the students, their successes and their difficulties, highlighting the responsive nature of teaching, and the improvisatory element of devising pedagogic strategies to aid learning.

The Multi-Sensory Modes for Learning Movement

The unique interventions of the teachers, adapted to each student's zone of proximal development, highlight another key point: there is little consistency in the way students learn. Greg Downey discusses the unevenness he observed in students' attempts to learn capoeira, 'Players learn in idiosyncratic fashions and fail to learn in equally idiosyncratic fashion. Teachers do things in diverse ways, some of them more effective for some students than others.' (2010: 33). Attempts to imitate the simple pattern of tatkar do not happen in the same fashion for all: a few will struggle with the rhythm, failing to dance in time; others initiate with the wrong foot, and fail to grasp the repeating pattern; and others cannot produce any sound. Some dancers depend on the external visual stimuli for longer; others can be easily guided by oral recitation. In short, students do not learn uniformly. I return to the class of beginners learning the basic tatkar pattern,

> *The ease with which students reproduce this pattern is highly varied. As the speed increases slightly, the differences in kinaesthetic understandings are obvious. Some pick this up with what appears to be minimal effort, but others struggle to produce the pattern. At first, all of the students rely on the visual model, copying the movements of their teacher. Some of them remain fixated on the moving image before them for their own performance, as if understanding their own body through another. Students' sense of accuracy was regulated by the image they projected themselves toward. A student who caught on easily would be able to shift focus, often toward one's own reflection, staring at one's own feet, or her own mirrored image. Others may stare elsewhere, at the face of their teacher for some sign of affirmation, or perhaps at their own body image, or facial expression. Seibi would encourage them to recite the pattern, eventually teaching the correct bol pattern that accompanied the footwork, 'ta thei thei tat a thei thei tat'. This complicated matters for some. Some dancers could rely on sound and rhythm as a corrective, and the bol pattern was an adequate guide. One student kept muddling the footwork. Seibi danced directly in front of her, gesturing emphatically with her hands toward the foot that should be striking. Meanwhile, next to her, a student was able to confidently recite, do the footwork, and gaze gently at her*

own reflection. I surmise that she must have had previous dance training, making my own assessment based on her assured posture and the ease of production of her movements. (field notes 2008)

Dancers rely unevenly on external visual stimuli to assist their learning process. For some it is a life line, and an extension of their understanding of their own body. For others, external visual stimuli provide a frame of reference that is independent of their self. But providing visual models is a tool in the early stages of learning, and attention soon comes to rest on sound production.

We all learn to learn differently. We hear, see, feel and move differently. Diversity in learning was evident in the multitude of ways that students learn a simple skill like tatkar: some stare at my feet, some stare at their own feet, some close their eyes, some rely on recitation, others take months before they begin to understand the necessity of recitation. Such preferences for learning in particular ways also evidence unique individual body histories. Students' own learning exhibited preferences for different sensory channels: some learned better through visual representations, others through sonic representations. We apprehend through our own sensory fields, which are engaged and activated in disproportionate ways, some of us more dependent on one field, or different combinations of sensing. Our own attempts to imitate are guided by our own culturally-informed sensory order, crafted through our own participation in everyday and specialised domains, such as 'growing up in America', 'growing up in India', studying ballet, or learning tabla. The order is hierarchically informed, with some senses more developed than others, and is variable according to different training regimes (see also Classen 1993; Geurts 2002; Howes 1991; Stoller 1989). The sensory order is fluid; at any given moment, one sensory form might dominate, making others the background. Idiosyncratic sensing bodies must engage in particular methods of problem-solving in order to learn kathak. How do I get my body to do *that*? The answer relies on our own unique way of apprehending, and the ensuing translation from the external source to the self. Apprehending movement through sound was a critical skill, and re-orienting students' sensory fields toward this task was paramount in the learning process.

Kathak dance, like other rhythmic based forms such as tap or flamenco, privileges sound production as much as the production of a visual image. Dancers are not simply guided by the music; dancers create the music and rhythm with the sound of their feet. We learn

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dance through rhythm first, learning to recite compositions and mark time with our hands. The corresponding movements come after. Once students come to understand the necessity of grasping the rhythm, apprehending the movement becomes far simpler. In theory, oral recitation is a precursor to dancing the composition in kathak. The reproduction of the rhythm occurs through imitation, as the student repeats that which they have heard, mimicking the sounds as closely as possible. George Ruckert describes this process for music as one of 'hear, repeat, practice, repeat, hear again, practice' (2004: 35). Ethnomusicologist Bonnie Wade states, 'most music is learned aurally – both by intentional listening and by osmosis, that is, by absorbing what we hear around us'. (Wade 1979: 17). In the case of grasping the rhythm, elements do appear to be more automatic, and learned through osmosis, in comparison to learning other skills. Trevor Marchand notes, 'while some aspects of imitation are hard-earned, others proceed more automatically and entirely 'without theory'' (Marchand 2010: 13). Rhythms have a way of penetrating our bodies, getting stuck there, and re-emerging quite effortlessly. Finding a rhythm 'stuck in your head' after leaving class was common amongst students, whereby any effort to dispense with it was futile. Another senior di-di explained how after so many years away from kathak she came back to find that she still knew all the rhythmic compositions of years earlier. For this reason, rhythm provides an easily accessible mode for transmission and remembering. Every composition that we learn, we first learn through recitation of the rhythmic *bols*. While marking the main beat of the overarching time cycle or *tal* with gestures of the hand, we learn to recite a composition, 'Dha ta ghe tun gha, dha ghe dhin ghe dha, dha dhin dha, dhet dha kita dha, ta ka tun gha….'[4]. It is through first apprehending the rhythm, that one should come to know the movement.

Recitation, for a dancer, can be viewed as a standardised scaffolding practice, facilitating knowledge of the rhythm that, eventually, is not vocalised in the moment of expert performance. While a dancer would present a composition first by reciting it, then demonstrating the rhythm with the movements of their body, a dancer does not typically recite the *bol*s while dancing, although he or she might be rehearsing those phrases silently while dancing. Ideally, the rhythm is expressed by the body. When the novice gains competency, 'scaffolding is incrementally withdrawn or 'faded'' (Downey 2008: 207; see also Pea 2004). and recitation is not needed to guide the danced composition. Having another person recite for you is a scaffolding tactic used quite frequently. It serves as what

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[4] Bols are not even in stress or temporality – the unevenness is how they gain their specificity and the possibility of being remembered and mimicked

Figure 18: Das leads student in Kolkata in recitation

Bruner describes as 'a vicarious form of consciousness', that is sustained 'until such time as the learner is able to master his own action though his own consciousness and control' (Bruner 1986:123). However, due to the difficulty of staying in *tal* (time cycle) while dancing rhythmic compositions, recitation is a tool that is relied on heavily, even on stage. Das criticised the trend of recitation support for a soloist. He argued that, as an assisted mode of performing, it is tantamount to cheating in some sense, as it removes the necessity for the dancer to pay attention to the overarching time cycle within which he or she is dancing, making the performance of skills on stage far easier.

In order to further explore the intersection of sensory modes, I draw on my own difficulties in learning to apprehend movement through sound. Since many beginning students rely on an external visual stimulus, teachers try to redirect students' attention to the rhythm, to the sound of their own voice reciting the rhythm, and eventually to the sound of their feet. As learning progresses, an understanding of the musical system, time cycles, and the quality of sound prevails. Some students might arrive with this sensory mode of attention, privileging the sonic, but this was certainly not my case. Trained in modern dance, I relied heavily on visual stimuli to guide my learning in early stages. For me, replicating the visual image I saw was easier than reproducing the sound. My teacher would constantly remind me to recite, as we were advised: 'if you can't recite it, you can't dance it'.

Dependent on the visual channels for my own kinaesthetic learning, it took me years to begin to understand my own biased approach to learning, and how my approach hindered my understanding of the dance. That I apprehend a movement visually, easily transferring the image into my kinaesthetic field, is a preference that is a product of my own training history and a way to learn that has been learned. That another may apprehend the movement first in sound, and transfer it to the kinaesthetic field, means that we approach a similar result in extremely different ways.

Students come to classes with a range of skills, techniques and repertoires; those trained in music are often adept at understanding the rhythms and time cycles, while producing the appropriate postures or visually appearance might be more of a struggle. The contrast is obviously not as clear-cut as a visual-sonic divide. We develop our abilities to sense and perceive in disproportionate and diverse ways. While biases in learning may be constructed and highlighted through previous training in specialised artistic fields, such as dance or music, students, regardless of previous training, still demonstrate unevenness in their access to different sensory channels for learning. I recall being startled by the difficulties some students had in perceiving their own bodies by looking at them,

> *Rachna made a lot of corrections in positioning. People were trying to bend too much from the waist to get the right angle, producing all kinds of awkward shapes. Some were unable to discern what their body was doing, despite the verbal corrections. Rachna would have me hold a pose and then encourage the students try to fix their own posture, correct themselves by looking at the way I did the position and then try to make their bodies look the same. Some could not comprehend by way of sight or feel. In kathak, the body does not lean off its axis; rather, the arms angle, giving the illusion of a lean. Despite verbal instruction to not lean, some students could not kinaesthetically understand this; the only method seemed to be physically manipulating the body into the right shape. (field notes 2009)*

Asking students to put their arm in the same position as mine, replicating the same angle, a seemingly simple task, produced an endless variety of positions. Some students were unable to perceive angles. The teacher would request, 'look, put your arm like mine'. Some beginners still struggled to replicate such simple tasks. Their perception of the visual image did not relate to their own body positioning, and some students needed to be physically manipulated. Instructors would simply move their arm into the right position[5].

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[5] The practice of physically manipulating a students' body into the right position was quite common in kathak dance, a practice earlier supported by the lack of mirrors for personalised visual corrections. Physical manipulation of students also privileges touch over gaze, a practice that is often suspect in forms of teaching.

Figure 19: Pandit Das adjust a young dancer's hastak or hand gesture

Over the years I have slowly been retrained to give preference to the sonic field, to the
aurality of the dance, and to knowing through rhythm. But this is not my intuitive mode of
perception. For ballet or modern dancers, accustomed to spending long hours staring at
their own bodies in the mirrors at the front of the class, dancers spend much time trying to
match their own form to those of others. A dancer becomes very adept at grasping a visual
representation and reproducing it as her own kinaesthetic action. In several instances in
India, in attending other schools, I observed the practice whereby a guru would sit at the
front of class, teaching from a seated position, with almost all corrections made through
sound. In un-mirrored dance studios, dancers relied more heavily on apprehending
movements through sound, through the language of *bols*.   Corrections or criticism of a
movement were referred to through the corresponding *bol*, and not isolated as a movement.
In another instance in India, when the teacher did get up to demonstrate, she did so with
her back to the students, in a mirrorless studio. While ideals of beauty and elegance are
primary, apprehending the exact visual image of a model and learning to copy a visual
representation were not. This left considerable room for the emergence of individual style

in approaches to movement. In these examples, the link between the material features of space and the tradition itself is revealed; the addition of mirrors to studios, a trend also evident in India, has certainly affected pedagogical approaches to the dance, and with them, brought subtle changes to the form.

Learning *Tal*

In kathak, the desired aesthetic requires mastery over sonic and visual production, but it is correct execution of the rhythm that is most indicative of success. Not executing the adequate rhythm is the one point that clearly defines failure. 'Bringing *sam',* or completing the dance composition on the correct beat of the rhythmic cycle or *tal* is a defining feature of kathak.

> *The momentum of the composition seems to build, as the dancers footwork becomes even more vigorous; the tabla player echoes this heightening intensity with the fast and bold strokes of the tabla. They are working together, in the same time cycle, but the precariousness of their relationship creates a curious state of bewilderment and pleasure. The dancer begins her sequence of chakkars, or turns, 'ek, do, tin....', the suspense of an approaching end is palpable. Some audience members know and sense sum's arrival, marking the cycle with emphatic gestures of the hand. And then, the crescendo of music and dance comes to its final resolution on sum. Musician and dancer arrive, in an abrupt yet delightful synchronisation of music and dance, creating a suspended moment, leaving the dancer in absolute stillness. This is 'sam'.*

One of the most difficult aspects of kathak is dancing in *tal*, the time cycle of definite rhythmic beats, which is the background structure for any composition. In kathak, the most commonly used *tal* is tintal, a sixteen-beat cycle (which most closely resembles a 4/4 time signature in western music).[6] Rhythmic compositions must begin and end on the first beat of the time cycle, known as *sam*. In sixteen-beat tintal, a dancer begins to dance on the first beat of the cycle, and concludes on the seventeenth beat, which is effectively the first beat of the next cycle. Compositions can constitute anywhere from one to an indefinite number of cycles, but must always come to closure on *sam*. Dancers must always keep a

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[6] Neophytes will often dance in tin tal for several years before progressing to more difficult tals. The even vibhags or sections of tin tal, with four sections of four beats, makes tin tal evenly divisible and easier kinaesthetically to understand. Other commonly used tals are rupak (seven beats), dhamar (fourteen beats) (see diagram). Less commonly used, but used extensively with the most senior dancers, were 5 ½, 9 ½ and 13. For the first few years, dancers will dance mostly within the sixteen-beat cycle and utilise the different tempos or laya of any tal: vilambit laya (slow speed), madhya laya (medium speed), and drut laya (fast speed).

nascent awareness of where they are in the *tal*, an exceedingly difficult task when the body is fully engaged in the very physical act of dancing.

Compositions conclude on *sam* after a rhythmic pattern, known as a *tihai*, is produced. A *tihai* is a rhythmic pattern that repeats itself three times, foreshadowing the resolution on *sam*. One dancer described to me her panic at the thought of being on stage and 'searching for *sam*'. The crescendos of rhythm and dance that lead up to this final moment of stillness, when a dancer lands on *sam*, are one of the more aesthetically pleasing aspects of experiencing compositions. Arrival on *sam* is necessary for success of the composition, and inability to do so leaves the rhythm incomplete. The importance of this skill is demonstrated by the popular practice of repeating a composition during performance should one end off *tal*. Dancers repeat compositions, often until they perform correctly by landing on *sam*.[7] The dance lore circulating at the time of fieldwork held that one of the most accomplished kathak dancers had recently attempted a composition on stage eight times before ending on *sam* successfully in a difficult 8 ½ beat *tal*. Because of its inherent difficulty, a number of scaffolding techniques have been invented, formalised and incorporated into the curriculum to assist in understanding *tal*. In one case, the pedagogical tactic has been so refined that the technique has become the signature of the lineage and is now a part of performance repertoire. I describe this technique in the next section.

In early stages of learning, students learn to mark *tal* with gestures of their hand, reciting every composition with the designated cycle.[8] The simultaneous vocalisation of the rhythm and the gestural production of the time cycle facilitate a better understanding of where the rhythm falls in relation to the main beat. As rhythms become more complex,

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[7] The common occurrence might be startling for many audience members accustomed to the sanitised and forcibly perfected choreographic dance numbers evident in many dance traditions. Should a mistake occur, it would certainly not be acknowledged, but rather, a dancer would likely proceed with the hope that the mistake went unnoticed. In the case of kathak, while many audience members today would likely not be aware of small rhythmic imprecisions, the dancer often acknowledges it and repeats the composition. The frequency of repetition is testament to the difficulty of dancing on tal. This difficulty is the reason many performers choose to have someone reciting their bols as this guides them, freeing their consciousness from focusing on this more difficult aspect, and tending to other aspects of their performance.

[8] Dancers and musicians learn to mark these differing tals using the moving gestures of hands and fingers. Typically the left hand is held open-faced while the right hand marks the beats of the tal by clapping or tapping parts of the right hand on the left. Divisions of the tal are marked clearly by the clapping pattern. In the case of tin tal, beat one is indicated by the right hand clapping the palm of the left, beats two to four by a different finger of the right hand. Beat five is marked by the right clapping the fingers of the left, with fingers following for beats six to eight. Beat nine is referred to as khali and is marked by an 'empty' clap, where the right hand marks the air. The ninth beat is referred to as khali or 'empty' because of the closed sound emanating from the tabla at this point in the theka. It is also represented by the sound 'na' as opposed to 'dha' or 'tete'.

falling off the beat or bearing awkward relationships to the main beat of the *tal*, maintaining a steady *tal* becomes extraordinarily difficult. Despite students' best attempts, landing on *sam* often causes great difficulty. As a composition progresses, especially a difficult composition that falls off the beat or subdivides the main beat into uneven divisions, proceeding with attention to the external pulse can require a great deal of concentration. And when the dancer's consciousness is simultaneously directed toward the control of everything from eyebrow movements to finger gestures, the task is extremely challenging.

One of the most frequent mistakes of a kathak student is to gradually increase the speed of the composition. Momentum generated while the body is fully engaged in the act of dancing propels the dancer forward and inclines her to dance faster, recite faster or turn faster. As we dance, muscles engage, blood courses through our veins, neural pathways ignite and we move our bodies; the inclination for most of us is to gradually speed up. Maintaining tempo or *laya* during these moments is crucial.[9] Dancers can sometimes sense they are *be-tala*, or off *tal*, and will be able to compensate sometime in the composition to get back on *tal* and finish on *sam*.

In class, teachers often pull the students back, slowing them down, and helping them to stay in *tal*. The instructor often does this by loudly reciting the *bol*s of the composition at the correct speed, or emphasising the beats of the time cycle with her voice, or manjira (hand cymbals) so that dancers will understand that their dance has come off *tal*. Other tools such as metronomes or *tal malas*[10] are used by students, providing them an external source that clearly marks the steady pulse. Students unaccompanied by a teacher or musician rely on these tools for gaining competency in *tal* and *laya*. Ideally, a musician, such as tabla or sarod player, will keep the *laya* and mark the steady beat of the *tal*, giving a frame of reference for the dancer. However, an external source does not ensure one will stay on *tal*. The external reference assists, but a dancer still needs to be secure in her knowledge of the composition and the relation it bears to *tal* so that she maintains accuracy in rhythm, and comes to conclusion on the *sam*.

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[9] A dancer may choose to increase the speed of the laya and can indicate this to the musicians, but once dancing, on stage or in practice, a dancer should maintain the same consistent tempo, despite the rigorous footwork or pirouettes that she maybe executing within the established tempo.

[10] Tal malas are electronic devices that are capable of keeping a range of tals, in adjustable tempos and melodies.

Attending to the *tal* in every moment of the dance is a mode of attention that needs to be cultivated, especially in the early stages. When dancers are learning to apprehend bodily movements, their attention often becomes preoccupied with execution of the bodily movement on its own terms. A dancer should theoretically always have some idea of where one is within the time cycle. Tactics and games are devised to cultivate this awareness, both in and out of the classroom. A senior student instructed us to do such things as attempt to carry on a conversation, while 'keeping *tal*' in your head. She explained this while simultaneously demonstrating the task, carrying on a conversation, which ended with her counting in the last beats of *tal*, '…te te dhin dhin dha Dha', implying that for the duration of our conversation, she had kept track of the the steady pulse of the *tal*. The training is a strategy designed to reorient the body, and directs its modes of attention to rhythm, sound and feeling. 'It is a reorganisation of corporeal schemas which enables a fuller capacity for participation in percussive music' (Lindsay 1996: 206). In the dance studio, whether on the dance floor or sitting and watching, students are encouraged to always keep *tal* by marking the pulse with hand gestures. Das would constantly come up with challenges that would test our ability to keep *tal*,

> *Dada requested that Antara and I recite different tals together while dancing the same composition, one of us in tin tal (sixteen beat), and another in jap tal (ten beat). The composition came to a resolution after eighty beats, such that it took five cycles of tin tal, and eight cycles of jap tal. Dada said this would get us used to hearing different things while we each recited one tal. He used to recite keeping a different tal on each hand; we were told some gurus could keep a different tal with every limb.*

Students were reminded that understanding and working in *tal* was directly related to their ability to concentrate, and such games tested our focus. Success in dance was often equated to success in life outside of the dance sphere. Cultivating the ability to concentrate in dance was promoted as beneficial to our achievement in life.

Scaffolding to Performance: The Case of Kathak Yoga

One of the most elaborate pedagogical strategies designed to assist dancers in practice, concentration, and ultimately performance is Das's own innovation of 'kathak yoga'. Kathak yoga is a form of self-accompaniment. In the most basic form, the dancer recites the *bol*s of the *tal*, or the *theka* - the basic *bol* pattern or drum stroke which identifies a

particular *tal* (Das et al. 2001: 88)[11], while dancing the rhythmic composition. For example, the *theka* recited by Das's dancers' for the sixteen beat cycle of tin *tal* is as follows:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Dha	dhin	dhin	dha	Dha	dhin	dhin	dha	Na	tin	tin	ta	Te	te	dhin	dhin dha

The second line is the *theka* of tin *tal*. It is recited or sung with an accompanying *lehra* or melody while the dancer executes the bol composition with their body and feet. Senior students often play manjira or hand cymbals that mark the main beat and the micro beats of the *tal*. Several of the more advanced students also play the *tal* on harmonium while dancing, and Das himself plays the tabla while both singing and dancing.

'Kathak yoga', as Das called it, was developed for practice, to offer self-accompaniment and to hone the dancer's attention to *tal*. Ideally it would also prepare them to dance with live musicians[12]. Even before my first introduction to Das, I learned of his recent innovation. Upon meeting him, I came to understand the intensity with which he pursued the teaching of this technique; in every class, workshop, performance and discussion, the concept of kathak yoga would be explained and performed by Das and by the senior disciples. This technique, while initially developed to aid the solo dancer in practice has since become a skill in and of itself, to be performed on stage, and has come to mark the distinctiveness of this lineage.

In order to perform kathak yoga, the rhythmic composition, for example a footwork pattern, must be so durably installed within the repertoire of the dancer that she is able to perform it with little conscious reflection, enabling other body parts, hands or vocal chords, to tend to the simultaneous production of the steady beat. A dancer's conscious

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[11] Every tal can also be counted in numbers, for example, in tin tal, we count from one to sixteen, this is done in both English and Hindi (regardless of locality). Reciting tal is most appropriately marked by the corresponding bol pattern. Every tal can be recited using the language of the drums, bols, the mnemonic syllables that have come to represent the sound of the tabla or pakhawaj drums.

[12] Sarah Morelli writes that kathak yoga was initially developed in the American context as Das, like many kathak dancers abroad, found it difficult to find consistent musical accompaniment for practice and for class (2007). The absence of such musical accompaniment left a gap in students learning as they would not develop an understanding of how to dance within tal. Furthermore, Das, who used to teach all the classes, and who used to sit at the front of the class playing tabla to accompany his students found that standing and playing tabla enabled him to dance while he taught, leading footwork for the class and also practicing himself.

awareness is freed up for more complicated tasks, such as the layering of recitation, singing and playing an instrument.

The focus and concentration needed to perform multiple rhythms are espoused as its benefits, and this feature is aligned with more spiritual pursuits. Das explained the ultimate union of the mind and body in coordinating these tasks through the rhetoric of yogic philosophy, drawing parallels to the great yogis and *sadhus* of ancient India[13]. The technique promotes the union of the body and mind, and thus offers the same benefits of yogic practice:

> Classical yoga aims at stopping the constant, inward chatter of the mind and the mind's tendency to be perpetually distracted by the senses. Yoga recognises that the bodily organism is naturally oriented to the outside world and is distracted every moment by the data that the senses continue to receive from it. One's natural condition, therefore, is to be attentive to the world of matter and inattentive to the inner world of spirit. Yogic techniques aim at reorienting the individuals so that they may glimpse their inner, eternal nature and thus enjoy immortal calm –what yoga calls samadhi, a trancelike state that completely transcends individuality, ego, and finite material existence…The yogi seeks, through various techniques, to master every bodily function so that the body no longer works 'by itself', as it were, but is controlled by the yogi. As long as the body and the senses are in control, final calm will be impossible; thus yoga aims at taming the body by controlling it with the mind, which itself is then annihilated. (Kinsley 1993: 91)

The kathak yoga practitioner similarly seeks to gain mastery of all bodily functions for a transcendence or experience of *bhakti* or the devotional feeling that comes through dance. Kathak yoga was explained publicly, in programs, and videos:

> Dancers perform three contrasting concepts – complex rhythmic compositions with the feet and body, continuous singing of the rhythmic cycle and playing an instrument (harmonium or manjira). By integrating intense cardiovascular and weight-bearing exercises with sophisticated rhythmical mathematics, the dancer perform a perfect union between mind, body and spirit, with the goal to achieve pure bhakti through the dance. (Chhandam YouTube Video 2007)

Kathak yoga proposes to provide the opportunity for a state of complete devotion and oneness through dance. The elaboration of 'kathak yoga' tapped both into ideas of ancient India's spiritual and ascetic practices and the Californian market of spiritual, holistic and New Age practices. Many of the practical adaptations that Das made through living in

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[13] Sadhu is a Sanskrit term for a holy man.

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America, and then subsequently returning to India, would become integral components of the kathak philosophy that he taught. Das came up with practical solutions to real problems, and then was able to rearticulate them through a transcultural lens of Hinduism and American liberal ideals, giving them greater significance within these intersecting cosmologies.

Beginning as an educational device designed to assist students in understanding *tal*, to assist Das practically in teaching classes, and to adapt to the lack of available accompaniment, kathak yoga has since become the hallmark of the lineage, taught to and performed by all dancers. Claims to making 'history' were often heard. While it began as a tool for personal practice, as Das developed the practice, it became clear that it was a remarkable feat on its own, and it slowly made its way to the stage. Das first presented a portion of kathak yoga in 1991 in his production of 'Sadhana'. Kathak yoga has now become a part of almost all his performances, and even in the traditional solo he will present a short section of kathak yoga. His senior disciples have since integrated kathak yoga into their own traditional solos, introducing it into the program as the 'inventions of the guru', much as Das presents 'the train' as an invention of his guru.[14] The professional company also presented 'Shabd', a group choreography with company members singing, playing manjira and harmonium as they danced[15]. In Das's classes, it is no longer sufficient to simply dance a composition. One now has to dance it with kathak yoga[16].

The evolution of kathak yoga in this lineage marks the interactive nature of teaching, revealing how new knowledge is produced in the process. In this case, the contributions were so substantial that what was once a pedagogic tool is now the preferred mode of practice, and a highlighted aspect of the lineage. An invention driven by the artist himself

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[14] Das also includes 'innovations of the guru' in his performance, often performing 'the train,' as many of his fans would know. The piece replicates the sounds of a trains' journey through the sounds of his feet and ghungru, a piece created and taught to him by his guru, Pandit Ram Narayan Misra. Already we see an obvious example of how creativity and innovation are incorporated into the structure of a performance.

[15] See the following link for an excerpt from the Chitresh Das Dance Company's 'Shabd', which features kathak yoga. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNOLB5AJS6Y

[16] Dancers also recognise some of the inherent flaws in relying too heavily on this practice. One of the main errors is that in self-accompanying, it becomes easy to change the tempo willingly, and without an external source to regulate, one can continue to dance in tal, but consistently increase the speed. In several instances, both in the classroom and on stage Das or other senior instructors will intervene in a students' demonstration of kathak yoga, slowing the tempo down as they observe its gradual and steady increase. Sometimes students are left to their own devices and end up near the end of composition with a laya that has increased so dramatically that they are incapable of completing the technical components, for example, a series of chakkars or pirouettes at that speed. Seibi Lee also explained that rather than developing the capacity to split one's focus, some students find other strategies to perform kathak yoga, such as identifying markers and memorising the pattern of the rhythm in relation to the tal (see Morelli 2007).

took shape in relation to his students, and his responsive shifts to the needs of the students, as well as to the environment. The invention, integration and supersedence of kathak yoga highlights the shared production of knowledge, and the manner in which the process of teaching and scaffolding creates in itself new knowledge.

'Knowing How' and 'Knowing That'

Other adaptive strategies for teaching have also become formalised within the school, particular in an emphasis on explanation and translation. Many aspects of kathak are necessarily made explicit in the process of migration, in being called to teach people who do not have other forms of knowledge available to them from other contexts, such as everyday life in India. Being able to explain what you are doing has become a necessary skill, both for the teacher and performer of kathak, as they seek new ways to communicate the complexities of the art. Propositional content assists students and audience members unfamiliar with the dance and with its culture of origin, allowing them to bypass some of the implicit knowledge, and facilitate a temporary understanding of some aspects of the dance (see also chapter 9). In both contexts, such explanations are a form of scaffolding, to assist student's capacity to perform a skill or understand a necessary form of embodiment, or to facilitate an otherwise less accessible aesthetic appreciation of kathak[17]. Skills, techniques and dispositions that once existed in the performative and non-propositional sense, are now developing discursive dimensions.

Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between these two levels, discussing 'understanding' and 'knowledge'; the former is a bodily form of appropriation, the latter entails a conceptual representation and a level of abstraction (1962). Others have similarly tried to differentiate between ways of knowing. The differences between being able to 'do' and being able to 'say' reflect Gilbert Ryle's distinction between 'knowing how' and 'knowing that' (1984). Elaborating on Ryle's distinction, Mark Harris describes, '[knowing how] is the knowledge of a skill, how to put something into action; it is tacit and situation-dependent, performative and non-propositional. "Knowing that" is propositional knowledge (theoretical or factual), since it conveys meaning, is based on rules or laws, and is not dependent on context' (2007: 3). In some cases, a differentiation between theoretical and performative knowledge is made in Chhandam, and the two ways of knowing are

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[17] Today, Indian audiences may not necessarily understand the art form any better, and are also the intended recipients of the extensive exegesis around the dance.

distinguished and valued independently of one another. I provide several examples of the rise of discursive knowledge and the growing emphasis on analytical ways of knowing in Chhandam.

In Chhandam America, teachers often ask new students a question such as, 'if you wanted to do four sets of *tatkar*, how many times would you have to step per beat of the *tal*?' Initially, questions like this are bewildering to most students, but they quickly become adept at using the terminology and their mathematical skills. Kathak in Chhandam is always discussed as being highly mathematical. The answer to the question would require the student to multiply the four sets of *tatkar* by the eight steps that are within each step, to come up with thirty-two complete steps, which then must be danced within a sixteen beat cycle, requiring the dancer to take two steps per every beat in order to complete four sets or *avratans* of *tatkar*. Theoretical knowledge of *tal* and other aspects of kathak was certainly a part of many schools of kathak. In Chhandam America, it was taking a position of rising prominence.

The explanations of what dancers were doing were rehearsed and became a skill on their own. Dancers were often asked to explain what skill another dancer executed, having to explain the footwork, or the rhythmic pattern, often a bewildering task. Das often asked, 'Do the students know what I am doing? Explain to them what I am doing'. On one occasion, after a display of virtuosic footwork, a senior teacher began trying to explain. Das interrupted, saying, 'we are singing – holding the notes. And then there is the speed – you have to get the speed, while maintaining *tal*'. The explanations accessed another dimension of knowledge, more accessible to most, and as such, the discursive elaborations were usually attempts to create intrigue, mystify and appeal to new audiences. Dancer Antara Bhardwaj went as far as presenting the mathematical equation for a *tihai* in her solo performance: '$3x + 2y = z$, where x is the number of beats per section, y is your gap between the sections, and in *vilambit laya* (slow speed) it is greater than 0 and less than or equal to 1, and z is the total number of beats that you are trying to fit the *tihai* within'. She had previously been queried by her family and friends as to how kathak was 'mathematical', resulting in the explicit equation.

Did the verbal articulations, mathematical explanations, and propositional content[18] assist students to perform, and ultimately to come to 'understand' the skills, in the embodied sense? The relation between 'knowledge' and 'understanding' in enskilment was certainly dependent on the skill, the learner and the context. What works for one student may not necessarily work for another. In the case of learning *bol* compositions, after reciting and marking the *tal* with our hands, dancers were often asked to explain in mathematical terms aspects of a composition, for example, how many beats are the gaps within a *tihai*, or from which *matra* did a *palla* of the *tihai* begin?[19] Some students claimed that such theoretical knowledge of the compositions assisted their own bodily understandings, but was never sufficient on their own. Yet, this kind of knowing of the *tihai* was not a prerequisite for the kind of knowing that enabled one to dance. A teacher explained that Pandit Das himself might actually not be able to explain which *matra* each *palla* started from where, but that for him, it was not necessary as it was 'in his blood'. In this sense, the ability to 'know that' was assumed to be irrelevant for a master like Das, whose 'knowing how' was so superior, that it superseded any forms of propositional knowledge of the dance. In the above example, while the ability to theoretically explain the mathematics of the composition was not necessary for being able to execute the *tihai*, it might assist a student to get back on *tal* should the student lose the place in the cycle. In this sense, propositional knowledge did serve corrective measures.

Bourdieu also questions this relationship in a short reflection on dance:

> One of the questions raised is certainly that of knowing whether one has to go through the medium of language in order to make the body understand certain things, whether when you talk to the body in words, it is the words which are scientifically correct which are best able to make the body understand, or whether, sometimes, words which have nothing to do with an adequate description of what one wants to communicate are not better understood by the body. (Bourdieu 1990b: 167)

In some cases, the words might facilitate another understanding of the bodily action, but did not lend to the production of the action itself. Whether or not certain articulate forms

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[18] Verbal explanations as described here are separate from the act of recitation, which is the vocalisation of the rhythm, usually while marking tal. Recitation, on many levels, does facilitate a bodily understanding, and enables students to dance the composition, as one enacts and embodies the rhythm through voice and hand gestures. Recitation is already a form of performative understanding.

[19] Tihais are rhythmic patterns that repeat themselves three times – each of the three segments is known as a palla. Dancers are asked to explain what matra or beat of the tal each of the pallas begins from, or how long of a gap exists between each palla.

of knowledge were useful in making the body understand was also subject to individuals' capacities for learning and knowledge transfer. Some dancers easily grasped theoretical and mathematical explanations, and could notate rhythms flawlessly, while others who grasped them kinaesthetically failed to produce effective discursive representations of them. In the actual performance, the explanations, meant to develop a deeper understanding of the body's ability to do, necessarily fell away.

Learning to perform chakkars, or the heel-based pirouettes of kathak, was a skill that was perfected through endless repetitions. Comparing traditional teachings with American movement training Chatterjea observed 'a lack of verbal analysis occurs in traditional teaching, with dance technique transmitted through visual channels, so that the dancer almost never learns to think in terms of muscularity, weight shift, energy manipulation, or finding his or her centre'' (Chatterjea, 1996: 75-6). Chhandam teachers in both India and America have found ways to verbally assist in the production of turns. The elaborated discursive dimension of the dance was a stronger feature of Chhandam America, best understood against a backdrop that privileged analytical, verbal and discursive articulations. Furthermore, thinking 'in terms of muscularity, weight shift, energy manipulation, or finding his or her centre' was pervasive in the wider field of dance in California, where kathakas also went to yoga and pilates, had previously trained in ballet and were engaged in other physical disciplines. This language was available to us, and we drew on it to guide and be guided. While the everyday Indian context that makes things more easily understood is lost in America, dancers gain a context in which certain channels of explicit instruction and understanding are much more robust. Teachers in America engaged a slightly different vocabulary, talking about alignment, 'core strength', 'tightening the core', 'finding the centre', and a range of postural terms drawn from other prevalent bodily disciplines such as pilates, yoga and western dance forms. Corrections from their Indian counterparts were directed to specific body parts, 'shoulders down, 'open the arms', but less about use of the 'core' or 'centre.' The notions of 'core' or 'centre' are in themselves a kind of cultural construct or poetic way of talking about the body. The systematic breaking down and analysis of techniques proliferated as an approach in an environment where foreign bodies met an aesthetic way of moving that was unlike any they had known before.

The adaptive strategies of teaching in the western context, particularly evident in the need for verbalisation and analysis, engage a more normative Western approach to learning. Marglin states, 'western tradition is preoccupied with analytic and theoretical ways of knowing, episteme, devaluing and representing practical and contextual knowledge' (Palsson 1994: 903). Tamara Kohn describes a similar trend in her study of the Japanese martial art of Aikido,

> In America and Europe and Australia, however, there are many dojos where aikido technique is endlessly explained and described and analysed verbally on the mat. Students then expect to be 'taught' and wait for explicit instruction that is only partly embodied. This leads students often repeating such verbalisations in their training, correcting one another, stopping the flow, standing around arguing over what they saw their teacher do, or just chatting to each other. (Kohn 2011: 79)

Yet, even in this new environment, the excess of verbal instruction and guided interventions were of assistance, however, only as an aid to initial execution. The ability to perform the pattern relies on forgetting these background corrections as kinaesthetic understanding developed, one that existed independently of any attempts to objectify it in words. The explicit articulation of rules is merely a step on the path to full knowing. Tim Ingold argues that the novice becomes skilled not through the acquisition of rules and representations but at the point where he or she is able to dispense with them:

> Rules and representations…are like a map of an unfamiliar territory, which can be discarded once you have learned to attend to features of the landscape, and you can place yourself in relation to them. The map can be a help in the beginning to know the country, but the aim is to learn the country, not the map. (Ingold 1993: 462 cited in Palsson 1994: 903)

Certainly, the aim for a dancer was to dispense with the rules, representations, and objectifications. This striving was never truer than in the case of improvisation, believed to be the essence of the form. Improvisation relied entirely on an embodied understanding that was independent of analytic and theoretical knowledge. In the case of improvisation, propositional or discursive reflection was a hindrance to improvisation. I elaborate the case of *upaj* or improvisation, translatable as 'from the heart', in the next chapter. Even the term *upaj* reflects a distancing from intellectualisation and mental representation.

While Das engaged in discursive techniques, his emphasis on return to practical and contextual knowledge reminded us that the 'rules' were not important, it was the 'know-

how', and the being able to 'do' rather than to 'say'. Indeed, excessive questions and analysis seemed to be an irritant for Das, partly for the reason that they engaged a pedagogy of the western intellectual that was not necessary to the art. For Das, quite simply, what was important was 'how you dance' – 'let me see them dance' he would say, and in the end, the quality always came back to this embodied and tacit way of knowing.

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The guru-shishya relationship is not linear; it's a very reciprocal experience. As the shishya learns from the guru, the guru learns from the shishya too – it goes both ways. (Charlotte Moraga 2010)

Successful bodily iterations also produce their own knowledge, implicitly creative in another way. Mere imitation commonly associated with authoritarian models of pedagogy is shown to be creative – even without the added challenge of migration. The suggestion that the imitative learning processes is a uni-directional relationship is unhelpful when trying to understand the interactional processes of social transmission, the actual give and take of instruction, demonstration, correction and improvement. The teacher-student relationship is predicated on a giving of knowledge by the teacher and a receiving of knowledge by the student; the relationship involves an unequal exchange that privileges and prioritises the authority and knowledge of the teacher. But it is an exchange nonetheless. As the practitioners recognise, teaching is a reciprocal process. Teaching can be one of the greatest 'learning' experiences we have. Although the conditions for learning are different, and do not directly depend on knowledge being didactically or otherwise directed from the student, the dynamic relational quality of this exchange constitutes the production of knowledge.

The cumulative effect of scaffolding techniques can be the creation of new cultural criteria for knowing, such as has happened within this kathak community. In the example of kathak yoga, one sees how pedagogical devices are transformed into skills requiring their own performative competency and assigned their own value. Practitioners come to teach and know skills through very different modes. They produce new skills, some of which can be effectively incorporated into the lineage's knowledge and used as definite markers of style and uniqueness. This interactive process consolidates a 'paramparic' body: a knowledgeable body endowed with the unique repertoire of this lineage, establishing a link

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to the past and a continuity with the future by virtue of its existence in the very bodies of the next generations of teachers and performers.

CHAPTER 8:

Disciplining the Body: Paramparic Bodies

Discipline must be instilled – joy, ananda, ultimate joy can only be experienced through discipline – freedom comes out of refined discipline with responsibility.
(Pandit Chitresh Das)

Learning kathak involves learning a whole new way of being in the world. The rigorous apprenticeship under Das is intended to craft a new person, one who embodies a new refined set of moral precepts, values and beliefs, but also one who is capable of the exquisite aesthetic ideals that the art demands. In the earlier chapters of this dissertation, I have emphasised the learning of this 'way of life', through immersion in the *gurukul* and in the larger school, where etiquette and attitude is privileged in one's study. While learning is never about acquiring an isolated skill set, the ability to dance, to perform skills, techniques and know the repertoire naturally has to take precedence. As dancers, we spend a great deal of time on the dance floor, developing our practical dance knowledge and understanding. Coming to understand skills and gain performative competence comes through practice: self-disciplined practice and practical learning guided by the guru. It is only through consistent training and practice that dancers get better, and come to 'know' the techniques and skills of the art. The act of disciplined learning is itself valued. In the process of learning, dancers not only learn the skills and techniques of kathak, but they learn to learn, they learn to be disciplined. The attitude and discipline to study affects one's ability to learn, as does the act of learning which cultivates discipline and right attitude. Using the Indian concept of *riyaz*, loosely translated as personal practice, I highlight the ways in which the act of learning is intended to not only enskill the student, but to ensure that moral and ethical principles are imparted in the disciplined pursuit of knowledge, crafting a new kind of person, a kathaka.

Through years of disciplined training, crafting, monitoring, censoring and continual learning, an adept dancer emerges, well versed in the traditional knowledge of the lineage. I use the term paramparic body, following Matt Rahaim's use of the term in the Indian musical tradition as he describes 'each paramparic body [as] a way of musically being formed out of corporeal dispositions passed down tacitly through teaching lineages' (Rahaim 2008: 340). They are bodies, which are inscribed with the knowledge of a lineage, both technical and social, both aesthetic and moral (see also Bryant 2005; Brownell 1995;

Marchand 2008). Kathak dancers of the same lineage share an identifiable corpus of material on dance, including *bol* compositions, technical skills, *bhao*, or storytelling pieces, *kavitas* or poems, songs, similar aesthetic preferences, stylisations and predilections to movements. Dancers also share knowledge of the prescribed attitude, comportment etiquette, and patterns of interacting all also passed down within the *parampara*. Stylistic differences, both in technique and attitude, serve to distinguish the lineage, and are critical to its survival[1].

Embodiments of the aesthetic are memorialised in the bodies of dancers who follow the way of life as taught by the guru. This is how the tradition is lived, sustained, and passed on to future generations. In this sense, the body is the site of the living tradition. Rahaim adapts his notion of paramparic body from Katherine Young's description of the family body, as a body as one of our family traditions,

> Family bodies, like family stories, provide their heirs positions, situated perspectives, on parents' ways of being in the world, out of which children can devise their own 'presentations of self' (Goffman 1959). Bodies are judgments about how to relate to the world. Out of a family repertoire of such judgments, children shape a corporeal self. Whether by imitation or resistance, their bodies memorialise the family's way of being in the world. The body is one of our family traditions. (Young 2002: 25)

In a dance lineage, the family body, or the paramparic body is actively shaped, and provides the basis for the new way of being in the world. The body of a finely crafted kathaka is endowed with aesthetics of movement, music and morality; it is itself the familial tradition.

Paramparic bodies are knowing bodies. They are also creative bodies. As a dancer gains the capacity to reproduce traditional knowledge, she is also endowed with the ability to interpret, innovate and create from her own position as 'authentic' embodier of the tradition[2]. Endowed with the corporeal heritage of the lineage, she has the capacity to express the lineage's identity, at the same time that her body is a site of live creation of the tradition. For these aspiring kathakas, the act of disciplined learning of a tradition both

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[1] It is often said that the insularity of lineages was more rigorously maintained in years gone by where patterns of segregation and exclusivity asserted the independence and distinctiveness of lineages and gurus from one another. Today, it is noted that there is typically more crossover, less exclusivity and more hybridisation. Nonetheless, committed study to one master and lineage endows students with style that it is identifiable to a trained eye.

[2] Authenticity and tradition were understood by many of the senior dancers as cultural constructs. Das, as the master and most direct link to the knowledge handed down by the great gurus of the past was the most 'authentic' source of knowledge.

ensures kathak's continuity at the same time that it opens a space for creativity and improvisation.

In this chapter, I examine the crafting of the paramparic body, through *riyaz*, or personal practice. *Riyaz* also ensures an intimate knowing of the art, that secures a continuity of tradition, but from which individual style and improvisational acts can emerge. I locate creativity within the cultural prescriptions for *riyaz*, highlighting the innovative and agential processes that can emerge from such apparently unyielding structures and strict disciplinary regimes. By locating creativity within the disciplinary regime of kathak, I signal a movement away from a purely reproductive view of the body, as the site of nothing more than the reproduction of hegemonic power relations. Instead, I will argue for the productive nature of discipline through training in the guru-shishya *parampara*, taking a cue in part from the work of the late Foucault (see chapter 10). Over this chapter and the next, I show that culturally specific creative acts are generated through prescriptions of adherence to tradition and a rigorous disciplining of the body. Creative acts that flow from the paramparic body are a remarkable combination of individual intention and social memory, of self-interest attuned to the wishes of the guru, and of personal expression within the community's aesthetic heritage.

'Practice', Discipline and the wider morality of *Riyaz*

'Practice, practice, practice' is a phrase that echoes in the ears of anyone who ever studied in Chhandam. Not a class goes by when students are not reminded, prodded, provoked, or chastised about their practice or lack thereof. The three most important things for a dancer are consistently said to be, 'practice, practice, practice'; this line became the mantra for students at Chhandam. Emphasis on practice is not unique to Chhandam, and exists across learning in all the Indian arts. Becoming a kathaka hinged on the relentless rehearsal of basic techniques, drilled into the body, through endless repetition. There is nothing romantic about this picture: a lone dancer in the studio, a *tal mala* producing an electronic pulse to regulate the *laya* or tempo, and provide a reference for her *tal*, repeating endless cycles of *tatkar*, over and over, until her shins ache, and quadriceps burn. 'Practice is boring' Das would often tell us. He was right. There was nothing particularly thrilling about endless cycles of footwork, although playing with the variety and rhythm of the footwork did break the monotony. Practice was also meant to be hard. This is believed as

the only route to improvement. In Indian arts traditions, this personal daily practice is known as *riyaz*.

In Chhandam, students learn the phrase, '*Riyaz mehnat ke sat*', translated as 'systematic practice with deep exertion'. It was never simply about repetitions of skills, it was about dancing hard, gruelling and physically exhausting training, involving endless repetition of basic footwork, drilling *chakkars* or pirouettes, all at high speeds. It was stamina testing and endurance building. As Neuman has pointed out for music (1990), the very act of practice carried its own value, and evidence of practice was coveted,

> *Chhakars, or the heel based pirouettes that are a defining feature of kathak, were perhaps one of the most troublesome physical skills for students to master. While you can find ways to cheat through footwork, it is far more difficult to cheat a turn. You either do it, or you do not. Falling off centre, running into the wall, colliding with your neighbour, or even falling over, are all characteristic blunders in learning to turn. At first, turns were the bane of my existence as a kathak dancer. As soon as the speed increased I lost coordination completely. And turning on the heel after a lifetime of turning on the ball of my foot seemed counter-intuitive. But I was determined to get better – and faster. During my first intensive period of training and fieldwork in India, where I had ample time for daily practice, endless repetition seemed to be the answer. So I practiced – and practiced. And when I had finally practiced enough that a thick callous on the heel of my turning leg developed, it seemed I was on the right track.   Such corporeal evidence testified to my devoted practice. I was gaining legitimacy as a dancer. And when the callous finally ripped open in the middle of a class, I was offered subtle congratulatory and affirmative comments from my peers in Kolkata. I debated whether I was actually getting better, unable to assess my own improvements. But at least I had the calloused remains to show for it. And that hard evidence seemed to be worth a great deal in the eyes of my peers.*

Corporeal evidence, a calloused heel, but also the daily accumulation of sweat, a saturated *shalwar kamiz*[3] and pools of perspiration were evidence of adequate practice. The physical by-products of hard work are etched into the body, and become highly prized possessions, not only for their usefulness to the skill, but for the values of hard work and devotion carried in their very textures[4] (see also Neuman 1990). Many believed that the guru and other seniors could ascertain from one 'ta' or foot stroke whether or not you had been practicing. The question of practice was usually addressed within the first few minutes of conversation. George Ruckert similarly explains that classical musicians from India will

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[3] Long tunic worn with loose trousers and usually a dupatta or scarf.
[4] One teacher expressed her abhorrence at the prospect of having a pedicure for its threat to her hard earned calluses, those she earned through hours and hours of practice; to remove them was unthinkable.

often greet each other with the opening question, 'how is your practice coming?' (2004: 27). Senior dancers always inquired after students practice. Tales of disciplined practice further endorse the ideal; the feats of our own guru are held up as the standard for practice, whether it two hours of hard footwork, running eight miles, climbing stairs with ankle weights, or throwing dumb bells while doing footwork. Neuman describes North Indian musicians tales of practice, 'feats of on-going practice, 120 days consecutively, 12 hours at a time, practicing through the night, amidst bugs, insects and scorpions, and even tying one's hair to the ceiling to stay awake (1990: 33)[5]. The commitment and sacrifices the great gurus made for their art stand as model behaviour for aspirants.

The cultural conception of *riyaz* extends far beyond simple ideas of practice or rehearsal; practice is not simply about getting better. Practice is not regarded as a means to technical improvement – it is a moral practice in itself, part of becoming a shishya, and in that sense, becoming devoted to a guru, a lineage and an entire tradition. Etymologically, 'the word *riyaz* itself, coming from the Arabic, connotes abstinence, devotion, discipline and hard labour' (Neuman 1990: 42). In this sense, the *riyaz* of a student embodies the idealised actions of any devotee, surrendering their entire self to the practice of their art. It is likely that improvement will follow, but demonstration of the ability to do a skill is not the measure of value or right attitude. *Riyaz* carries a far greater significance than the loose translation of 'daily practice' entails. There is a moral, affective and cosmological level of meaning that is being instilled in the student, which distinguishes it from the English 'equivalent' (which turns out to be no equivalent at all). Through *riyaz*, and the physical enactment of practice, dancers perform their devotion. The rigours of training, the endless footwork, perspiration, calluses, and all the daily toil signify something more than a selfish pursuit. Rather, training in this way provides an opportunity to live out one's devotion, and therefore, one's relation to the guru and the art, in the present moment.

The act of practice carries its own performative social force in its expression of devotion and building of a relationship to the guru, even in his absence. By dancing, we connect to our guru. One student echoed the words of her guru in saying, 'keeping Guru-ji's photo is

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[5] Unlike the ideal of the tabla player, from the standpoint of a dancer, twelve hours of practice is quite impossible physically. Although there is an incredible amount of physical stamina required in the task of sitting at a tabla and playing tabla for several hours, the physical output for a dancer is far greater. And in this way, a dancers' riyaz, in our lineage, measures slightly differently. Two hours of hard footwork and most dancers would be 'finished' as Das would say. And because of the intense physicality of dancer's idealised practice, most dancers would only ever talk about practicing 1 to 2 or up to 3 at the most, hours a day. Of course, what mattered here was the kind of practice one was engaged in. Knowing how to practice was crucial.

a short cut, connecting with him, remembering him, lies in our *Riyaz*, which is what he is endlessly drilling in our minds and bodies' (Mehta, interview with Vrushali Mundhe-Jawle 2010). Even when we dance alone, isolated in our own dance room, it is never merely an individual experience. Even the most individual of pursuits, personal practice, hinged on the relationship to the guru. I was often told, 'his relationship to you is through the dance'. Regardless of his proximity or location, the potency of their relationship continues to motivate and incite students to practice, to be disciplined, and subsequently, to improve - a mutually productive and sustaining cycle. Through *riyaz*, and through the physical enactment of the dance, students connect with their guru-ji, experiencing the teachings, and connecting the experience of that moment to a spatially and temporally distant authority. The strong metaphysical dimension of kathak gives the dance a potent sense of emotional meaning, and enables the re-creation of gurukul, as has occurred in the American context.

Students' felt and lived connection to their guru provides the basis for their experience of the larger metaphysical dimensions of kathak. The connection to the guru is then infused with deeper sentiment and devotional fervour through the ongoing association with divine practice. *Riyaz* can be taken up as a spiritual pursuit, a pursuit which itself contains its own moral worth, regardless of the resultant form. Das states that dance and artistic pursuits provide the quickest way to reach and access divine experience. One's individual and endless pursuits for perfection become social, and meaningful within the larger religious framework, and the very bodily experience of dance is felt, interpreted and explained through the rhetoric of the divine. In the bodily act of dance, the dancer can actually experience moments of this transcendence in the course of their quest (see discussion below). Such experiences serve to reassert devotion, commitment and belief to the guru, lineage and tradition. The wider framing transforms the experience of the student, because what is being learned is a way of being in the world, not simply as dancer but as a subject in search of transcendence (in the guru, in the lineage, in God). The realisation of one's relationship to the guru, and the associated religious belief of devotion also transfer value to what might otherwise be construed as a personal pursuit by making it a shared spiritual pursuit. It also becomes the pursuit of an entire community as reproduction of the lineage certainly depends on devoted and knowledgeable individuals capable of sharing the knowledge through teaching and performance.

Pragmatics of 'Practice' vs. *Riyaz*

What do the lofty ideals of *riyaz* really mean for dancers? Do students have *riyaz*? For most students of Chhandam, the metaphysics of *riyaz*, or of being a shishya had little relevance to their everyday understandings of what it means to enrol in a school and be 'students' of 'dance', 'taught' by a teacher. Even for aspiring shishyas immersed in a whole cosmological world mediated by their guru, the ideals of *riyaz* were distinct from the more ordinary quotidian forms of practice. Few dancers have *riyaz*. Some of us practiced. Das pointed out, only he and Charlotte had *riyaz*, although others were starting to develop it. *Riyaz* required much greater commitment, discipline and sacrifice to practice than most dancers had yet to develop. In Das's lineage, *riyaz mehnat ke sat*, practice with deep exertion was held up as the model. Did those who practiced uphold this ideal? It is hard to say. Personal practice is something that is quite evidently difficult to observe or participate in, except if it is your own[6].

Even the solitariness of *riyaz* was complicated by the practicalities of living in San Francisco. Guru-sisters often practice together. The logistics of practice, including the prohibitive cost and difficulty of locating studio space in San Francisco, as well as the difficulty of finding a place to practice in one's home (most students' apartments in the Bay area are not most conducive to rhythmic footwork and the sound of two feet and 300 bells), encouraged such shared practice times. The convenience of sharing studio space and rental fees endorsed shared practices times, as did the realities of students' busy scheduling. Shared practice sessions also doubled as rehearsal time for choreography for upcoming performances. Most dancers had other jobs, or worked endless hours for the school. The demands of busy scheduling, and conflicting responsibilities often meant that the shared practice they have with guru-sisters maybe the only time they may practice, outside of class time. Furthermore, the idealised '*mehnat ke sat*' of their practice was more achievable with the motivation of others in the room. Recalling newly taught choreography

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[6] Here, I encounter one of the methodological difficulties of trying to describe what is meant to be solitary practice, as much of it was inaccessible to the ethnographer. Having practiced with certain dancers, in groups of two or three, provided a good sense of the way in which these individuals would practice, and was the closest one could come to observing another students' riyaz. Observing the kind of individual warm-ups people would engage in provided a window onto people's practice habits and their discipline to learning. Some dancers would come early and be involved in heavy footwork, saturated with sweat before the others, some dancers might stay late. During retreat, you always knew which dancers would be up first warming-up for the day's training. All of this provided a glimpse of the different approaches to practice and the disciplined styles of training. Their own comments on their practice supplemented my observations.

was also easier with the help of others, as dancers would piece together new composition through shared recollections. Enjoyment and initiative emerged out of such shared practice time, providing further incentive for dancers to coordinate practice with each other. Dancers in our lineage talked more about 'practice', rather than '*riyaz*'. Aware of the connotations and meaning of this term, few would claim to have *riyaz*. In reality, students' practice was highly variable, and their *riyaz*, mostly non-existent. Keeping in mind the moral connotations of *riyaz*, no one really wanted to admit their lack of it, yet the lack of conditioning of the body was not concealable. That students did not have this practice was a constant source of criticism, a hindrance to their development and a strike against their development of right attitude. If there was anything that was repeated as much as our footwork, it was the consistent daily admonishment for our lack of practice.

Many dancers relied heavily on the 'workout' they knew they would get from their guru-ji's class for practice and upkeep. The hardest practice most of these dancers had was before their guru. And most exclaimed that they could not push themselves the way he did. A senior shishya explained that in class, Das was really teaching students how to practice. He guided them through an experience of what their own practice should be like. Of course, he was also there to teach, correct and assess a students' development. In this way, not only was Das teaching techniques, but he was cultivating habit and trying to generate discipline. Without the predilection toward practice, and knowing how to practice, his students would risk atrophy without his presence to guide them.

The Body of Habit: Discipline and Habit Formation

Acquiring the discipline to practice, thereby learn, is itself a form of habit. Through guided in-class practice, or through personal practice, we rehearse skills, with the intention of coming to know them, incorporating such understandings into our own bodily repertoire, and in this sense, acquiring them as habit, a point I return to in the following section. In the process of drilling these techniques, teachers are hoping to instil the capacity to perform techniques, but they are also instilling the habit to practice in this way; this is an important pedagogic goal of Das's training, to acquire the habit of learning and practice. The objective of disciplined practice, as guided by the guru, was both about the acquisition of skills, and the acquisition of the capacity to do. As pointed out earlier, 'he is teaching you how to practice'. As Dewey pointed out, 'In learning habits it is possible …

to learn the habit of learning'. (1930: 105). Fairfield elaborates on the acquisition of this capacity,

> The learning process succeeds not when a given individual – whether professor or pupil – assumes an altogether dominant position in the course of discussion or inquiry. The practice of education is no mere expertocratic bestowing of information, but involves more essentially the acquisition of capacities which, as Dewey argues, enable one to continue learning long after formal study comes to an end. One learns to learn, as we say, and it is a learning more imperative and essential to the spirit of education than any mere imparting of facts. (Fairfield 2000: 11)

Learning how to practice was critical to the survival of the paramparic body. Das's aesthetic style was known as rigorous, athletic, and impressive in its rhythmic prowess. Without bodies trained and capable of upholding the ideal, the style would disappear. Early on, I was told by my peers in India, that as soon as people knew I studied with Das, they would look to my feet. Accurate representation of the lineage required an immense amount of upkeep. The guidance of habit formation was important for the maintenance of a paramparic body that would continue the legacy of the lineage, but was also critical for dancers' own self-interests. Should they want to succeed as an artist, especially as an artist with claims to a moral superiority, practice was vital, and the cultivation of habit and discipline was integral. Merleau-Ponty puts the matter eloquently, 'habit expresses our power of dilating our being-in-the –world, or changing existence by appropriating fresh instruments' (1962: 143). It is through this acquisition of habit that a new sense of being-in-the-world is created and experienced, all of which is integral to the emergence of a new self, that of a kathaka.

Locating Creativity: Mundane Repetitions

The notion of 'habit' carries with it the idea of some unthinking replication of a pattern or behaviour, although this is precisely what philosophers like Merleau-Ponty were arguing against. 'As has often been said, it is the body that 'catches' and 'comprehends' the movement. The acquisition of a habit is indeed the grasping of a significance, but it is the motor grasping of a motor significance' (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 142-3). In this grasping, we come to understand, through our bodies, and incorporate specific tasks, making them our own. *Riyaz* is easily misconstrued as automated and un-reflexive; 'there is a definite suggestion of some unthinking, blind adherence to routine in *riyaz*. Till a certain stage is

reached, no freedom is given to question the legitimacy/validity/ efficacy of the authoritative process' (Ranade 1999: 17). Yet, the creation of habit through *riyaz* does not happen unproblematically. Here, I join my previous discussion of imitation. The repetitions of skills that endorse habit, are themself, an important site for 'thinking' and creativity. As I explore below, even the most mundane and seemingly repetitive tasks of kathak are implicitly individual, generative and creative. Hallam and Ingold remind us that 'the more strictly standards are observed, the greater the improvisational demands on a performer to "get it right"'. (2007: 5). Even in the reproduction of traditional forms, creativity is implicit. The necessity to 'get it right' requires practitioners to quickly adapt to the demands of the aesthetic. The precision with which traditional techniques must be reproduced requires a 'heightened responsiveness' (Hallam and Ingold 2007: 5). The act of figuring a way to reproduce such techniques is an inherently creative act in itself. Thus, even in the unlikeliest of places, in the mundane repetition of footwork or *chakkars*, we find improvisatory skills at work. Even as we repeat the basic pattern of *tatkar*, over and over again, our repetitions are never precisely the same. I return to Bernstein's formulation of repetition, whereby '[p]ractice is a particular type of repetition without repetition' (1967: 134; see also Ingold 2000). The body is always shifting and adapting to both internal and external fluctuations, responding to the changing variables of body and world, and finding the best motor solution to the problem. When performing a basic *chakkar* or pirouette, our breathing pattern changes, our muscles fatigue, the flooring is inconsistent, the lighting variable, or we speed up or slow down. These may be naturally occurring fluctuations in the body and environment, or they may be manufactured by a more knowledgeable other as highlighted in chapter seven.

In every repetition the body itself begins to understand the necessary adjustments and corrections required for the end goal. We do endless repetitions because '[r]epetitions of a movement or action are necessary in order to solve a motor problem many times (better and better) and to find the best ways of solving it' (Bernstein, 1996: 176). In this sense, every repetition has an element of improvisation, and each repetition is created anew. In the process, we also ideally improve our performance of techniques. In successions of *chakkars*, I eventually stop falling off my axis because I gain the know-how to remain centred and upright. I gain the strength and ability to activate the right muscles that enable this, my motor-visual skills have become coordinated enough that I can spin my head around fast enough, finding a 'spot' to see in front of me, preventing dizziness, and I come

to learn the most effective way to do this with my own body. Das's dancers are trained to perform *chakkars* at very fast speeds, and he is always pushing the upper limits of the pace of successive turns, as he does with footwork. Increase in speeds highlight a student's difficulties with the skill, and reveal where their problem-solving abilities fail. The cumulative effect of training prepares our muscular and cardio-vascular system to produce the skill with diminishing resistance, enabling faster speeds and the ability to render more perfected techniques.

Through *riyaz*, dancers also develop their own unique approach to executing techniques. *Chakkars* or pirouettes are, on one hand, a very technical component, simply requiring the dancer to get from point a to point b. On the other hand, *chakkars* are a very individualised technique and no two dancers will perform their *chakkars* the same. If one has ever studied, or watched ballet dancers closely, one will see that in executing pirouettes, the mode of execution, the end pose, and everything in-between, looks almost identical between dancers: the port au bras, the way the torso is held, the position of the lifted foot and toe in relation to the standing leg, it is set, and all dancers strive to look the *same* way. Whether or not they produce the skill using the same functions is debatable, but the goal is for the most part, unison in appearance[7]. In kathak, this is not the case. For *chakkars*, the one inflexible requirement was to execute the turn precisely on rhythm, slapping down ones foot at a precise moment. Although a basic approach has been distilled, with beginning and end postures clearly articulated, identical execution was not primary, especially for soloists. In the example of Lucknow turns, the most prevalent turning style in our lineage, the arms extend out at the initiation of the turn, and are pulled back in at the finish. We are taught that the momentum to get around comes from the core, while the arms help to propel oneself around. Generating power, speed, and enough momentum is a kinaesthetic problem of getting from position a to position b. As each dancers' body, their proportions, their weight and height, as well as their previous dance experiences, are highly variable, there will be many different approaches to turning[8]. Das's own style in turning was extremely different from his students; his stylistic approach highlighted the sound of his feet, as he was able to create multiple sounds in one turn, by jumping up and

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[7] I use ballet as an ongoing comparative, as the practitioners themselves often understood their dance and training in relation to ballet dancers. Ballet was the perennial comparison for the kathak dancers I worked with, although this held true more for the dancers in America who saw themselves against a dance environment that included San Francisco ballet, Alonzo King's Lines Ballet and more. The comparison, while invoked in India, did not have the same significance.
[8] Students brought their own history of bodily training, and interestingly, the two most competent at chakkars had come from an intensive training in western dance forms, one in ballet, another in jazz.

down on his turning heel while rotating. His most senior disciples all had different approaches[9]. As I heard Das say, 'it is impossible to have a student who dances like you'. Thus, even in basic techniques, there is individual variation.

Locating Creativity: Emerging Style in Repetition

The preliminary stages of learning are typically characterised by drilling basic techniques, time and again, until they can be performed with little conscious attention. Mastering technique is but one stage in the development of an artist; beyond technique is the know-how of using that technique to create aesthetic enjoyment, and to create *rasa* or mood (see chapter 9). The artistry of dance comes through the display of virtuosic technique, infused with feeling, and individual nuances that come together to create sentiment in the audience. But understanding technique is certainly a necessary ingredient for the rest,

> Only when the fundamental techniques have been so embedded into the neophyte's body that such techniques are part of the performative body-consciousness, ready-at-hand, to be used in the performative moment, can the maturing student eventually create the characters, and be ready to give his individual artistic signature to a role. (Zarilli 2000: 66)

The long-term goal is for kathak students to mature into their own style, developing their own flair in pure dance elements, and finding unique ways to interpret characters (see chapter 9). Discipline and habitual practice instils such bodily techniques and skills, so deeply in the body that they are ready-at-hand, available for use, as latent possibilities that can be recalled in an instant. As we get better and better at solving motor problems, such as the execution of footwork, or pirouettes, we require less conscious attention to rehearse the skill, freeing our conscious capacities for additional tasks, which we can apply with greater ease.

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[9] Today, with greater emphasis on group choreographies and increasing standardisation of technique through creation of curriculum, a more unified approach to the visual representation of turns is emerging. This became more prevalent when group choreographies were presented, especially for the company. In these cases, concerted effort was directed toward creating unison, but individual style was still evident. Students that trained at different times might also have different approaches to their turns. Two young dancers that were trained under Das in the 80s as children returned to kathak. While both very adept turners, their own styles to turning were even more pronouncedly different than those senior dancers who had been around for some time. Conformity amongst senior dancers also emerged from their shared training, rehearsals and performance as an ensemble. The demands of group choreography have created more consistency across technique, but as a solo art form, it is not of ultimate importance.

In initial stages of learning, we become preoccupied with our bodies, how they look, feel, or sound, when trying to replicate, or execute a skill. We are consumed with the performance of a skill, adjusting, correcting and figuring how to achieve the desired goal. Shawn Lindsay describes the initial learning of skills in hand drumming as involving an 'uncomfortable awareness of one's body. Novel gestures require more concentration to perform than the casual listener might imagine. But the body rendered "perspicuous by difficulty" soon disappears (Lindsay 1996: 201; see Leder 1990, Zarilli 2004). As we progress in learning a skill, these adjustments may come to form what Bernstein termed 'background corrections' (1996: 188), enabling our body to recede from our immediate awareness. Anna Portisch describes this in terms of riding a bicycle, 'as we become better at keeping our balance on a bicycle, our field of attention becomes more encompassing: initially we focus on staying upright and moving forwards while making appropriate kinds of bodily movements; later we may include steering and moving through traffic at a certain speed within our field of awareness' (2010: 75). In the performing arts, the equivalent is to move out into interpretive skills. At this point, the dancer can move attention outward – to the real or imagined audience –since the ideal of producing rasa cultivates this communicative intent (see also Zarilli 2000). It is understood by dancers, that in order to include the nuanced expression required of kathak, skills must be rehearsed to the point that the body is not a focal point of attention, and that 'thinking' ceases to occur. One senior dancer explained that while preparing the *bhao* section for her solo, it was necessary to do this over and over to the point where she was no longer thinking about the choreography, and it is only at this point that something came out of her. 'You have to do it over and over, so that you know it so well, and rather than thinking, now I am Sita, now I am Ravan, you can fluidly move through the characters, becoming each one of them'. (Lee, personal interview, September 14 2009). Another dancer instructed to do just one movement over and over, 'because it is not until you have done a movement thousands of times, until you are so comfortable, that it really becomes your own'. The goal is not to look identical to everyone else, but to practice endlessly until the movement is yours. Dancers appropriate the movements, and traditions, through their own motor understandings of motor tasks (see Merleau-Ponty 1962: 143). In the process of repetition lies the answer to innovation and individual style. Repetition is then not designed to create a blind adherence to tradition, but to facilitate a kind of knowing that will allow the emergence of individual style and interpretation.

Refinement of technique enabled emergence of individual nuances and style. But refinement was only a possibility for a seasoned dancer, and a conditioned dancer. If the body is not conditioned, the possibilities are greatly reduced, and so too is the opportunity for aesthetic enjoyment. In Indian dance and music, an idealised state of readiness is referred to as *taiyari*. *Riyaz* enables *taiyari*, maintaining dancers conditioning and dexterity and prepares dancers to respond to any combination of unexpected variables, creating rapid kinaesthetic solutions that facilitate efficient performance of techniques. It is only through this kind of efficient knowing and production of skills that artists gain the capacity to layer in the aesthetics of the practice, playing with the nuances, creating mood, and adding individual flair. Being *taiyar* 'which is like saying [s]he is blooming, [s] he is ripe, [s]he is ready' (Ruckert 2004: 27), is a state of ideal existence, and dancers without it are criticised. The necessity to be *taiyar* is most imperative in the case of *upaj*, or improvisation.

Locating Creativity: *Upaj*

'Kathak is not choreography', we are reminded time and again. Despite the fact that many Chhandam dancers do end up dancing choreographies, we are never allowed to forget that the ultimate goal is to be a solo artist. The requisite of dancing with live musicians necessitates a great degree of improvisation, or as our lineage refers to it as, *upaj*, also translated as 'from the heart'. *Upaj* emerges in a number of ways, most basically in that the act of dancing with live musical accompaniment ensures a degree of ongoing interaction, response and reaction, and improvisatory engagement between musician and dancer throughout the duration of an entire solo. Dancing with live music, in which the dancer cannot entirely control the external variables, adds a degree of risk. But it is in this risk-taking that excitement, spontaneity, and the freshness of those moments can create aesthetic pleasure in the audience. *Upaj* implicitly underwrites any solo with live musicians, but it is more evident in certain segments of the solo, such as during *sawal jabab*, or question and answer rhythmic interlude, as well as in the dramatic interpretation of stories. I focus here on the kinds of rhythmic improvisation that can occur during the sections of *nritt*, or pure dance (see also chapter 9).

Upaj, or improvisation, as it was translated within our lineage, is at the core of Das's philosophy. All of the training, practice and *riyaz* we do is intended to prepare us for these

live moments of improvised dance, and creation, as experienced between dancer and musician. *Upaj* was on many levels taken as an essence of kathak. The true test of a dancer would be on the stage, in a traditional solo, with live musicians, where unpredictability and the unknown reside and the performer must be equipped with both the knowledge necessary, and the readiness to make it happen. *Upaj* was often positioned in opposition to the overwhelming presence of choreographed dances and recorded music that was dominated stages, in both India and America[10]. Such rehearsed dance relied only on techniques, and memory, but did not test a dancer in their capacities for *taiyari* and *laykari*[11]. While Das also created set choreographies and from time to time relied on recorded music, he aligned himself strongly with live musicians, lecturing constantly on the necessity for all his students to be able to 'dance with live musicians alone on stage for two hours'.

With such a strong emphasis on this live creation of rhythm, how does a dancer prepare for improvisation? *Riyaz* is offered as one explanation, but for serious dancers, improvising is a skill in itself and must be developed. Improvisation in kathak is more of a structured spontaneity than a random chance of events, and is a skill that can be facilitated by a more knowledgeable other. While in this chapter I focus on improvisation through rhythm and footwork, in the following chapter, I highlight the importance of improvisation and individual style in the case of *abhinaya*. Ultimately, improvisation in kathak is a totality of all of these elements – pure dance, drama and music.

Learning to Improvise: Corporeal mathematics

Upaj should become an instinctive ability for a kathak dancer, such that at any given moment, a dancer could improvise some rhythmic frame, footwork, or story. But it is an instinct that needs sufficient cultivating. While some were able to improvise with less direction, this was most often not the case, and methods of assisted rhythmic improvisation did occur. Dancers ideally should know the *tal* so well, that they have the capacity to bring a *tihai* from anywhere in the cycle and have it land on *sam*, a skill requiring an

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[10] The choreographing of dance and the use of recorded music has taken away this vital ingredient of innovation, an ironic point considering that modernity is associated with greater freedom, and guru traditions with mechanical repetition.

[11] 'Taiyari – lit., readiness. The virtuosity of technique acquired by systematic practice; Laykari – The deep understanding and versatility of rhythm and timing' (Das et al. 2001: 85-6)

extraordinary amount of preliminary corporeal math so that the dancers begins the *tihai* at the correct *matra* or beat, bringing the conclusion of the *tihai* on *sam*. Ideally, a dancer has spent so many long hours repeating, drilling and ingraining techniques, that they can quite spontaneously present a *tihai*, even creating it on the spot. In reality, most students seek ways to make this 'improvisation' easier, at least in early years, as the spontaneous creation of *tihais* requires such an intimate knowing of *tal* and rhythm, one that can only come through a lifetime of practice or a very gifted improviser. To aid in the challenge of improvising, a number of scaffolding tactics have been created, although it is well worth noting that the greatest tool for improvisation is relentless practice of any and all footwork and *chakkars*. The more ingrained these techniques become in one's bodily repertoire, the more available they become, accessible at any moment, and readily available, such that they can be drawn upon in an instant, utilised without requiring any conscious reflection on the task, for conscious reflection would forestall the improvisatory process. Improvisation shares an antagonistic relation with the mechanisms of conscious reflection in that conscious thought is seen and experienced as an impediment to improvisation.

In learning to improvise, one of the first steps is being able to dance a *tihai*, the concluding pattern of any composition or rhythmic phrase. Bringing a composition to *sam*, back to the first beat of the time cycle, requires the execution of a *tihai*, a rhythmic pattern that repeats it self three times and concludes the composition. In this basic composition, the dancer dances *atgun tatkar* for the first 12 beats of the cycle. From the 13th beat of the cycle, she begins the basic tihai, 'tat tat thei – tat tat thei – tat tat thei', which concludes on the *sam*, the first beat of the next cycle[12]

```
+
ta thei thei tat |  a thei thei tat | ta thei thei tat |  a thei thei tat |
2
ta thei thei tat |  a thei thei tat | ta thei thei tat |  a thei thei tat |
0
ta thei thei tat |  a thei thei tat | ta thei thei tat |  a thei thei tat |
3
tat  -  tat  -  | thei  -  tat  -  | tat  -  thei  -  | tat  -  tat  -  |
+
(ta)
```

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[12] In this bol notation, the vertical lines mark the breaks between each beat. Each horizontal line includes one Vishay or section of the tal. In this example of tintal, each vibhag is four beats. The numbers on the far left indicates the vibhag. ' +' marks the first vibhag, and '0' marks the 3rd vibhag. The beginning of the 3rd vibhag falls on beat 9, also known as khali. When keeping tal with one's hands, khali is an empty or silent clap, and is thus notated as '0'. The fourth vibhag is this notated by the '3', as this indicates the 3rd tali or clap. Hence, the tal is referred to as tintal. There are tin or 3 claps.

As with all compositions, students first learned to recite and then danced the composition. In more advanced versions of *tihai*s, a kind of corporeal math is involved, whereby the dancer must calculate the length of the *tihai* and know this enough in advance to execute the *tihai* from the right beat in the time cycle in order to bring it to *sam*. This also requires consideration of the gap between each *palla* or each of the three sections of the *tihai*. The following *tihai* in *drut laya* or the fast speed of *tin tal*, where every vertical line marks the division between four beats, completes itself in one cycle.

+   2   0   3   +
1 2 3 4 | 5 - 1 2 | 3 4 5 - | 1 2 3 4 | (5)

Each *palla* of the *tihai* take 1 ¼ beats, while each of the two gaps takes ¼ beat to equal four beats. While basic structure like this are learned, ideally, learning how to improvise with *tihais* is the goal.

Improvisation: The Case of the Sixteen *Tihai*s

The 'sixteen *tihai*s' are one of the quintessential practice techniques used by any advanced dancers in Chhandam. While they test a dancer on a number of things, including stamina and endurance, they are also a critical tool in the development of a dancer's ability to improvise. The sixteen *tihai*s, also referred to as *'Natawari Tihai*s' were created to enable a deeper understanding of *tal* and provide the dancer with the skills to dance a *tihai* from anywhere within the 16 beat cycle of tin *tal*. Thus, the sixteen *tihai*s refer to a progressions of *tihai*s, each starting from a different beat of the 16 beat cycle and concluding on *sam*. For the senior most dancers, the complete 16 *tihai*s will follow the pattern beginning with the *tihai* from the 1st *matra*, then 10th, 2nd, 11th, 3rd, 12th and following this sequence. In its complete form, dancers will sing the *lehra* or melody of the *theka* while dancing the compositions, in the style of kathak yoga. Advanced dancers practice the sixteen *tihai*s in every class; the sixteen *tihai*s have come to occupy an elevated status in the class material. Junior dancers come to know of the 16 *tihai*s, learning a few at a time over the years, building up to the full progression. Being able to complete the 16 *tihai*s in kathak yoga style is indicative of a higher level of development and the ability to do so is revered by junior students.

Dancers talk about the *tihai*s as a 'gift', as it challenges them on many levels and is an incredible tool for learning. Part of the greatness lies in the fact that in knowing the basic structures of each *tihai*, students acquire the ability to perform a *tihai* from any beat of the rhythmic cycle of tin *tal*. Although students might not realise at first, knowing the sixteen *tihai*s is a start to improvising. The sixteen *tihai*s provided the dancer with the scaffolding to create a *tihai* from any *matra* of the cycle, effectively enabling a dancer to start from anywhere in the time cycle and conclude on sum. In improvising, a dancer still works within a rhythmic cycle, such as tin *tal*, and can play with rhythm through the progression of cycles, but at some point, in order to conclude, a dancer must throw a *tihai* which will land on *sam*, effectively and successfully marking its completion. The 16 *tihai*s gives dancers a starting point from which to play with the idea of improvising, such that a dancer could improvise throughout any number of cycles, and then bring *sam* by ending with one of these already known *tihai*s. Theoretically, an adept improviser would be able to anticipate the *sam*, and have a deep enough kinaesthetic understanding of the time cycle, that they could create a rhythm that would repeat itself three times, and land on *sam*. This would require knowing how long each repetition takes, how long the two gaps are and then understanding what beat to begin from so that the segment completes on the *sam*. Such idealised corporeal math is facilitated by an intimate knowing of rhythms, patterns and time cycles, and for most, would require a great deal of conscious reflection to begin the *tihai* on the right beat in anticipation of its conclusion on *sam*.

The sixteen *tihai*s provide the necessary structure for further improvisation. Once the basic structure of a *tihai* is known, a dancer can use the structure but incorporate different footwork. A very basic replacement would be replacing the basic eight step *tatkar* pattern with two sets of the *ta re ki ta* pattern, the latter which requires use of the flat foot and heel sounds. Upon teaching three variations of a basic *chakra dar tihai*, Das said to his students, 'ok, I taught you three, now you can do 300'. The idea is that, in coming to a deep understanding of just one thing, just one *tihai*, a dancer is equipping themselves with the tools to expand and create from this basis of intimate and thorough knowing.

To test the dancers on their ability to draw on what should be an ingrained set of rhythmic structures, dancers play the *tihai* game. Within this *tihai* game, as the time cycle progresses, the teacher will simply call out 'go' from anywhere in the cycle, and dancers must instantly respond by dancing the *tihai* from that point in the time cycle. In these

instances, dancers will do the established choreographic repertoire for each of the *tihai*s. It tests the dancers readiness or *taiyari* and their depth of knowing, requiring execution of the *tihai* without any hesitation. On one occasion, Das asked students to recite *tihai*s in *jap tal* or *dhamar*, ten or fourteen beat cycle, but most were actually unable to do it. Students' inability to do this was cause for much frustration, as his students sat perplexed, unsure of how to approach the task. His annoyance came from the fact that he had already taught them this, and they should be able to do it. Students still sat quiet and uncertain. His request of making *tihai*s in *jap tal* or *dhamar* should have been easy for his senior students and people should have realised they knew *tihai*s in this *tal*, even though they may have not directly been taught. 'Why?', he asked. Das went on to explain, they already know *tihai*s from each of the 16 beats of tin *tal* and so if they take those and then map them onto the right beat in another time cycle, it will arrive on *sam.* For example, the 3rd *matra tihai* in tin *tal* would fit as the 1st *matra tihai* in *dhamar*. Even the basic *tihai*s of *tin tal* provide a dancer with limitless options and variations.

Dancers can also make up *tihias*, using known combinations of *bols*. But upon asking how this was done, a senior disciple explained one could play with bols, and then try to figure out how much gap is needed, but overall, there is no recipe. We are instructed to play with it. Students will come to learn that certain combinations of bols do not sound right together, and certain footwork does not logically follow into the next, but much of this is learned through trial and error, and the guidance of an authority. James Kippen explains a similar phenomenon in tabla playing, 'the majority of rules governing the process of improvisation are learned through example and by trial and error' (Kippen 1988: 162). Dancers have their own formulae with which they learn to improvise. Structured improvisation enables musicians and dancers whom have never worked together to improvise together through a shared knowing of the syntax and rules of the game. The *sawal jabab* section of performance, a question and answer, exemplifies this relation most clearly, where each artist will perform a rhythm that the other will copy[13]. Newer dancers might have practiced and roughly structured how this will go, nervous about the risk-taking in live performance, but masters like Das will go to the stage and simply play with

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[13] See the following video for an example of sawal jabab. Here, it is Pandit-ji who is initiating, while the tabla player, Kousic Sen, responds, but the reverse is also typical.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SxWyvli7es

the tabla player in a live and fresh encounter between two artists, both eagerly anticipating the rhythm that the other might deliver.

Cosmological 'Realism': Metaphysics of Union

The spontaneous creations of a successful improvisation were often articulated as a connection to divinity. Performers and audience members attributed peak moments of performance, particularly improvisation, to the divine. Das had explained to his students on several occasions that his improvisational performances came from the divine, admitting he did not know prior to the event what his performance would hold. Audience members conferred the sentiment of embodied divinity to performance. The apotheosis of performance triggered a variety of audience reactions, with some individuals overcome by emotion, others throwing themselves at the feet of our teacher after the performance.

Such reactions speak to a wider layer of meanings that are readily available to performers and audiences alike, elaborated as they are by the practices of Hinduism, in which the 'oneness' that may be experienced by performer or audience member is articulated as transcendence of self and ego, enabling a connection to the divine (see also Shah 1998). The divine that is believed to be within each person and the moments of improvisation that require a complete corporeal engagement come together in the real experience of a 'flow' and spontaneity that seems to originate from outside the performer's immediate awareness. Successful performance and ritual activity share certain qualities. In both cases, actions may be felt by those who perform them to be external to their intention: a person submits to ritual activity in such a way as to remove the sovereignty of herself as agent, experiencing herself or himself rather in the manner of the object or vehicle of the pre-ordained acts she or he performs. The person carries out (or rather undergoes) her or his own enactments in the mode of automatic habitual practice with little ego involvement (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994: 96). Successful performance, skilled and improvisatory, encourages a cosmology of union felt and experienced through the body, completely immersed in the total environment, with all the variables coalescing in a unified instant, where rhythms intersect, musicians and dancer align, and the performer and audience arrive together on '*sam*'.

In kathak, there are always two rhythms going, that of the *tal* cycle and the rhythmic bols, often expressed through the feet; they must be kept both independent, maintain their difference, and yet unite, find union in their difference. There is unpredictability in their union, as there is any improvisation. The inherent risk in improvisation contributes to the rapture of its resolution. It is this sense of uncertainty and anticipation that engenders the sense of the union as coming from elsewhere – as the divine. The coming together of all these elements - creates a lived experience of the metaphysics of union with the divine. The devotional fervour felt by participants in moments of live creation, often explained as *bhakti*, has its basis in a full sensory engagement, and as such, never floats off into pure idealism. Cosmological explanations arise from very real experiences and gives extra potency to the sense of realising something larger. Not every performance achieves this goal. Not every audience member will interpret the experience in such cosmological terms, especially western audiences. As I have discussed earlier, much work must be done to establish the backdrop in which such experiences can be lived and shared.

Moments of 'improvisation' are more than just creativity. They offer the possibility of transcendence, of merging, and an experience of unity. The translation of *upaj* as improvisation does not convey this deeper cosmological meaning and the lived experience of such live creations, much as *riyaz* cannot be translated in the English equivalent of practice. Unlike some versions of *bhakti*, where the divine remains ever elusive, the dancer can actually experience moments of this transcendence in the course of her quest. There is a strong metaphysics to kathak, as with other arts in India, a point which also emerges in the experience of *abhinaya*, roughly translated as 'expression', which I take up in the next chapter.

The belief that *upaj* represents a connection to the divine reinforces the conviction of dancers that it defines traditional modes of kathak. By assigning such a potent significance to *upaj*, they necessarily stigmatise any departure from it. Dancers explain this trend towards modern kathak, to choreography and recorded music, as associated with a decline in *upaj*, thus endangering the 'essence' of the form. The modern styles of kathak with recorded music and set choreography no longer rely on improvisation or an understanding of *tal* for successful performance, removing the element of risk and unpredictability implicit in traditional styles. A dependence on recorded music eliminates the need for the adeptness and readiness required in understanding *tal* and improvising within it. It also

removes the possibilities for an experience of 'oneness' and union that is brought about through the uncertainty and improvisation of live creation with musicians. Das lamented that a large part of what defined kathak is moving to the margins, jeopardising the meaning of a practice that gave a material, experiential sense of a connection to divinity. The emphasis in our training on rhythmically grounded improvisation and its affiliates, tradition and spirituality can be understood as standing against the trend towards modern choreography, which suggest a secular materialism. Such oppositional understandings were and are a further reflection of the emergent transcultural sphere.

Continuity and Creativity

Following Hallam and Ingold, I have challenged the assumption that 'creativity is about change, and moreover that its source lies with the agency of the individuals who initiate it, as against the inertia of tradition induced by social agency' (2007: 7). Rather than seeing creativity merely as change, I have also looked at creativity as it exists in the continuities and *sam*eness of culture-making. A western notion of creativity that prescribes creativity as producing new forms, radical changes, and breaks with the past provides a very limited view of its larger scope, especially as it exists in non-western traditional practice. This ideological struggle matters not only to scholars, but to the traditional artists, who are now participating in a global market, and vying for competitive arts grants that privilege this western notion of creativity. Traditional artists like Das have come to rely on phrases such as 'innovation within tradition' to communicate their understanding of creativity. In the artistic field, where funding, sponsorship and grants rely on presentations of innovation and newness, a more nuanced understanding of cultural conceptions of creativity is necessary. Traditional forms are not replicating themselves in stagnant unchanging ways, yet traditional practitioners must fight against the dominant paradigm in bureaucracy that privileges 'modern' products as uniquely creative.

Chapter 9

Learning *Abhinaya*: 'Becoming the Character'

I asked Dada how his guru taught him abhinaya, he responded to my question by telling a story of himself, at the age of fourteen or so. His father came to watch him dance at his guru's house. He described how at the time he did all this fast and furious footwork and chakkars, but when he ended, his father was disgusted. Das then imitated his own guru, sitting back, relaxed, smoking a cigarette and saying very nonchalantly 'he needs to go make love to a woman first'. (field notes, Kolkata 2004)

Kathakas are storytellers. Storytelling requires the dancer to interpret and stylistically enact the characters of great epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata. While the epics are traditional, in the sense, that the written form has been handed down from thousands of years, the renderings are not fixed, not uniform and certainly not static. Every time a kathaka enacts a narrative from one of these classic epics or depicts an archetypal character, they do so with their own interpretive nuances and individual style, bringing freshness to the performance of what otherwise may appear as objectified traditional narratives. From what may appear to be a prescribed narrative, springs a new world of drama, told through the body, eyes, hands and feet of the kathaka, each and every time they attend to the task of retelling these stories. Kathakas must be able to portray all the characters of the story, both male and female, 'constantly shifting back and forth between the physical and the metaphysical in terms of gender, age levels, personality and emotional mood of the characters' (Shah 1998: 5). As Das's guru pointed out, a dancer's ability to dance, to evoke emotion, to portray the masculine and the feminine, and to render characters of the great epics relies on life experience. Amongst artists, it is often said that the art of expression cannot entirely be taught. *Abhinaya* comes with maturity of the artist and their life experience[1].

Yet, it is not simply *any* kind of maturity and life understanding that is needed – portraying characters and evoking emotions in kathak relies on an understanding of an affective dimension of experience that is grounded in ways of being most commonly found in India. Thus, for dancers in America, the process of 'becoming the character' (Zarilli 2000: 65) brought a new set of challenges to learning. Learning certain aspects of the dance, such as *abhinaya*, brought foreign learners to a certain kind of limit, a radical absence or silence in

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[1] Abhinaya is often translated as expression; especially the depiction of the classic stories and songs through gesture and mime. Also, 'the art of acting'. (Das et al.2001: 82)

the body of habit, which could not be easily filled within the aesthetic sphere. *Abhinaya* provides a rich example of some of the gaps that exist in learning as the art form crosses borders and oceans, and is taught within a context whose backdrop does not support it. The cultural embodiments of daily life in India, or at least a historicised everydayness of India, emerge as integral to the effective and appropriate portrayal of characters and the expression of emotions. In this chapter, I discuss some of the difficulties, and varying approaches to teaching *abhinaya* to foreign learners who lacked the cultural knowledge and the implicit understanding of many of the taken-for-granted principles of daily life in India. I use *rasa* theory to discuss the importance of 'realist' elements in all stylised representations of dance forms, another reason why 'place' and the affective experiences it provides really do matter.

Dancers, many of whom did not grow up in India, were developing their own unique stylistic identity, within the limits of the parampara. This chapter also highlights the contradictions and instabilities in both teaching and learning *abhinaya* for these dancers[2]. As dancers attempted to develop their own unique artistic stamp in the portrayal of archetypal Indian characters, and to evoke a culturally specific emotive dimension, they were guided to draw inspiration from what was available – a directive that often involved implicit contradiction. While the everyday world of India was drawn on as a source of inspiration, not all aspects of everydayness were relevant. Nor were they readily available to dancers who spent most of their time in America. Dancers were also guided to look inward – a directive that connects the dance to a more universalist expression of emotion in which anyone can portray sentiment by drawing on the deep recesses of their own inner self. However, while dancers must proceed with attention not only to what feels to be sincere, and what is culturally appropriate, they must also attend to the vision of their guru. I describe a process of 'becoming the character' in the company production of 'Sita Haran'[3] in 2009, which was in part created in Das's absence. Thus, the process also relied on the dancer's self-interrogation of what an authentic embodier of the tradition would want. Agency and authority intersected in the intentions of this next generation of

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[2] Local students in Kolkata also experienced difficulties with learning abhinaya – many aspect of modern India also ran counter to the everyday dimensions of India that were idealised in learning abhinaya (see later discussion). In this chapter, I focus mainly on the students of Chhandam America, primarily the senior students.

[3] The company's production of 'Sita Haran' depicted a section of the Ramayana, focusing on Sita's abduction by the evil king Ravan. In the production, Das chose to also focus on the forests of Kishkinda and the fighting between the two monkey kings, Bali and Sugreeva. The production ended with Ram's killing of Bali.

kathakas as they strove to adhere to the wishes of their guru while developing their own unique stylistic stamp. I will argue that the cultural conditions in America have exacerbated dependence on the guru for an interpretation of what is authentic – especially in this domain of the emotions and their representation in abhinaya. The 'realist' element in rasa theory, encouraging close observation of everyday affects, continues to be emphasised and developed by Chhandam dancers – but without them necessarily finding in the everyday world of America, the ingredients their guru tells them to look for, uncertainties and instabilities arise. How do dancers negotiate these contradictions? And how does it intensify and shape further their sense of reliance on the subtle cues provided by their guru? These are some of the questions explored in this chapter.

Rasa, Theorised and Embodied

> '*yato hasto, statho dristhi*
> *yato dristi stato manaha,*
> *yato manaha stato bhava,*
> *yato bhava stato rasa*'

The end goal of all of the Indian classical arts is the creation of *rasa,* most often translated as aesthetic enjoyment or mood. Every performer intends to evoke *rasa*, a shared aesthetic enjoyment between dancer, musician and audience. All the subtle nuances of gestural movement, the refinement of postural control and comportment, facial expression, rhythmic play and use of *tal* must be accompanied by the effective creation of *rasa*. Students are introduced to the concept of *rasa* in the above *shloka* or verse, a part of the opening full pranam that Chhandam students perform at the beginning of every class. The *shloka* itself comes from the Abhinaya Darpana, of Nandikesvara which is a shorter compendium of Bharata's Natya Sastra, a treatise of dance, music and drama (Coomaraswamy 1977: 1). The theory of *rasa* is itself based on the Sanskrit texts of the Natya Sastra (composed somewhere between the 6th and 7th century AD) and on Abhinavagupta's commentaries written in the twelfth century. Through the performance of the *shloka*, while singing and dancing, we learn that through the coming together and unification of all these aspects of performance, the dancer ideally evokes *rasa*[4]. While *rasa*

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[4] 'Where there is the hand, so there must go the eye, where there is the eye, so there must go the mind, where there is the mind, and where there is the mind, so there is the feeling, and where there is the feeling, there is the creation of rasa' (Transl. Das et al. 2001: 7). See Zarilli for an alternate translation of this shloka (1987: 206-7).

ideally comes out of all aspects of live performance, it is in the performance of *abhinaya* that specific *rasa*s are more identifiable, and most often talked about. It is therefore through a discussion of *abhinaya* that I too address the concept of *rasa*.

Rasa is the ultimate goal of performance in all of the Indian performing arts. While *rasa* is essential to music, dance, drama, it is also relevant to the production of sculpture, architecture, and painting. 'Interestingly, its primary referent, however, is cuisine' (Schwartz 2004: 5). *Rasa* is associated with 'taste' 'essence' and 'flavour'. The metaphor of food, and taste, is often used, to describe the cooking of flavours that are so integral to the production of *rasa*:

> *Rasa* theory makes it very explicit that this is a world in which time is slowed down to the time it takes for good flavours to be released. Taste, in this world of performance is no different from good cuisine. The temporality is at once slow and yet requiring decisive judgement and action. It entails taking time over the cuisine, preparing the ingredients, but also intervening at the right time to adjust the heat, simmer the appropriate spices before adding meat and vegetables, allowing a further simmering that releases the flavours and mingles them. (Ram 2011: 161)

In the same sense that food must be tasted, so too must the *rasa* of a performance be tasted or experienced by spectator in order for the *rasa* to be created. Creation of *rasa* relies on spectators, typically referred to as *rasikas* 'who can appreciate the nuances of experiences whose essences, the *rasas*, are distilled and re-presented for their enjoyment' (Ram 2011: 161)

> It is a spectator's experience of aesthetic pleasure arising from the encounter with the performance of the character's *bhava* or emotions through which she or he is temporarily transformed into an 'extra-worldly' state of being…Various spectrums within the audience experience it in various subtle ways depending upon the historiography of their emotions, identity, life-experiences, and above all, their relative knowledge of dance, music, mythology, religious symbolism, philosophy, poetics, and aesthetics associated with all of these. (Shah 1998: 16)

It was this engagement between dancer, musician and audience that created the aesthetic enjoyment of the performance. While an educated audience would be the ideal rasikas, in their ability to perceive the subtleties and nuances of the performance that lend so well to the creation of *rasa*, it is often the case, certainly in America, but also in today's India, that most spectators have little knowledge of the *rasa* theory implicit in the classical Indian arts. Yet, even with audiences, uninitiated in *rasa* theory, the experience of *rasa* is still a

possibility (see also Ram 2011). American audiences that know nothing of *rasa* theory or the complexities of kathak also experience a pleasure and joy in viewing performances. Pandit Das's own ability to evoke *anand* or joy in audiences was a feeling that could be experienced by all, despite individual historiography, a point to which I return shortly.

Rasa theory takes emotions as central to performance. Bharata Muni's Natya Sastra suggests 'eight primary emotions (or *sthaibhava*): *sringara* (love), *hasya* (humor), *vira* (courage), *bibhatsa* (disgust), *raudra* (anger), *adbhuta* (astonishment), *bhayanaka* (terror) and *karuna* (pity)' (Chakravorty 2008: 104). Each *rasa* reflects an emotional state of being. Here we come to an impasse: can the *bhavas* or feelings which create *rasa* be easily translated inter-culturally? I show in this chapter that there are certain taken for granted qualities of these emotional textures that provide great difficulty in translation. Their unique manifestations rely on their creation within certain primary relationships within Indian society, such as that between lovers, or between a mother and child. While we all can grasp 'love', its particular expression is intimately linked to its embeddedness in such primary relationships. For foreign learners, the challenges of *abhinaya* highlight the different emotional textures of these relationships. There are certain gaps, that for learners, and audience members, may be too wide to be traversed. In this sense, *rasa* theory does not altogether work in the specific *bhavas* for those brought up outside India.

Despite these inherent difficulties, Das, and other Indian artists, find ways to cross these gaps, and fill these absences. Rather than focusing on the explicit articulation of *rasa* theory, or the *nava rasa*[5], Das focused on the creation of oneness through the production of *bhakti*. By redirecting the goal of performance explicitly toward *bhakti*, I suggest, he provided a more accessible means of experiencing *rasa*, a notion that itself underlies the egalitarian principles of *bhakti* itself. This connection between *bhakti* and *rasa* goes back to the medieval devotional movements as Chakravorty explains, '*bhakti* was imagined as intense emotional outbursts of personal devotion to god…The aesthetic emotion of *rasa* was experienced through *bhakti* by the devotee (*bhakta*) in the form of divine bliss' (2008: 104-5). While Das and Chhandam dancers do not dwell on the specifics of the *nava rasa*, the creation of *bhakti* is the explicit goal of performance: as Das articulated 'the goal of achieving pure *bhakti* through dance'. In this sense, Das's approach did implicitly adhere to *rasa* theory but it was *bhakti* that was made explicit. *Bhakti*, I argue, is a feeling that was

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[5] Navarasa refers to Abhinavagupta's original eight rasas, plus the addition of a later rasa of santa, peace or tranquillity.

more easily translated and felt. The divine euphoric dances of Das could be felt by audiences, despite no prior knowledge of the Indian arts. Many audience members and reviews described the 'energy' or 'electricity' of Das's performance. While perhaps not grasping the cosmological significance of the achievement of 'oneness' through performance, a sensuous transformation of feeling occurred in the audience, conveying something of *rasa* to these uninitiated audiences. *Bhakti rasa* was the perfect vehicle to reach the widest audience. I return to this at the end of the chapter.

Unlike those aspects of the kathak lifeworld that found their way into explicit discourse, there was no such explicit teaching of *rasa* theory in Chhandam. Instead, Das redirected his dancers' attention back to India:, asking them to engage in a close empirical observation of physical affects in the lived world. Das emphasises observation and participation in a milieu where these orientations are believed to still exist. The everyday world of India was made salient to us as a highly valuable site for the learning of abhinaya. While I keep in mind that everyday emotions and movements do not simply reproduce themselves in dance, I follow the orientations that were part of Das's pedagogy. In certain respects, stylised expressions are themselves a further cultural refinement of what is already cultural in the world of lived emotions and affects – Das drew our attention to this. I use *rasa* theory throughout this chapter to elaborate this relation between the cultural specificity of emotions and affects in everyday life, and their stylised expression in the aesthetic of kathak. It emerges that *rasa* theory bases itself on a close empirical observation of physical affects, thus making the world around the dancer matter to the aesthetics of performance.

Learning Abhinaya: The Basics of Gat Bhao[6]

Abhinaya, which literally means a bringing forth, refers to the art of acting, and expression that is a fundamental element of all the Indian performing arts. In bringing forth the characters and emotions of the art, dancers engage their entire body, from their eyebrows, to their wrist, to their feet. All aspects of the body are attended to in the process of becoming the character.   In Chhandam, explicit direction on how to emote is often absent. While perfecting the art of *abhinaya* was said to be something that comes with maturity, students were prepared for 'acting' in other ways. Students learned first to master the

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[6] Depicting a story or drama in kathak style (Das et al. 2001: 83).

movements of their body, in order to master the coordination required to evoke emotion, and ultimately, to create *rasa*. Dancers must first have mastered control of rhythm and *tal*, footwork, hand gestures and arm movements, head, neck and eye coordination. All of these skills were learned by neophytes, slowly and gradually, preparing them for the task of storytelling (cf. Zarilli 2000 on kathakali training). I begin with a fuller description of the techniques that must be mastered to portray abhinaya – many of which leave considerable room for individual variability and the emergence of individual style. It is precisely this room for latitude which also, paradoxically, left students looking all the more intensely to the master.

Subtleties of Hand Gestures

Hastaks, or hand gestures are used both in storytelling and in pure dance and can be both decorative and symbolic. The refinement of such skills expressed the idealised *khubsoorti* and *nazakat*, the beauty and the delicacy of the beauty, which was necessary to invoking a full aesthetic enjoyment of the art. For a foreign learner, accustomed to the aesthetics of western dance forms, in which the hands are typically not focal points, attending to the hands proved a challenge. A supple and agile hand could alone portray beauty. The wrist, neck, eye, and eyebrows were also focal points of attention for the kathak dancer[7]. In recent years, Das's dancers came under fire. While critics lauded the strength and speed of their footwork, they were critiqued for the lack of beauty in the hands. By the time I met Das, he was continually asserting the necessity of both aspects: strength and speed, as well as beauty and grace. Embellishments with the hands were a source of great individual variation and evidence of personalised style. Beauty comes out of the fluidity and fluency of a movement that has been etched deeply into the body, a gesture that has travelled that path in space thousands of times, as if to carve itself in the malleable kinesphere of space surrounding the dancer. The proficiency of doing, the certainty in initiation, and

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[7] The neck, wrist, eyebrow, and eye were vital components of performance, especially khubsoorti and nazakat. A good example of the subtle nuances of kathak comes in the dance piece known as 'Thaat', a piece that 'displays the subtle technique of the face, hands, and breath, while sometimes interspersing dramatic rhythmic flourishes which end quickly in crisp poses and stances' (Das et al. 2001: 88). The spectacular nature of this piece comes precisely from the vigorous flourishes of footwork, juxtaposed with the dramatic elegance of a crisp look, lifting eyebrow or subtle neck movement. While Zarilli describes the ways in which kathakali dancers exercised their 'fingers, wrists, hands, as well as each set of facial muscles (cheeks, lips, etc) required to embody each expressive state fully' (2000: 73), such was not the case in kathak. While we were often urged to practice lifting our eyebrows independently in repetitions to develop this skill (a skill which some are naturally able to do), we did not systematically practice these things in class, despite their necessity.

absoluteness in the trajectory and direction all lend credence to the movement, and leave space for addition of personal flair that will be the precursor of one's individual style.

Hastaks in kathak are not strictly codified. Unlike some south Indian forms, there is no 'alphabet' of *mudras,* another term for hand gestures. Flexibility in the use of *hastaks* left a great deal of room for personal interpretation and variation. There are no 'rules' per se around the use of *hastaks*. My own confusion and struggles to depict a character were met with the directive, 'watch guru-ji'. In his absence, the next in line took on the role of temporary authority. But even senior students struggled to understand the breadth of gestural vocabulary and its many uses. During the production of several dance-dramas, which relied heavily on dramatic portrayals through character development, it was apparent that even senior disciples were still learning the appropriate way to portray and use their hands. Students would attempt various uses of known *hastaks*, and the guru would give the final say as to whether or not something was appropriate. I was told, 'you do it, and when guru-ji doesn't like something, he will tell you'. While the very basic *hastaks* were distilled down and taught to beginners in isolated fashion, their many uses came to be known through time, through exposure and through observing their guru-ji. For example, *ghunghat hastak* was the common *hastak* for pulling the veil. It was also used to signify pulling out a *bansuri* or flute. Students first encountered the *hastak* in these forms, but would later come to recognise it in other contexts. For example, *ghunghat hastak* was also used to illustrate picking flowers, pushing water out of a *pichkari*, holding *malla* (in meditative pose), and many others, much of which I still do not know. Such contextual knowledge relied on exposure and observation of the guru. For the master, the possibilities for using *hastaks* are endless, but the disciple, still unaware of the entire spectrum of possibilities remains dependent on her guru-ji for an understanding.

While some gestures were purely decorative and used in very non-literal ways, often in elements of pure dance, or *nritt*, *hastaks* are also used as literal and mimetic representations of actions and objects in the context of storytelling (Zarilli 2000: 77). Symbolic gestures express objects, such as the opening of the hands for a lotus, the fluttering of the hands for a butterfly. Other gestures mimed actual movements made in relation to an imagined object, such as the pulling of the veil. The movement of the hand indicates that one is stylistically pulling an imaginary veil or *pallu* across the face.

Movements, such as pulling a veil, plucking flowers, a woman adorning herself with jewellery relied on realistic portrayal – not in the sense that they mimicked everyday behaviour precisely, for it would be difficult to locate many of these idealised movement. However, gestures needed to accurately represent the material world. In the case of pulling a veil, we were instructed to 'practice with a *dupatta* or scarf to get a sense of what you would have to do to get the veil across your face.' In these cases, dancers were often asked to imagine the object, or to go home and try the action with an object replica. Here, a senior disciple corrected the gestures of a student portraying Govardhan Ghiri, the story of Lord Krishna saving the people of Vrindavan from the floods, paying particular attention to the unbelievable nature of her depictions.

> *The first gesture depicted a woman carrying a pot on her head. 'Your hand is not holding the pot', referring to the misplacement of her hand. 'And what are you doing there? Gathering your children? Are they the same height as you, no – so you must bend down to gather them. You need to show what it is that you are doing. These are not just random movements. And then you are holding a baby, but you just drop it and go into the next move. You must think what you are doing'. Although movements were stylised, they needed to be somewhat realistic to convey meaning. In another section of bhao she noted, 'and here you have pulled the arrow three times before you shot it – why? You only need to pull it once, and then let it go'. She urged the dancer to be aware. 'You must tell yourself that in your head while you are doing this'. I winced at the ongoing criticism and corrections, but they continued.*

While 'realism' is not the goal of Indian aesthetics, a stylisation of a realistic portrayal and observation is necessary.

Body Position, Posture & Comportment

> *Dada demonstrated a section of bhao, moving around the room as he did so. When he stopped he asked Charlotte what he had just done. She responded by saying that he had done some footwork, describing it. But he retorted, 'yes, but you said nothing of my abhinaya'. Charlotte, who had been sitting behind Dada and therefore only had a rear view of the performance responded by saying, 'I couldn't see'. Dada took the opportunity to make a point. He demonstrated again, enacting the shooting of an arrow, and showed that even from behind, one could get a sense, and a feeling just from the movements of the body.*

Abhinaya is expression that relies on the entire body's ability to perform, to evoke emotion, feeling, to portray genders and characters. It is the coordination of the entire body that effectively communicates. While we often think of the expressive qualities of

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the face in such matters, expression also includes learning how to express using shifts in body weight, finding different qualities of movement, initiating from different points. In initial stages, teachers constantly draw attention to body parts, giving kinaesthetically directed corrections that draw a students conscious attention to their 'backs', 'ribs' 'shoulders' and so on. Often it is the job of the teacher to get students to see what they have become incapable of seeing through their very own inhabiting of their body.

> *'Kanhaya' – Dada repeated, as students pull their imagined bansuri or flute. 'Ghunghat hastak should be taught before this' (ghunghat hastak is the particular hand gesture used to depict a bansuri). 'Tribhang' – 'hip out' he said. He reiterated the importance of this several times, a three point, or triangle, a line that comes from Odissi. At the end of 'kanhaya' students should be in a bent, squatted position, tribhang, while holding flute, with right leg crossed in front and toe. 'Strong toe'. 'Relax', 'down more' (bend), 'hips out'. He moved around the room correcting the angles of torsos so that students' chest faces the front right corner, while their arms are in the direction of front left corner. 'Elbows down' (in relation to the holding of the flute). 'Hips out' he says again. 'Drop your elbows', 'rib cage' drawing students nascent awareness to that body part. 'Back straight' he said time and time again. He fixes, angles, elbows, hastaks, and physically moves peoples – doing so gingerly and cautiously.*

In this beginners' workshop, Das used explicit directions and bodily terms, in addition to demonstration, to communicate the desirable posture to his students. As described in chapter seven, such verbal analysis had emerged as an important pedagogical tool. If this does not succeed, teachers physically move the student themselves, manipulating their torso or appendages into the desired position. In this case, explicit instruction supported the more objective aspects of portraying characters, such as the angle of the torso, or position of the foot, but there was relatively little direction as to the kind of emotion that should infuse such bodily comportment.

Body comportment is particularly effective and necessary in the portrayal of masculinity and femininity, as dancers must learn to inhabit their bodies in both gendered-modes. The ability to 'become the masculine, and become the feminine' as Das states, is embodied in the concept of *Ardhanarishwara*, 'Literally meaning 'half-female, half male;' symbolically representing the embodiment or union of both feminine and masculine energies as a balanced force in nature i.e., the reconciliation of opposites' (Das et al. 2001: 82). The

Figure 20: Das depicting Rati, Goddess of lust (India Jazz Progressions 2007)

principle of *ardhnarishwara* was stressed by Das, and achievement of the embodiment of the masculine and feminine was crucial to the ultimate goal of one-ness through dance, a point I return to at the end of the chapter. But it was also one of the most difficult aspects of *bhao*, to be able to portray both gendered roles, and switch from one to the next almost instantly.

In traditional storytelling, the kathaka enacts all of the characters, indicating a shift from one role to the next through a particular turn, known as a *palta*[8]. Dancers must completely transform their comportment, gestural dynamic and expression from one moment to the next, to clearly indicate which character they are portraying. Effective storytelling relies on this non-verbal communication of character and narrative development.

> '*You are doing three things: being a percussionist/musician, dancer and actor! But none of you believe me. The senior students, they don't believe me. And now add the eyebrows and neck*' *He continued on,* '*What will you do tomorrow if I die today? You come alone, you go alone. Did I teach you to be a submissive housewife? No.*' *And then he asked again about the three things, being a musician, dancer and actor, pointing out*

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[8] See the following link for an example of Das switching from the portrayal of the evil king Ravan to the feminine Sita. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W50yvRH4EPo

how difficult it is, but no one believes it. Then he asked Leela, a senior student who was assisting. He looked directly at her, fixing his gaze intently and said, 'Prove it'. The class stood silent, all eyes on Leela. Again he asked Leela to show these three things. She stood there, as students often do, not really sure how to respond, likely having minor heart palpitations as many of us do when we are called upon in by the guru in class. She paused, gained composure. I wondered - as I'm sure others did – how would she do it?

She began, 'tingun, with ardhanarishwara'. She began reciting theka. On the second cycle, she continued with tin-gun reciting, but began doing the masculine, changing her body posture slightly and her footwork, moving back to one diagonal. From khali, she changed to the feminine, moving to the left corner, and softened her body and face, enacting Radha. He tested her, and she succeeded. He asked another student if she did it. She replied, 'Yes, she showed it using the different weight and sound of the body'. I had initially been looking just to her face, but the student was absolutely right. The difference was also manifest in the sound and the body weight.

'You are the masculine, you are the feminine', he asserted, creating a sense of awe among the dancers.

(field notes 2009)

When Leela attempts to demonstrate the principle of *ardhanarishwara*, her attempt is successful because she is able to convey the difference between female and masculine with shifts in her body weight, and comportment, as her guru-sister pointed out. I spoke with several dancers about their own process of portraying male and female characters,

Monica: How do you bring the masculine presence into your dance? Are there things you consciously think to carry that more masculine poise?
Rina: I think the simplest thing is that the centre of gravity for men and women is very different, and so women's centre of gravity tends to sit lower, and so we often learn with our hips or the bottom part of who we are, where as men lead with their chest. And so learning how to lead movements from your upper body was a constant challenge, definitely for me: body carriage. But also, if you watch guru-ji depict men, its not just about depicting men, its about depicting male warriors. Its not just a man, but a male warrior. The swiftness of movement, the alertness, the sharpness of movement, and that was really challenging. And of course you know the way guru-ji dances is extremely dynamic and so bringing that dynamism and bringing that warrior alertness and sharpness in your body --- I had to really work at it.
(Mehta, personal interview, September 30, 2009)

Dancers, almost all of whom were female, needed to portray male roles. While the all female company certainly developed their ability to play male roles through the production of two dance-dramas, their own existence as women was not adequate in ensuring accuracy and beauty in their attempt to portray female roles. In fact, portraying female

characters was even more problematic. For many students immersed in a north American context, the portrayal of male qualities is seen as less problematic. Meera Varghese describes this trend in her study of Bharata Natyam in Canada,

> The most common challenge expressed by Bharatanatyam teachers in Canada is the difficulty in drawing graceful, feminine movements and gestures out of Canadian-raised girls. In one of the private classes I observed at the Jai Govinda Dance Academy, Jai demonstrated the feminine movements of a particular character and expressed frustration when his Canadian-raised student could not execute the movements correctly. He later remarked to me, 'This is a problem with all of my female students—I can be more feminine than they can'...Jai also commented that some of his female students are much better at performing the more masculine poses of *Shiva* than the graceful movements of *Parvati*.' (Varghese 2009: 10)

Das on several occasions echoed Govinda's words, pointing out that he was capable of expressing the feminine more effectively than most of his students. The expression of an idealised femininity was often seen as a greater challenge, as the repertoire of movement for a historicised Indian femininity seemed to be far removed from the lived experiences of those who grew up outside of India.

Learning from Everyday: But from *whose* everyday?

> *Dada began talking about observing people and the way they act. 'This is abhinaya, abhinaya is life', he emphatically stated, 'it cannot be taught', then he paused, and went on, 'yes, stylised versions of it can be taught, but for the real thing one has to look to life.'*

Stylised versions of *abhinaya* depended on observations of the everyday. In line with *rasa* theory, Das identifies an important point: *abhinaya* requires a stylisation and separateness from the everyday that is in the same moment, grounded in and based on such empirical observations of the world around you. As was the case for the performance of *hastaks*, 'realism' in portrayal of the masculine and feminine was vital. Portrayal relied on the dancer's awareness of oneself, but also on observations of the world around them.

> *Natya* or dramaturgy, into which are to be poured all the most sophisticated of techniques of make up, dialogue, dance etc., aims to surpass the muddied flux of everyday experience. The techniques allow performers to extract or distil the essential elements of that which is to be represented, discarding the mixtures that characterise daily experience as so much raw material for the artist and bringing forth an essence, the *rasa* to be savoured by the spectators. (Ram 2000a: 8)

There is both a necessary transcendence of the mundane in the creation of *rasa*, at the same time that the representations must be grounded in everydayness. In this case, gestures must be representative and based on known patterns of practical engagement with the lived world, and with objects in that world. But they must also be elaborated and embellished to differentiate from the mundane.

The embodiment of the masculine and feminine roles that is required by the kathak dancer caused considerable challenge for most learners, but posed a new set of problems for students who did not grow up in India. Many of the basic understandings, comportments and gestures that form the background of experience in India were absent in the bodies of his American dancers, as I described in chapter four. The absence of an understanding of emotions and gendered dimension of behaviour was particularly evident in students' attempts to portray abhinaya. Confronted by students who possessed a different repertoire of bodily knowledge, the connection between the quotidian world of India and the aesthetic prescriptions of dance and storytelling was made obvious. Das's frustrations with student's lack of understanding would occasionally escalate into such comments as, 'You did not grow up there. How will you ever know?' He had a point. This absence proved crucial to the dance. How *would* we ever know?

There is a modification of rasa theory implicit in the exigencies of migration. Instead of simply being asked to observe everyday affects, Das directed his students to observe the everyday world of India as a source of knowledge. While resident in India, we were reminded to observe the world around us: the movements, the gestures and the patterns of interaction. We were also encouraged to participate in them, whether that was eating with our hands, sitting on the floor, wearing a sari, or religiously performing *namaskar*. Many of the elements of a wider habitus I mention in chapter four, were not the observations, necessarily, of an anthropologist. They were pointed out to us and made part of a program that seemed to have arrived at conclusion similar to anthropology – to know a cultural form you have to observe and participate in the quotidian and the embodied dimensions of life. Life in India was positioned as a source of authentic knowledge for our dance. And when it came to the art of acting, expressing emotion and playing iconic characters of India's past, the background world of India certainly seemed to matter. A version of Indian-ness in the everyday became an important source of knowledge for a developing dancer.

Yet it was also apparent to me as an anthropologist that in fact not all expressions of quotidian life even in India were given equal attention by the guru. The selectivity was particularly apparent when it came to gender. The actual performance of femininity in daily life was highly varied, revealing a diversity of caste, class and regional habitus in local movement scapes. The purposive stride of a working class woman in Mumbai was very different from the movements of a low caste female chai seller in Kolkata. Attention was being given to a particular class of actors, women who portrayed a more particular version of femininity. Modernity posed another problem for the guru. While restrictions on young women in the public sphere still exist, women move through the public domain with greater freedom, wearing western clothes, riding scooters, and travelling alone. Kolkata is undergoing rapid 'modernisation' and women's role in the public sphere is being re-conceptualised, and with it, new ways of occupying those spaces emerge.   Das could not use them as models for us. Instead, he turned to other spheres of aesthetic practice: film, sculpture, images, or paintings. Das directed our attention to an old Satyajit Ray film that was playing on television, urging us to observe the young Bengali woman who was manipulating her *pallu*, gently turning away from the male elder, and concealing her face with the *pallu*[9]. It was a vision of a femininity of a historic period, an idealised femininity of what some might consider a by-gone era.

Thus, while Das drew upon the everyday world of India, where this world let him down, so to speak, he took inspiration from the aestheticised domain of practices. Das once lectured on body positions in Indian art, especially the way the gods and goddesses are often depicted, they lean heavily into one hip, so that the line of the waist is running diagonally one way, while the line of the shoulders is running diagonally the other way; Das used this '*tribhang*' position in his style.

The external world was being selectively sourced for references and images that fitted the imaginings of a historicised femininity, intended to depict a very idealised and aestheticised sense of beauty and modesty. From temple carvings to black and white films to selective live embodiments of motherhood (discussed below), the public domain was ripe for images and ideas on how to portray femininity. Our attention was rarely if ever directed to quotidian portrayals of masculinity, but images of strength and power were associated with common images and ideas of masculinity as embodied by Shiva, or the

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[9] Pallu is the loose end of a sari.

Rajput warriors of Rajasthan, or even the famed Japanese warrior of Miyamoto Musashi. Das's vision for embodiments of masculinity and femininity drew from a wide range of eras, cultures and location.

It was an older generation of women that Das turned to as repositories of a certain level of continuity between the quotidian world and the stylised representations of art. We were guided to the movements of these older women – to mothers, and to wives – who in some way embodied something of the old world, a femininity not seen in the young woman of today. A young dancer that manipulates her invisible *pallu* across her face in the dance, may never do so in daily life, but she has a frame of reference for such activities and gestures, both in their stylised (seen in films, music videos, images, etc) in the gestures of older women. For younger women growing up in India and wishing to learn dance, such role models stood in a more intimate relationship to their experience. They could more easily draw on the comportment of their own mothers, aunts and grandmothers. Familial embodiments, gained from growing up in that world, or even being raised by an Indian mother did provide a strong basis for understanding otherwise foreign modes of comportment and ways of being in the world (see also Young 2002). Although this may be in no way identical to the characters of thousands of years ago, it resonated with a shared cultural understanding of an idealised femininity. In this way, growing up in the cultural milieu of Kolkata provides dancers with a shared set of assumptions from which to enact, move and dance the aesthetic renderings of classic characters and their emotions. Without that experience, a gap in necessary knowledge persisted. In many ways, no advice or scaffolding tactics could fill this – contradictions between the goal and the available sources persisted. Thus, contradictions in the instructions we received also emerged.

Aware of this gap, Das tempered his approach as well. While continuing to exhort us to observe older women, he also gave us encouragement to draw on our own forms of sensuality:

> *You cannot do it like these girls, you see Kasturi and Shudeepta (local Kolkata students), they do it the Indian way, but Seema does not', pointing to the Indo-American in the group. You have to use your own sensuality to express these things'. I understood the necessity to draw off one's personal recesses of emotions and experience, but I persisted, as I knew by cultural standards, my own renderings would surely not be appropriate. I inquired further, 'If I do this, how is what I do kathak?' Das went on to explain, 'it is possible to do gat bhao in the same way, but you have to watch these women all the time, they way they act, move and sit'. At that moment, he pointed out a*

students' mother who was sitting on the couch; she sat elegantly in her sari, her body slightly narrowed and concave, causing a reduction in the space it occupied. She was leaning forward, almost as if her elbows were rested on her knees, relaxed, sitting there in her sari. He said most of his students in the west, non-Indian and Indian, do not do gat bhao in this same way. But it is possible, you have to watch very carefully.

An understanding of Indian cultural modes of knowing and being needed to be tempered with a genuine adherence to our own background, our life experiences. Circularity in our process of learning abhinaya emerged – we were often directed to the everyday of India for empirical observations, but in some instances, observation of any gendered interactions, even in America, were sufficient. We were often directed to look to our guru, yet over emphasis on this was met with a re-direction to look inward. But if one looks inward, they must also be careful to avoid the kind of self-absorption that was also criticised by Das. While I strove to find some unity in the pedagogical directions we received – I could not. Rather, the contradictions and ambiguities that arise in the migration of practices are most aptly reflected in the teaching and learning of abhinaya. There was no one easy solution to the challenges of transporting practices and bodies in a transnational art form. The contradictions implicit in practice created instabilities for many learners, who struggled to understand *how* to portray abhinaya and where exactly they should be looking.

The universal relevance of these stories and the universality of emotions was also emphasised, contradicting some of the earlier instructions to look to India, but nonetheless, remaining highly relevant to dancers and audiences outside of India and also those not of Indian ancestry. Das's vision and message was one that proposed a universal relevance to the great Hindu epics, as containing significance for every culture, through their embodiment of universal truths. The emotions evoked resonated with shared human traits, that anyone, regardless of class, caste, religion, race, ethnicity or gender could dance, appreciate and experience. He himself drew on observations of gender in the U.S. for his evolving art. At a workshop in Barrackpore in India, Das explained to the local students that he also observed the men and women in the cafeteria in San Francisco University, explaining that all this instructs him on his *abhinaya*. His bi-culturally fluency was an asset to his capacity to address very varied demographics of students. He was always observing, in keeping with the importance of 'realism' in *abhinaya*. While such American forms of embodiment were not necessarily the idealised material of Radha-Krishna depiction, they still mattered for Das. For Das, and in fact *rasa* theory, recognises a universality in certain aspects of emotion. The variable forms of kathak, and the diverse

bodies that performed it, were validated through a rhetoric of universalism that struck an affective chord in the multicultural Bay area.

The intersection between essentialist ideals ('look to India for everyday affects') and universalist ones ('look within yourself or at any world you live in') was played out by the bodies of dancers, who were consistently trying to negotiate personal expression within a larger cultural framework. As students, we were compelled to both engage with Indian aesthetic values and an Indian dimension of emotional experience, yet we were also directed to our own inner selves as a source of personal expression. Lack of familiarity with the cultural framework made this an even more difficult task, for there were limits to how far the universalist understanding of emotion could carry a student. Such matters came to a head over public performance.

Being Sita: Essential Indian-ness or Universalism?

Prior to opening night of 'Sita Haran', a 'work-in-progress' event was held in which short excerpts were shown in a small, intimate theatre in the Bay area, followed by Q&A. One of the most controversial comments of the evening came from an audience member[10] who commented that the portrayal of Sita was a western one.

> *Dada replied to her comment in the circuitous fashion that I had come to expect. He spoke about the rest of the characters, their distractions, and how it all ends in violence. Circumventing her comment, he brought it back to what the underlying meaning of the story was, or at least his interpretation of it. He describes the moral failings of several of the characters and how this leads to unnecessary violence, especially in the killing of Bali. Das had chosen to focus on a frequently marginalised part of the story in the second half of the show, the meeting and ensuing battle in the forests of kishkinda. While the Ramayana is frequently held up as embodying ideal characters, such as Ram and Sita, Das highlights another side to the story. In his response, he returned to the point that 'there is a universal essence underlying the story that can apply to each person'. He then began talking about his multi-ethnic group of dancers, and posed the question,' what about a 'white' Ravan or Bali?' pointing to Charlotte (his non-Indian shishya).*

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[10] The woman who made this comment was of Indian ancestry, and would later also ask about when people would start portraying more modern tales and get away from these ancient epics that were thousands of years old. Her comments induced speculation by the dancers she was a disgruntled Indian woman who mistook the tradition as restrictive and failed to see the larger picture.

Another audience member also responded, paraphrasing what he took to be the significance of the work, 'so what you are saying is that the portrayal of each character is a individual journey, it is each persons' understanding of that role, how it relates to them, and how they bring it out – so that the point of Indian or Western is not even a valid one'. The emphasis on an inner path of discovery on the capacity of each performer to infuse that role with their own understanding, was taken by many to be the deeper meaning. Later, Das and several company members expressed their annoyance with such an inconsequential comment, when the overall message was so much deeper. For most performers, this woman's pertinent comment was to be dismissed. She stood accused of not seeing the larger and more important truth: this was about portraying the universal essence of life and humanity. Part of Das's response to this comment of a 'western portrayal' was to redirect the audience's attention to one of his most adept non-Indian students, subtly pointing out that it really did not matter what one looked like. *Abhinaya* could be done effectively, even on a 'western-body' such as Charlotte's. I return to this point below.

This anecdote highlights one of the underlying problems for foreign learners. Some components of what *rasa* theory seeks to elaborate in stylised fashion are in fact culturally specific constructions of emotions embedded in primary relations, such as the love of lovers, or the love between mother and child. Das frequently invoked the metaphor of love when trying to draw out feeling in his students. Love, both the idealised love between man and woman and also the devotional love of *bhakti* are often drawn upon in portrayal of characters, especially pertaining to the love between Radha and Krishna. Many of kathak's stories, such as the dance of lord Krishna, fall back into this familiar narrative between Krishna and his ideal devotee. The sensuous portrayal of love is an emotional dimension of experience that one must learn to portray. Life experience is believed to provide a significant base of emotive experience from which a dancer can draw from in order to depict characters. Yet, upon closer examination, we learn that such portrayals must be tempered with an understanding of the emotional textures of these relationships in which there is a continuum between love and *bhakti*. We immediately are no longer in a world that is universal but richly historical. While love may be something that is universal, the expression of it between a god and devotee or Krishna and Radha are not, and depicting the emotions and affects of these relationships requires a deep understanding of such emotional bonds.

What of our Sita, who was accused of dancing in a western way? The dancer who had portrayed Sita was in fact of Indian ancestry, although brought up in America. She had also trained intensively in classical ballet for much of her youth. The audience member was not simply mistaken. She was able to identify a certain comportment and predilection toward a style of movement that was outside what she felt to be an Indian aesthetic. We have seen that convincing portrayal relied on coordination of the entire body. Das, other Chhandam teachers, and the dancer herself, were aware of the inscribed patterns of her ballet training. I frequently heard the comment, 'too balletic' directed to this dancer and asked her about this,

> *Going on my toes, going into relevé….something about the way I hold my hands, even Dada says, your hands are too balletic, its always here and here, its always placed, and they want me to let go and not place my hands. Stop being so deliberate about my actions and just let go, and be more natural. (Nath, personal interview, September 22, 2009)*

One of the senior dancers and the rehearsal director for Sita haran also made this observation that this dancer's heavy ballet training was something that 'you can't throw out of the body', and her rendering coincided with what she has seen ballet dancers do, such as the predilection to go into relevé (on one's toes) as an ending. Despite the attempts to recuperate this company dancers' portrayal of Sita from accusations of western aesthetics through a rubric of universalism, the audience member had tuned into something that seemed somewhat out of place in relation to what Indian aesthetics entail.

Das and Chhandam dancers responded to this criticism with a universalist argument: emotions are universal, and the expression of Indian-ness is a lesser aim. However, this argument only goes so far. Even without audience criticisms, dancers already know that they do not entirely "get" this aspect of the dance. There is a quality of Indian-ness to it, one that is both desired and eschewed. The being-in-place of the San Francisco context instilled dancers with a different spectrum of cultural embodiments, revealing a gap in their learning of an art, whose aesthetics are grounded in another location.

In taking for granted the emotional textures of such primary relationships, we misrecognise the kinds of bodily knowledge we carry by virtue of our being-in-place and growing up in a particular world. While such primary relationships have relevance to all human-kind,

their particular manifestation in kathak draws from their embeddedness in the network of relations that defines life, in what we refer to in the age of nations as 'India', but might well describe a broader regional configuration of social relations. *Rasa* theory seeks to bring out the expressive content of such basic states of emotion. On one hand, emotions and their bodily affects are seen by Das as universal, but their expression within the context of meaningful relationships makes them particular to their environment. In short, it makes them 'cultural'. While the *bhavas* of *rasa* theory might have wider relevance cross-culturally as basic affects, their particular expression comes from their situated-ness within relationships. This is why the specific *bhavas* of *rasa* theory do not entirely work for those brought up outside India.

Can the gap be crossed? I cannot entirely answer this question, for while much of the cultural knowledge implicit in kathak can be gained through committed, diligent and life-long learning, the skill of *abhinaya* is a challenging one. I provide an example. Senior shishya Charlotte Moraga was, at the time of writing, lauded for her own *abhinaya* as presented in the company's dance-drama. I asked Moraga if she felt any discomfort portraying Indian characters, to which she said point blank, 'what do you mean, because I am white?'. I sheepishly recoiled.

> *Its never a question to me whether I'm doing justice to the character ethnically – because of ethnic background. I feel like because I am not of the culture, I do so much research, that I feel like…(pauses)...these are archetypal characters, these are really archetypal characters, so I feel like I understand the nature of the character, and then guru-ji's training is so rich in the sense that he doesn't hold back – he won't say oh you won't be able to do this because you are not Indian, so you should just do this, he doesn't do that. So I never feel like that's a problem, that I'm not doing justice (Moraga, personal interview, October 4, 2009)*

Charlotte was a part of a generation of students that emerged out of Das' classes at SFSU. She had no previous knowledge of Indian dance or Indian culture. The question of her 'whiteness' was one that she, and other non-Indians would confront over the years. Part of her answer to any of the discrimination she might have experienced was *riyaz* and dedicated study. This was also Das's response, when he trained his first generations of 'blondes and brunettes' so vigorously in the technique, that their dance technique would, he hoped, overcome the resistance of Indian audiences and the competition with other dance forms in the west. In our discussion, I recalled to Charlotte the particular comments about the portrayal of a western Sita, and the expectation of some audience members, that

such roles should be done in an 'Indian style'. Moraga responded, referring to her own portrayal of classic characters,

The ironic thing is that the older Indians, who really would have that expectation, they were like, 'you were so Ravan'. They did not say 'this was not a western Ravan', 'this is Ravan'…so we all have to find our voice in a character – no one is going to portray Ravan in the same way. And no one is going to portray Sita in the same way. (Moraga, personal interview, October 4, 2009)

For this non-Indian kathak dancer, perceptions of race and ethnicity were not paramount in her expression of what she, and her guru, saw as a universally relevant art. The ongoing recuperation of 'universalist' interpretations and explanations of the dance and characters provided the only answer possible to the impossibilities of retrieving or re-creating an 'Indian abhinaya'. His dancers are armed to deal with it; they respond as best as they know how, with hard intensive training that leaves no room for questions of authenticity. As Das often says, 'the art will win in the end'. Whether or not a dancer could portray love in an Indian way seemed to matter less when diligent training and study created other possibilities.

Invisible authority and Self-interrogation: The Production of Sita Haran

Young dancer: How do you refine abhinaya and make it look natural?
Senior shishya: Watch Guru-ji – he is doing it all the time, then go to the mirror and practice, practice, practice. (field notes 2008)

In our lineage, the guru was held up as the penultimate example of authenticity and mastery on expression and storytelling. Senior teachers would often direct students to their guru's acting as a source of knowledge, authority and inspiration. While his students redirected the search for an authentic and appropriate mode of expression to their guru, he directed several queries to external public sources of knowledge, such as the daily world. But given the ambiguities about which daily world actually mattered, in the end, the guru grew in significance as the authentic and sole embodiment of aesthetic knowledge. But this only shifted the source of instabilities of meaning. Students studied the face of the guru intently, scrutinising his performances, and gaining inspiration through watching and feeling. Senior disciples would watch attentively, eyes glued, anytime he would dance, and especially when he would portray evocative emotional renderings. Yet, as the guru says, you cannot do like he does. Nor does he want you to. It is not, as Bourdieu may have

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noted, a case of 'look, do what I am doing', rather the guru specifically instructed us not to do what he is doing. In the case of *abhinaya*, it was not a case of learning to imitate or copy. We were meant to watch carefully, observing every detail. As Das moved around the room, students would often shift and rearrange themselves in space to get the best view of his expression, being admonished if they should miss something. There was a necessity to observe, yet, if the intention was not to imitate, what were students watching? Anjali Nath commented,

> *Guru-ji can of course give us movements and motions and have us imitate them – and that's one way he can teach us, and he will do that sometimes, and its great when he does, and its inspiring to watch. But that's not really his purpose, to have us imitate him, and in this production (of Sita Haran) he has not been spoon-feeding us or holding our hand'. (Nath, personal interview, September 22, 2009)*

In May 2009, Das and company began work on the production of Sita Haran. After assigning characters and providing some initial direction, Das departed for his performing and teaching tour in India, leaving the company with the brief: 'work it out for yourselves' He had given them music samples, and had set parameters around what was to happen – but there was a lot left up to the dancers. For this production, dancers would both rely on an interrogation of their self, and reliance on their own emotions and experience, but this was set in relation to what they believed to be their guru's vision. Rina Mehta commented on her experiences of the production that year,

> *It is not that he is totally hands-off, but there is a difference with this production. He tells you what he wants, and gives you some direction, but then you have to figure out everything in between. For example, there were several pieces of new music that he sent over from India while he was there, and he didn't tell us what to do. Rather, he said 'Do it and show me.' And for myself, I wondered what he was talking about. I began thinking, 'What am I supposed to do?' In my experience, up until that point, he had always told me exactly what to do. (Mehta, personal interview, September 30, 2009)*

This was to be part of the journey. Working closely with the music, armed with stacks of historical references on the *Ramayana*, and utilising the knowledge gained from years of training, the company dancers set off on the task of trying to understand, embody and bring to life their assigned characters.

The relative independence that Das granted these dancers highlights a particular version of agency, not that of an entirely autonomous agent, but one that relies on the interrogation of
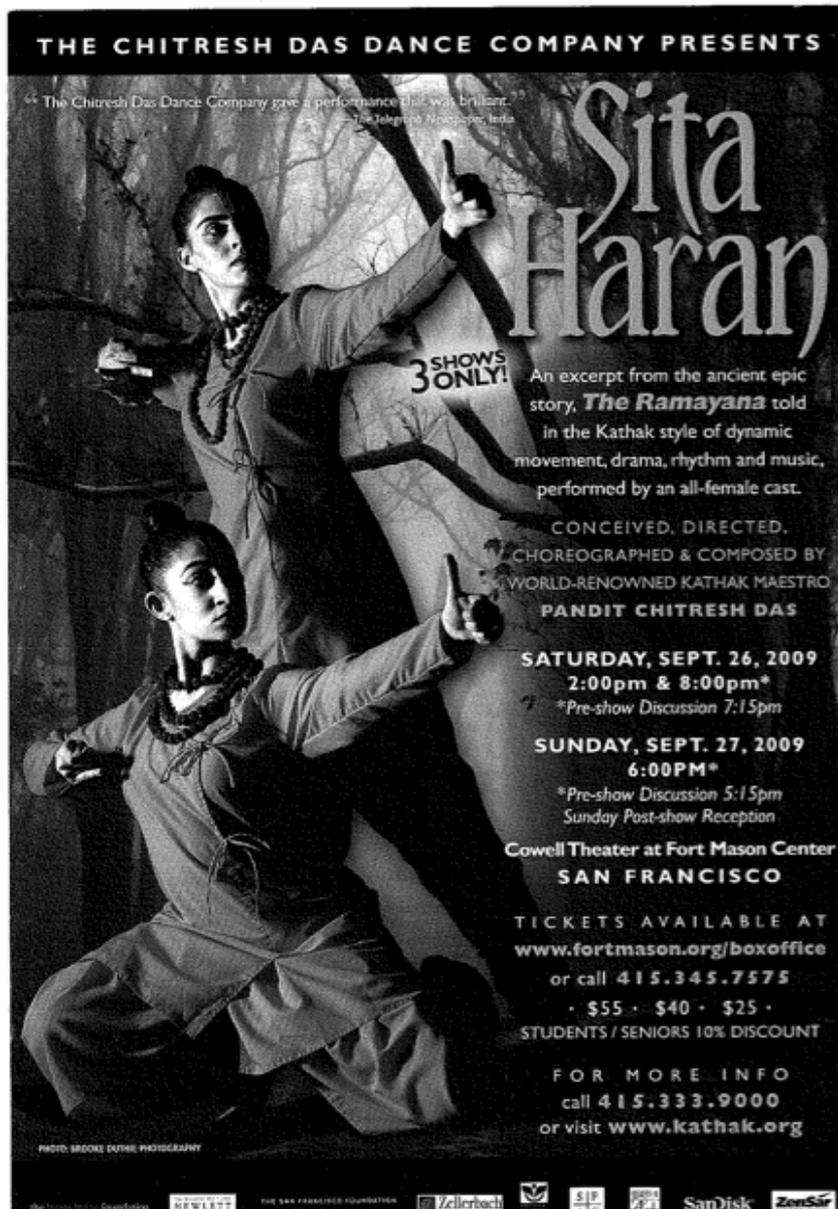
Figure 21: Flyer for 'Sita Haran' with Yasmeen-Shaikh and R. Mehta as Ram and Lakshman

an invisible authority at once internal and external to self. This invisible version of authority relies very heavily on that which has been absorbed by students, so that they are relying on being able to ask themselves what an authoritative embodier of the tradition would want. Yet, students experience an enhanced version of agency in this shift away from imitation to a more mature phase of learning.

During Das's absence over the summer months, they worked diligently on studying their characters and constructing logical interactions amongst the characters that matched the many historical references they consulted. In the preliminary stages, there was heavy reliance on constructed dialogue, spoken in accompaniment to the actions. Dancers would

create a dialogue for their scene, in a cadence that matches the *tal* or composition. One senior teacher commented that although in kathak we do not use our voice to act out characters, it is a tool in the beginning stages to assist in exploring emotion. The need for verbalisation, both of the dialogue as well as the ability to speak about your character were seen as useful in developing one's character.

> *When we are doing it we try to speak the dialogue, it actually really helps when we speak the dialogue and you're trying to say it. When you think it in your head it doesn't necessarily come out. That's why I said earlier that I can almost see in people's heads what they are trying to say but it is not coming out through their body. That helps us but then we get dependent on it, and then we realise that when we stop speaking the dialogue we are not being quite as emphatic and that the more emphatically we speak the dialogue the more emphatically we do this....so lately, Guru-ji has been saying, don't speak the dialogue – where before he was saying speak the dialogue, so its again a maturing process[11].(Lee, personal interview, September 14, 2009)*

The verbalisation was an intermediary step to the larger goal of non-verbal bodily communication of a character, and of one's emotions, especially in one's interactions with others. In later stages, when the mimed dialogue was clear, the dancers would stop verbalising the narrative, and rely solely on the actions, although several noted that they kept the dialogue going in their heads.

Dancers worked with a musical score created by the guru, with *bol* compositions, videos of earlier creations, and with their own understandings of the story to come up with a beginning to their character. Upon Das's return, dancers revealed the work, and faced the scrutiny of the guru. His students would present something they had worked on; if he allowed you to continue, dancers knew they were on the right track. Das would stand to the side, if he liked something, he would let you continue, or if he did not, he would jump in and show it himself. Students needed to bring something, and he added instructions or corrections. Seibi Lee talked about her own initial attempts at rendering the character of Marich,

> *We got the music a week and a half before he came, which was two and a half weeks before retreat, so I just listened to that music over and over and over again. I*

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[11] In the performance, limited sections were narrated from off-stage. The decision to narrate was one that was debated by company members – some felt that the audience would get the 'feel' of the performance and the narration would detract too much, while others felt the narration was required so that the audience could follow the story. It was assumed that even amongst the large sections of Indo-Americans in the audience, many would not understand the full story. The text was added later in the process and was not included in the musical score.

understood that it was devotional song, and I couldn't choreograph anything in particular, I learned the words and I understood what the words meant, so I tried to depict what those words meant. And then I sang it over and over again to get the feeling of devotion – so when he asked me at retreat to do it, it was a complete shock… luckily the singing of it just took over in me, and I don't really remember what I did. And he was very happy and had said, yes, I wouldn't change very much of it. But the truth of the matter, it was feeling-wise what he had liked but there was a lot he could change about it. A couple days later, we were in that music again, and he just stood up and danced. And he danced in a very different way then I had danced, and he said, its not that I would change what you were doing but this might be the way that I would do it…And since then he has danced little bits and pieces of it and so he has given me some direction but basically he does not want to say, okay, do this, walk five steps here and do this, turn around do this. He absolutely at this time, is hands off, he wants people to be figuring it out. But for feeling, he wants to give that feeling. (Lee, personal interview, September 14, 2009)

Through trial and error, students hoped to arrive at a mode of expression that was accepted by the guru. Das granted a new freedom to his dancers in this particular production. While he left many aspects up to them, he remained the authoritative figure. The agency I am describing was not free of dependency. Dancers still longed for moments where he would demonstrate, hoped he would show them 'how to' portray something, and hung on each and every one of his corrections. Aside from directly portraying the roles himself, he would often play opposite to a student, guiding them into their role through their relationship to the character he was evoking. Anjali Nath described her experience of playing Sita opposite to Das in the role of Ravan, the demon king who is about to abduct Sita,

I was thinking less and just reacting,….and when you are just reacting, it tends to be more natural. When Dada acts, he just exudes the emotion that he is trying to convey, and it just came right through me. Literally all he was doing was staring at me, literally, from across the room all he was doing was staring at me, and I was looking away, looking in front at the audience, reacting in the way I thought I should react, and then I looked over, back toward him, I thought he was going to be moving around, and I looked back, and he was just absolutely still just staring at me. And I felt a bit of jump in my chest, which was a natural reaction, and then I looked away, trying to act – so I felt that shock initially, so I looked away again and looked back, and he was still in that position, and that shocked me even more, because it was completely unexpected and completely effective. (Nath, personal interview, September 22, 2009)

Much of the learning came through experiencing. Much of the guru's instruction on this particular aspect went unspoken. There was a silent communication from body to body, and an invoking of empathy. Correct expression and adherence to the standards of the lineage and the expectations of the guru relied on developing a keen sense of intuition of

Figure 22: C.Moraga as Ravan abducting Sita, A. Nath

Figure 23: Closing scene of 'Sita Haran'. Bali (C.Moraga) has just been shot by Ram. Also pictured, Labonee Mohanta and Anjali Nath.

the guru's desires, and gaining an empathetic understanding of the guru's emotional world. The more we participated in his emotional world, through daily interactions, the closer we came to developing an attuned empathetic response to our guru. This was also the case for the original score of music that he created, as students felt it embodied the emotional dimension of their guru's expectations for each scene. Thus, the role of the guru became amplified on many levels as students relied heavily on him for much of their education regarding not only kathak, but also, on Indian culture.

Das's own evocations and emotional renderings of the characters in Sita Haran were the source of inspiration for all his dancers. But as I watched Das play many of the characters throughout the rehearsals, I saw that it was less about the dancers doing as he did, for in fact, every time he danced a role in a scene it was very different. It was more about creating an experience or sparking a feeling that exemplified what that scene should convey. The task was then to find that feeling within oneself in order to re-create the mood or *rasa* during the performance. Occasionally, he informed the dancers that certain gestures were or were not appropriate at certain places in the narration, but more often, he instructed his students to 'listen to the music, feel the music,' which was a musical score he composed for the production. I observed several company members listening over and over to the music, knowing that Dada created that music for those scenes and those characters specifically, and as a dancer commented, 'and for those individuals in those roles'. Rina Mehta described her difficulty in portraying Ram in one scene, and her own process of searching for the feeling through the music,

> *I must have listened to it 45 times over three days, and when I came into the rehearsal studio one day, and I after really getting to an emotional place one day where I was like, I'm not getting it, I'm not getting it, I'm not getting the feeling, because he was going for a feeling, he wanted the feeling – and I couldn't figure out how to get the feeling, cause feelings are really intangible. So I listened to the music over and over and over again, and I just tried and somehow, it clicked for me. And what's interesting was that once the Suriya Pranam (sun salutation) clicked, the other scenes clicked for me. And the body carriage clicked for me, how he wanted the body carriage, how he wanted the body movement. (Mehta, personal interview, September 30, 2009)*

The music conveyed that which words could not; the music was taken as a sonic representation of the guru's emotive repertoire and desired expression of feeling. The music provided a very rich connection for empathetic connection to the guru, his emotional

dimension and his vision for the art. By listening to the music he created, dancers lived out another dimension of the guru's emotional world, connecting to him and to their roles. The music served as the central source of inspiration and authority in the absence of the guru (but also in his presence). As Seibi Lee explained, 'he created the music, its so powerful, we have to rise to that music, its an interesting process that way, because the music is full of detail' (personal interview, September 14, 2009). By creating the opportunity for them to experience the *rasa*, he guided them into their characters in a way that also left ample room for a very personal and genuine interpretation of that role.

Charlotte Moraga reflected on this tension between individual creativity and the guru's vision,

> *It is always challenging because he expects you to bring a lot of yourself to the role. Traditionally for him, Kathak was not choreographed. In fact, he even said, you think you're going to be doing choreography – ha. So you have to really get into the role, he composed the music, he gives you the music, and he gives you this and that, and then you have to come up with something, you have to do your dance, you have to get into your dance, and you have to choreograph your own dance, and if he likes it, its stays like that, and the things he doesn't like, then you change that. Right. So you have to bring a lot of yourself to the role, which leaves a lot of creativity for each of the dancers. Rachna, she really brought a very distinct monkey character, a very distinct Sugreeva. And he really liked it – and he would tell others, 'do like Rachna'. He really liked that. And so I think there is a lot of creativity, a lot of room for each of the dancers in that sense, but he has a vision – and so if you are doing something that is definitely not working with that, then you would have to change it, so usually, we would change it – he wouldn't tell you what to do. It is really a collaborative process in some sense because of that. (Moraga, personal interview, Oct 4, 2009)*

In some instances Das encouraged innovation, in others, he ruled some out. Dancers, like Moraga, recognise the important role both guru and disciple have in creating the form. Das does not offer prescriptions, but suggestive interpretations which are always variable, in order to show the emotional significance of the character, the situation, the narrative, and to create an experience. The example of the making of Sita Haran highlights another development in my treatment of the relations between emplacement and the role of the guru. For advanced students, the relationship to the guru does not depend on place or even him always being there in place. Students can live out the affective dimension of their relationship with the guru, at least for a time, through the dance, music and other sensorial transformations of place.

'You are the Masculine. You are the Feminine'

Das started in about the ballet (an opposition that was always looming). 'They have a 50 million budget – because they believe in it. But why do Indian people not have this for Kathak? Because they don't believe in it. They believe in the temple. 'SANSKRITI' is not in the temple. It is in the Vedas. How can you go to the temple and worship a deity. You become lord Shiva. That is the power of Shiva and Shakti. Which priest will teach you that. This is in the concept of ardhanarishwara. You are the masculine. You are the feminine. How many priests can do that? The realisation that you are Lord Shiva and goddess Parvati – this is in you, not in the temple. What has this got to do with intensive?, he asked rhetorically. He then launched into a description of 'ta thei I', which was part of our opening pranam. He described, as he loudly slapped his foot on the floor, 'feel the hit, your nerves, all senses hit the earth, and you are connected, connected to the divine – 'ta thei I'. He described, 'ta from tanu, the body, thei from sthala for ground, and I for Ishvara, the lord' (translated as 'the body which dances upon the earth for the divine') (field notes 2009)

I end this chapter in the way Das often ended his classes, his lectures and much of his teaching – by somehow bringing it all back around to the spiritual aspects of kathak, to an experience of the divine. The contradictions implicit in practice, and in learning, reflected in this chapter, are on many levels, irreconcilable. The instabilities of living in an increasingly inter-connected world, and learning an art form that now exists between nations, brings with it a range of new challenges in learning and performing that may never quite come together in a unified way. Even for a guru, such as Das, there was no coherent narrative or unified pedagogy that he could offer to solve the implicit contradictions that are a part of the world in which we were learning. Yet, for Das it could all be reconciled, however momentarily, in the experience of the dance, 'ta thei I'.

The experiential qualities of the dance, feeling the hit of the foot on the floor, feeling the union of landing on *sam*, the union of multiple rhythms, of dancer and musician, the production of *rasa* between audience and performer - all of this provides a very real material experience of the dance as a means of realising and connecting to something larger. 'The goal of achieving pure *bhakti* through dance' is one that Das articulates, and it is one that makes felt sense through the dancing body. There is a feeling of oneness or union that is the goal of such aesthetic practice. This is communicated in the opening shloka, 'yatho hastho….'; the goal of creating *rasa*, through coordination of the entire body, the creation of feeling, and the evocation of *rasa* with the audience creates an idealised 'oneness'. 'The master and his technique are ideally 'one' – he is what he does at

each moment. The state-of-being verb establishes this condition as one in which four elements (hand, eye, mind, bhava) are simultaneously present within the performer. The fifth element *rasa*, applies to the audience's state of engagement, and at an ideal performance, is simultaneously present' (Zarilli 2000: 92)

This aspect of the Indian performing arts, its ultimate goal of 'oneness', is well known. Indian aesthetics are inextricably woven with the higher spiritual goals of enlightenment

> The aesthetic experience is ananda…it is self-luminous and self-conscious, devoid of all the duality and multiplicity. He [Abhinavagupta, a commentator on the Natya Sastra] theorised that 'in art the purified state of the undifferentiated experience was *rasa* or ananda. Thus *rasa* becomes a 'State of consciousness' akin to the bliss (ananda) of the enlightened, liberated soul. …Vatsyasan said Indian art is not 'religious in the ordinary sense, nor is there a theology of aesthetics, but the two fields interpenetrate because they share the basic world-view in general and the specific goal of moksha and liberation in particular. (Schwartz 2004: 17)

Das's gift as a teacher was to be able to mobilise and bring to life this interpretation of embodied aesthetics and the metaphysics of union with the divine. In his teaching, the metaphysics of *bhakti* never float off into pure idealism, but took up very real lived experiences in dance. In the case of *abhinaya*, being able to portray and embody the qualities of both genders had far-reaching and profound implications for mastery of *abhinaya* and character portrayal. He made it the vehicle for a Hindu philosophical truth, that the masculine and feminine energies are a balanced force in nature and implicit in every being. There is a necessary distinctiveness and difference that must be maintained to portray masculinity and femininity. Yet, the coming together of these principles in the same body provides an immediate experience of the cosmological union with the divine, as dancers learn to effectively embody *ardhanarishwara*, and the harmonious co-existence of opposites. Such an idealised state of union did not come easily, but the experience of union through the embodiment of *ardhanarishwara* linked the performance to the divine, providing a way to reach and momentarily experience divinity in our daily world (see also Shah 1998). Such experiences engaged the learner, providing moments of 'bliss' and enjoyment, but also connected to a wider framework of divinity that made these practices meaningful.

The cosmology of union and difference, grounded in the living, breathing body, provided a tangible and felt experience, that seemed to be able to, if only momentarily, bridge the gap

between worlds. The fact that we all have bodies, and we all move them, provides enough of a shared framework for understanding, such that, dancers of all cultural upbringings, can participate, in varying degrees, in an aesthetic dimension, that in many ways, is untranslatable. Such experiences continue to hinge on the relationship to the guru. Dancers still rely on the authority of their guru, although in shifting ways. Yet, there is an experience of agency in discipline, of new emergent forms of subjectivity, that are the result of such a rich confluence of meaningful, affective and technical practice. The agential aspects of learning, enjoyment, interest and initiative, actually tie the students all the more emotionally and affectively to the guru and the tradition, a point to which I turn in the final conclusion.

Chapter 10

Conclusion: Learning Kathak, Learning Agency
Becoming a Kathaka

In late 2007, Pandit Das inaugurated what was to be called 'The Parampara Series', a series of traditional kathak solos to be given by the most senior disciples, the members of the professional company[1]. The title was meant to reflect the Guru-Shishya *Parampara* within which each of these students had been immersed. Each would now embark on their very first kathak solo, an important milestone along the trajectory of becoming a kathaka. In this concluding chapter, I use the Parampara series as an example on which to base the discussion of subjectivity and emergent agency from within what are often considered to be the inflexible structures of tradition (see Chakarvorty 2008). Internal examination of the power-relations of guru-shishya reveals a new kind of subjectivity, peculiar and particular to the pedagogical model within which it arises. Learning and agency exist within the guru-shishya parampara. This particular version of enhanced agency, evident through a longer temporal view of the learning process, recognises that the effect of enhanced agency is not to free the shishya of the guru, but in fact ties them even more closely together. The precise forms of agency, creativity and innovation that emerge from within the strictures of traditional practice do not produce an oppressed subject, any more than they produce a completely autonomous agent. Inequality and power certainly are present within this system, an implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) patriarchal one, yet there is a temporal flow to the learning process in which degrees of agency experienced by the junior partner in the dyad are constantly shifting. In this conclusion, I consider the productive nature of discipline and subjection within the learning relationship between guru and shishya.

The Traditional Kathak Solo

The traditional kathak solo is the test of a true kathaka. A dancer ideally dances for two-hours, on stage, alone, with live musicians. The criteria of live musicians requires the

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[1] The Parampara series began in October 2007 with Farah Yasmeen Shaikh and concluded in November 2009 with Labonee Mohanta. It was the first solo for most all the company dancers (this excludes Yasmeen-Shaikh, who had earlier performed her first kathak solo although she was to be included in the series. It also excludes shishya Jaiwanti Das and Charlotte Moraga who performed their solos in 2001 and 2002, respectively)

dancer to be '*taiyar*', or ready, as they will be dealing with the improvisation and unpredictability of in-the-moment interactions with their musicians. The length of the solo, often labelled as 'two hours' (although many were in fact shorter) requires the dancer to have a degree of stamina to endure the performance. The solitude of it, especially for dancers who often dance in group choreographies, means that every movement a dancer makes is under scrutiny of the entire audience. In earlier years, Pandit-ji had previously reserved the opportunity for performing a kathak solo for the shishyas who were most devoted and long-term as apprentices. His move to request each one of the company dancers to perform a solo was unprecedented within the school. For a multitude of reasons, Das decided it time to push these students 'out of the nest' as one dancer explained to me. Not that these dancers were new. They had studied with Das anywhere between ten to twenty years. While other schools and dance styles included such solo debut performances as an established part of the curriculum, equivalent to a kind of graduation, Das had been reluctant to do so, and had not established any precedent about when or if a dancer would perform a solo[2].

The first kathak solo provides a particularly unique opportunity for dancer, guru and audience. It is typically the one and only time that the guru will remain on stage for the duration of the performance, seated on the rug, alongside the musicians. Das would, from the sidelines, play tabla, guide, and support his disciples in their first experience of their solo. The naming of 'Parampara Series' also carried with it this significance; the guru-shishya relationship itself would be made quite public through the interactions between the guru and shishya while on stage. It was a rare opportunity for the audience members to catch a glimpse of the guru-shishya relationship, to see how the guru guides the process, and how he pushes them, but also how the dancers in turn must stand on their own. It is

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[2] In Bharata Natyam, the arengetrum is the first solo dancers perform, marking a ritualised transition to a new status of dancer. For some, it is the step on the way to becoming a professional dancer, and clearly marked this transition. Das, and others, have been critical of the trend by which Arengetrums are taken as a form of cultural capital, pursued in their own right, at the expense of the actual knowledge and understanding that is to be gained through arduous apprenticeship. Das had previously avoided such 'coming out' ceremonies and had focused heavily on training, as a pursuit in itself. Two of the members of the company who had danced in their childhood were surprised by this current shift, recollecting that when they were young, they rarely performed, and never even thought about doing a solo. A number of variables coincided to incite this new trend in Das's approach, one of which was a growing awareness of the need to create a strong legacy. Several eminent Indian artists passed away during my years of fieldwork, including Ustad Ali Akbhar Khan, the sarod master who had initially brought Das to California. While I was there Das began questioning his students, 'what will you do when I die?'. The need to create a strong legacy became increasingly important. There was also a growing awareness, via YouTube and other forms of social media, that there was a lot of lesser skilled kathak dancers out there, representing the art. I suggest these as just two of the reasons that Das began to strongly encourage his dancers to take the next step in their performing careers.

this dynamic of attachment and dependency intersecting with new ways-of-being that underlies the guru-shishya parampara.

Dependency and 'Passionate Attachment': Dancing for the Guru

Students depend on their guru, not only for his teachings, his love and care, but for a sense of approval, and recognition of their own legitimacy as artists. The very conditions of their ongoing existence rely on their own subordination within this relationship. The relationship is a vivid elaboration of the 'passionate attachment' Judith Butler describes as an element of all subjectivity, tying subjects to their own subordination.

> [A] subject is not only formed in subordination, but that this subordination provides the subject's continuing condition of possibility. A child's love is prior to judgement and decision; a child tended and nourished in a 'good enough' way will love, and only later stand a chance of discriminating among those he or she loves. This is to say, not that the child loves blindly (since from early on there is discernment and 'knowingness' of an important kind) but only that if the child is to persist in a psychic and social sense, there must be dependency and the formation of attachment: there is no possibility of not loving, where love is bound up with the requirements for life. The child does not what he/she attaches; yet the infant as well as the child must attach in order to persist in and as itself. No subject can emerge without this attachment, formed in dependency. (Butler 1997: 8)

Butler here directs our attention to infancy and childhood and relations to primary care giver – the very model I have already described as the prototype for the guru-shishya model and for *bhakti* or love (chapter 3). In both cases, emotional dependency, love and need are at the heart of learning. A shishya, like a child, may exert little choice, but does gain in agency, and eventually, some degree of autonomy. However, Butler also quite immediately shifts, in her text to the language of exploitation,

> [N]o subject emerges without a passionate attachment to those on whom he or she if fundamentally dependent….Although the dependency of a child is not political subordination in any usual sense, the formation of primary passion in dependency renders the child vulnerable to subordination and exploitation…'. (Butler 1997: 7)

A degree of vulnerability exists within such power-relations, especially where shishyas must 'surrender' completely, but identifying this as the main possibility fails to take the temporal dimension into account. I have describe earlier the distrust and suspicion around the figure of the guru (chapter 3). The rootedness of this learning relationship within the patriarchal structures of India have added further fuel to the debate. Dancer and

anthropologist, Pallabi Chakravorty notes, 'kathak was firmly institutionalised at the centre (Delhi) as a patrilineal and patriarchal practice of gharanedar gurus who never acknowledged women practitioners of the past as gurus, teachers, co-creators or pioneers' (2008: 54). Within these structures, many female performers have experienced restrictions as artists within this pedagogical relationship. Kumindini Lakhia, a well-respected innovator in kathak who was has set out on her own writes, 'to what extent can we be slaves of accepted forms and norms? Can we not dance without sticking the label of a guru or gharana on our foreheads?' (1995: 177). Critical of the need to self-identify with a particular guru or *gharana*, and to gain status through this kind of association, Lakhia has been a non-conformist of sorts, developing her own style that has diverged from her own guru. Exploitation of shishya*s* and patriarchal limits placed on women in particular, are distinct possibilities within the model. Yet, exploitation remains only one of the possibilities that emerges from this structure. For a fairly privileged group of women, who feel they are learning something worthwhile, such an interpretation may not be warranted.

Chhandam dancers are aware of these critiques. They are sensitive to the perceptions of outsiders who do not have a framework with which to understand their experience. When viewing the guru-shishya *parampara* from a single snap-shot in time, to the uniformed observer, the picture might indeed seem oppressive, with young women running around behind their guru, doting on him, or bringing him chai. Dancers reflected on the gulf between this perception and their experience:

> *Often westerners think of the idea of guru-shishya as very acquiescent and passive but it's absolutely not that. It is an exceedingly active process for both the guru and the shishya. It is the most active relationship there can be, because in the relationship the guru takes on with the shishya encompasses that of a teacher, a parent, a guide, and embodies so much more. It is not impossible in the western context, they may actually manifest it, but they don't embrace it as a philosophy. (Lee, interview with Poonam Narkar 2010)*

> *It's really interesting to get insight from different generations of Guru-ji's students (and with such varying ethnic backgrounds!). It never ceases to amaze me how he has managed to preserve the concept of guru-shishya parampara in modern day society – whether it be in India OR the West. It's a dying concept worldwide. What is even more interesting is how differently each shishya is navigating through their journey and actualising it for themselves, yet still retaining a common foundation. It brings to light how Guru-ji encourages individualism and trains and teaches each student within his or her life's context without compromising the core values of guru-shishya. I do have to wonder though, if it's fair to label the West as not understanding Guru-shishya parampara at all. I agree that many aspects of this*

relationship are difficult to grasp for majority of westerners. I also agree with Seibi that many mis-think it to be passive or a loss of personal agency. However, I also think it would be difficult to find an extraordinary artist, athlete, and even entrepreneur who did not have a very influential mentor in their life who went beyond being a teacher and who became their life coach. Granted this is not exactly the same as Guru-shishya, but there are strong common values that can be a starting point for dialog. (Nivas, Response to Blog Post 'What is a Shishya', Traditions Engaged, August 22 2010)

The question of agency and subjectivity is one that Das's disciples confront, mediate, and talk about. They also experience it in individualised ways, and do not always agree with each other. Other dancers commented to these blog posts, arguing against the view that the 'west' does not understand. However, many have become sensitised to the fact that those external to Chhandam can easily make such assumptions. For these disciples, exploitation is not the possibility that emerges from their subordination to their guru. The temporary suspension of agency that occurs in guru-shishya holds a larger purpose, the crafting of a new body, becoming an adept performer and the expansion of agency. The relationship certainly is a product of the wider patriarchal structures that underlie the male-female dynamics in Kolkata. Yet, a longer temporal view of this temporary suspension of self-interest reveals a slow ongoing expansion of agency that occurs along with submission to the guru and participation in the disciplinary regime of training. The temporary dismantling or disabling of self-interest in any present moment is blended with an understanding of the long-term goals of this subjection. Disciplinary power need not be debilitating. I return to the Parampara series for further insight into this relationship between subjectification and agency.

Shishyas are formed in dependency. For shishyas, as for children, emotional dependency, love and need are at the heart of learning, although in differing degrees. Dancers seek approval from their guru for their own sense of legitimacy as a dancer, for some indication that they are succeeding, and are on the right path. He is also the source of knowledge and the ultimate authority. Dancers, especially in the case of preparing for their solos, were aware of the way in which they relied on their guru, seeking his input and approval. There was a striking similarity in disciples' accounts of preparing for their solos. Every dancer described a process in which they sought the instruction, direction and guidance of their guru. This is what they had been accustomed to, being told what to do. Each one of them similarly described a shock in discovering that the dynamic had shifted quite drastically. The onus was shifted quite squarely to each dancer. Rachna Nivas commented, 'even

though I was going to his house for private classes, he was never addressing what I would be doing in my solo. He was training me, having me do footwork, or *chakkars* or sixteen *tihais* and all this stuff. And I'd be like but, but, but…'. She indicated her desire to be told what it was she should be preparing (personal interview, November 30, 2009). Antara Bhardwaj described a similar experience, 'even in the second to last rehearsal, I asked [Das], do you want to see my *thaat*. He asked me what composition are you ending with, but did not want to see it…what he kept emphasising every time I talked to him about the solo was this: 'I've trained you for 20 years, I don't want to be telling you what to do. You show me what you can do. I've trained you. You know what to do'.' (personal interview, November 4, 2009). While this forced independence in preparations for the solo was new, it marked an important turning point along the trajectory of a dancer, a point that must be considered when trying to understand the kind of agency, and subordination, dancers continue to experience. Their own preparations, while providing a new sense of autonomy, were still grounded in the anticipations of what the guru wanted (see also chapter 9). Complete autonomy was not granted. Students still strove to please the guru. But, as Das pointed out, the very fact that he had trained them meant that they now knew for themselves, what to do. The arduous apprenticeship that each dancer had been undergoing was designed to create a body from which a continuity of style would emerge.

In your first and every subsequent solo, what you're doing is not just a product of your preparation for that particular event. It's a product of ten years, or however many you have been studying. And it's a manifestation of all of that. And I think that you don't necessarily realise that until you do it. And I realised that when I stepped off the stage after the first solo. That's really what it was. You're able to use all of the things that you have learned…It was the first time I had to think of it in this way: what all have I learned, how can I as a solo dancer actually perform? I've been trained and I've learned so much over the past 10 years. But how you extract from that and turn it into a solo performance was a very new concept for me.' (Nivas, personal interview, November 30, 2009).

Nivas describes a realisation of the productivity of the years of training through her experience of the solo. The spectacular nature of performance, the ritual significance of the first solo, the presence of the guru on stage all contribute to making this a particularly potent event for such felt-realisations.

In reality, the long trajectory of apprenticeship is dotted with frequent moments of this nature, although of smaller scale. Bodily realisations, the satisfaction of learning a skill, getting something right before the guru, or being accorded more responsibility, all signify

the larger goal of enhanced agency through the creation of a new self, a kathaka. Disciplined learning in a traditional practice allows for felt-moments of creativity, improvisation and agency within the tradition, as I have shown throughout this dissertation. It is the productivity of discipline that is a key ingredient in the enhanced sense of self originating in training.

The Productive Nature of Discipline

Discipline, as a socialising force, is often thought to exert control, or a prohibitive force on neophytes or new members of any society. Subjects are coercively integrated into power-relations that limit and controls their own ability to think, act, exist or even recognise the conditions of their subjectification. Discipline can be used as a force of power to control, to exert control over the body, from the inside out. Bourdieu is perhaps the most influential proponent of such a view of bodily discipline:

> If most organisations – the Church, the army, political parties, industrial concerns, etc – give such a big place to bodily disciplines, this is to a great extent because obedience is belief and belief is what the body grants even when the mind says no. It is perhaps by thinking about what is most specific about sport, that is, the regulated manipulation of the body, about the fact that sport, like all disciplines in all total or totalitarian institutions, convents, prisons, asylums, political parties, etc, is a way of obtaining from the body an adhesion that the mind might refuse, that one could reach a better understanding of the usage made by most authoritarian regimes of sport. Bodily discipline is the instrument par excellence of every kind of 'domestication'. (Bourdieu 1990b: 167)

The body is seen in service of power. Foucault's work on the other hand, sees a continual movement between two poles. In the first view, focussed on power and discipline, the body allows a 'de-centred' view of power, no longer emanating from a class or state but instilled in the very formation of subjectivity. Michel Foucault's early works, and that which he is most cited for, examine the ideas of discipline and power, particularly in relation to prisons, clinics and sexuality (1973, 1977, 1987). His earlier work on sexuality could be said to elaborate this view. Although agency is invoked here too, it is largely in the service of power, despite references to 'resistance'. Such a representation is less applicable to long-term learning. However, Foucault himself shifted to a view of power and agency that comes closer to what I am trying to formulate. In later years he stated, 'perhaps I've insisted too much on the technology of domination and power. I am more and more

interested in the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself, in the technology of the self' (1988: 19). The late Foucault became interested in how the self constituted itself as a subject. He called 'technologies of the self' that which permitted 'individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies ad souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality' (1988: 18). It is no coincidence that this shift in perspective was fuelled in the case of Foucault by a closer consideration of the sphere of aesthetic practices. According to Linder:

> In the final years of his own life, Michel Foucault famously considered the artist a promising model for modern life more generally. Foucault's embrace of aesthetics appeared to signal an important shift in just how far he was willing to take seriously the liberating potential of deliberate human action. Although his previous work—on the birth of the human sciences, prisons, clinics, and sexuality—considered disciplinary practices as operating within, rather than in opposition to, modern regimes of power, his move to aesthetics revealed a growing optimism in reinvigorated Enlightenment notions of 'human potential' and 'progress'. (Linder 2007: 451)

In this sense, examining the enabling effects of disciplined training in apprenticeship, rather than viewing such limits as constraining, sheds new light on disciplinary regimes. The crafting of the paramparic body is the location of an intersection between the aesthetic preferences and stylistic markers of a lineage and the capacity to create within a shifting set of limits. Disciplinary constraints are enabling forces that produce a newly crafted sense, with potential for individual interpretive and improvisational action. When Das tells his disciples to 'figure it out', he is aware that the skills and dispositions that identify the form and this particular lineage style are deeply embedded within the students. 'These resources and practices provide a path for thought and action that may not exist without them, while limiting the possibility of a disciple to think or act otherwise. Thus, disciplinary subjection provides the capacity for agency, while simultaneously shaping that agency in particular ways' (Parkes 2009:8). Dancers may feel the immediate constraints of discipline and the subjection to a guru, as he chastises them, expresses displeasure at their development, or are subjected to a 'torture' of footwork. Yet, they also remain cognisant of an imagined future, and frequently experience the pleasures of being a dancer. As such joy and pleasure is often mediated by the presence and action of the guru, the experiential

role of the shishya is constantly in flux. As Butler points out in a formulation that comes closer to mine, the subject remains a site of ambivalence 'in which the subject emerge both as the effect of a prior power and as the condition of possibility for a radically conditioned form of agency (1997: 15). By examining the gradual learning of improvisation, the development of individual style and mastery of interpretation in kathak over a long period of commitment to a disciplinary regime, we get a clearer sense of the kind of agency that emerges from these forms. Even through participation in a sphere of unequal power relations, and adherence to tradition, a space for articulation of a new conditioned form of agency is available, evident in the micro-social processes of learning.

Another point of distinction between apprenticeship and some of the institutionalised regimes that Foucault first elaborated his notions of power around is that today there is a certain degree of willed subjection for the apprentice who pursues study of the art. The learner's entry into such a relationship was not always voluntary. Many disciples were simply inducted as children, with no choice, as was the case for Das. However, many of Das's present day disciples came to the dance of their own accord as young adults. He often reminds them of this, stating, 'you have come to me'. Such wilful subjection to kathak training occurs with an implicit understanding of the long-term goal of becoming a dancer. Students desire many of the perceived benefits of training, which may include 'self-confidence, greater autonomy, higher self-esteem, emotional stability, improved physical capability' (Parkes 2009: 5; see also Lakes & Hoyt 2004) as well as spiritual fulfilment, health and well being, membership in a community, connection to Indian culture, recognition and authority, and a number of combinations of these and other benefits. Because of their desire to succeed, students willingly subject themselves to the rigours of training. However, as student's identity and development becomes bound to their guru, the voluntariness of their commitment dissipates. In many ways, the further you progress, the further you are bound to the guru, dependent on him for a position, status and identity within the lineage. Departure is not an option for she who desires to continue as a dancer. Switching styles, or gurus, especially after years of study is an unlikely option. Where one's status as a dancer hinges on one's relation to the guru and one's position with the lineage, leaving the guru is not a viable option for most – the dependency remains so long as the guru is the final authority on knowledge of the art.

Das is explicit in making empowerment a part of his philosophy, and so too are his most committed disciples. But this is not empowerment in the western sense, of a free and autonomous agent. Empowerment for these dancers hinges on their subordinate relationship to their guru. In the end, it is their experiences of training and performing that compels students to continue, as they experience an expansion of agency in return for their subordination to this authority. I turn now to a closer analysis of this new sense of self and experiential sense of transformation that occurs.

Becoming a Kathaka: the Solo

The kathak solo, because of its significance along a dancer's trajectory, and as a marker to a new stage of learning and performing, is a point where dancer's seem to take stock of what they have learned, where they stand, where they might go, and their status as 'becoming kathakas'. While the self is changing and transforming during their study, the solo provides a moment for this recognition. Certainly, others recognise this. And the potency and power of the performance have transformative potential. The traditional solo, for years, had been held out as something, off in the distant future, to which dancers aspired. But it was a coveted position in Chhandam, and with Das's strict standards, only two of the dancers present during my research had completed a solo prior to the Parampara series. The first solo occupies a very special position, for guru and shishya alike. It is equally a demonstration of the shishya's hard work and training, as much as it is a performance of the guru's work. The two have participated in this mutually productive relationship, however asymmetrical, in which a shared production of knowledge has occurred (chapter 7). It is only appropriate that the two share the stage, on this debut of the dancer.

While the disciple stands alone on the stage, the support of the guru, seated on stage amongst the musicians, act as a safety net for the duration of the performance. Dancer Antara Bhardwaj invoked the child-parent metaphor in her own descriptions of her first solo, she explained that having her guru-ji with her on stage felt like the first day of kindergarten, where the parent is still there, about to send them off to the real world. From his position on the stage, Das, who would play tabla, occasionally recite, and interject with comments, was able to silently conduct aspects of the solo, intervene when necessary, or

allow the disciple to continue. Yasmeen-Shaikh recalled such experiences during her first solo:

> *There was one composition in tal dhamar that guru-ji had me do – when I first did it I could tell by the first palla that it wasn't coming, so I stopped. So he then had me do it with Kathak yoga, reciting the theka. So I did it. But then guru-ji said 'ok, one more time with all of us!' At that point, I looked to the musicians, quite exhausted, with a face that said 'are you serious?'. And then did it again. You know, he won't let you get comfortable...on one hand, and ultimately you feel totally supported but he'll also push you. If he feels the laya is too slow, or if you don't bring it on sam, you must do it again. Or if he just wants to say, ok – do 108 chakkars. You do it. So essentially he becomes like the conductor in that situation. Now, he will also sense if the laya is fast and he will control that for you. A number of people commented on observing that relationship and that dynamic in the performance. (personal interview, December 2, 2009)*

The solo provides a very fertile context to view this peculiar relationship of experiencing autonomy within the subordination to one's guru, or rather, an assisted empowerment. Ultimately, he is assisting them to complete the task, pushing them out of their comfort zone, but providing a security net, to almost ensure their success. Some dancers may need more support than others, or rather, different forms of support. Dancers recognise this, as Nivas explained, 'he pushes you to go out on your own, and then reels you back in to make sure that you're staying on the right path. And I think that is the very difficult job of a guru because you don't want to be spoon-feeding your disciples, you want them to be empowered, but you want to keep them on path. That is what he is constantly doing, that dynamic of push and pull' (personal interview, November 30, 2009) Despite the assistance of the guru, the dancers own feeling of accomplishing the solo is not compromised. They still experienced dancing the solo. Dancers recognise their guru's assistance, but this does not jeopardise their own experience of growth, or achievement.

The strong sense of confidence that each dancer gained from it was evident in their remarks. Mohanta commented, 'I feel empowered …because a solo seemed so unreachable before' (personal interview, December 2, 2009). Each dancer explained some kind of realisation they had through completing the first solo,

> *I was performing all the time with the company, but as a solo artist, that was really hard to visualise and to even think that it was possible. And I think the point of going through the whole process was to basically make me see that this is possible, that we have all the ingredients to make this happen, its just whether we do it or*

> *not, whether we actually take the time, do the practice, and put it together in this way. (Nivas, personal interview, November 30, 2009)*

There is a strong cognisance of the role that disciples play, especially as to how they proceed after the solo. But even after the solo, their attention to their guru's desires does not abate. While the solos marked a sort of transitory phase to the next stage of being a solo performer, the dependency would continue. Students still relied on their guru for further training and knowledge. They also relied on his authority as recognition of their own status. Their position as subjects certainly did not vanish.

The solo is not the first or last instance of such experience. As mentioned earlier, smaller moments and experiences of agency and authority arise on daily basis and in the course of training, in feeling the body in new ways, in gaining the capacity to perform new skills, in being given a position of privilege in the hierarchy, or in being given new responsibilities. More spectacular experiences of this 'becoming' occur in such events, as the kathak solo, where students' own knowledge, understanding and status are publicly legitimated, providing an even greater sense of achievement. On stage, the stakes are high. Failure in this context would be quite devastating, and success, a remarkable achievement. Performances are crucial for such experiences, and students perform throughout their study, providing moments for such satisfaction and public recognition. But they are isolated moments, few and far between. Performances, and anticipation of them, sustain and motivate practice in various ways. The kathak solo is but one of many smaller instances of realisations of learning, potential and a new sense of self. While such spectacular instances of performance are privileged, by dancers, and by scholars, as particular salient and meaningful moments, the hours that go into producing those spectacles are where the stuff of learning and the reproduction of culture occurs.

Students describe a confidence and new belief in themselves, but this actually ties them even more intimately to their guru, and a growing sense of belief in their guru.
As students come to understand the possibilities of their new skill set, they have experiential proof of their achievement, and in the training of their guru. Dancers continually respond to praise or accolades by saying 'it is guru-ji's training'. In their success, they come to not only believe in themselves, but to believe even more strongly in their guru. That the guru helped a student to achieve this new sense of self only serves to reiterate this bond, and their connection to him.

Belief in the Body, Belief in the Guru: Transformations in Self

> *My main thrust is to kindle the energy within each student that will propel them beyond their normal levels of endurance. Over time this process develops strength and stamina – the necessary ingredients to sustain between one to two hours of continuous dancing. I guide this process through the playing of table (drums), while reciting the bols (language of dance and drums) and simultaneously singing lehra/nagma (a repetitive melodic phrase). This continuous dancing, drumming, reciting and singing generates a combined energy of force which radiates an exhilarating feeling and a high state of mind. As my guru-ji taught. (Das et al. 2001: 13)*

It is Das's objective to push students to new levels. It is through the sensing body, 'dancing, drumming, reciting and singing' that dancers come to experience a new plane of existence, and a 'high state of mind'. It is through experience that dancers come to believe. The larger cosmological dimension of kathak provides a meaningful set of relations within which such experiences can be made even more potent, grounding such belief in already existent frameworks of understanding. By providing students the 'place' to have such experiences, a process itself sustained through the affective and emotional dimension of guru-shishya (chapter 3 and 4), students come to interpret those experiences as originating from within that relationship. Following one class, Das spoke with a group of middle-aged women, all mothers and all beginner students at Chhandam. They spoke candidly with Das, exclaiming that they could simply not do this without him. 'You make us believe we can do it', one dancer exclaimed while the others chimed in with support. The overwhelming response of several senior students who were requested to perform their first kathak solo was just that, one of surprise for their own ability, growing confidence, and a simultaneous increasing belief in their guru. Through enhanced proprioception, guided by the guru, skills are learned, and students come to do things they never thought possible.

The acquisition of skills and students' growing sense of themselves as a dancer is both emotionally and physically linked to their guru. The euphoric experience of dance we have, when singing and dancing, especially as a group, the sensations of endorphins, the fatigue-induced elation, or the colloquial explanation of 'getting a fix', this is all intimately connected to the guru, and to one's growing relationship. The rigours of training enable students to reach a plane of existence and experience that is understood as transcending the mundane. When students experience these bodily sensations, they construe it as immanent

in the conditions of their relationship to their guru. As personal experiences reiterate the capacity of the guru to lead a student, and direct them to previously unthinkable goals, students' own devotion and loyalty to their guru is solidified, and the bond between guru and shishya strengthened. The bond is further endorsed through its ultimate grounding in the larger philosophical goals of spiritual enlightenment. The true self that emerges through intensive training, through the breakdown of ego, and through more live moments of complete physical engagement is seen and imagined as transcending the mundane. Experiencing the body in motion, completely in the moment, feeling 'high', surrendered to a will that seems to be external, is understood and experienced as an expression of this divine essence. Both Hindu and Sufi cosmologies surrounding experiences of oneness and transcendence take root in these experiences of the dancing body.

Foucault commented, 'To change something in the minds of people – that is the role of an intellectual' (1988: 10). To change something in the bodies of people, is also to change the way they think, feel and experience their selves – and that is the role of this dance guru. Earlier, I quoted Bourdieu's statement, that to create belief in the body, is to create belief where the mind will not adhere. Bourdieu goes on to say, 'making someone dance means possessing them' (1990b: 167)[3]. Such a statement requires us to imagine a body that constantly deceives the mind, each at odds with the other. As dancers, all of their skills and capacities rely on a perfected coordination between body and mind. For Das's dancers, their belief through the body is also with a belief with the mind. Through physical training and participation in the immediate everyday world of the guru, belief is grounded in bodily experience. And belief, compelled by the body, generates obedience and adherence to this 'social orchestration'. While this kind of possession and control through the body is identifiable, engendering an obedience to the guru, this is not without understanding of the enhanced sense of agency and the productivity of this kind of discipline.

Transformation, agency and belief are all grounded in felt-experiences of the body[4]. In so doing, and so experiencing, students also come to believe in their guru.

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[3] The metaphor of possession, used in this way, is itself redolent of a Christian equation of possession with the work of the devil or evil spirits. It is also redolent of a long heritage in which the body deceives (see also Ram forthcoming).

[4] Second-hand experiences of the growth of others can also be ways in which students belief is strengthened, in seeing their guru-sisters succeed, there is a recognition that they too can achieve the same ends.

Well, he does see – he does have the ability to really see into you. He can see what your natural strengths are, what your natural ability is, what your gifts are, and he can see what your blocks are. He can see what is keeping from taking you to your full potential, he can see your own hang ups, those you can't even notice, that you can't even notice that you are doing to yourself. He can see how to mould you for what is best for you in dance, but he can also see into you – he can tell when you are frazzled, when you are in a good mood, or distracted and somewhere else, and not even there, when you're present but not there, and he can see all of that. And then when you dance, it shows up in your dance….and then he'll ask, and he'll figure out, is it a boy, a job, your mother, your kids, what is it that is putting you out of your body, what is distracting you from the dance.(Barton, personal interview)

The dancer's belief that they can reach their own potential is accompanied by this belief in the guru's omniscient viewpoint. Many spoke of such 'blockages' that were preventing them from developing their full potential, and how the guru was able to help them through this. Das's role as a guru was quite explicitly equated to that of a psychologist, as he assisted students to work through these 'blockages' and difficulties. Such imaginings of the guru's abilities to guide, to remove the darkness, to induce transformation, and to engage a divine source of energy might sound 'mystical' in the sense that has also been devalued and divorced from anything 'real'. It is for this reason I have been emphasising the very real, physical experiential elements that ground such intangibles as faith and belief. As we danced, we felt ourselves in new ways, discovered new sources of energy, and gained a new sense of proprioception, all of which could be understood and amplified through a spiritual ideology and belief in the guru.

The transformative power of study, physical, emotional, mental and spiritual transformations were often interpreted within the Hindu cosmological framework that underscored the practice. This was a recurrent and explicit theme, most often articulated through the goal of *'bhakti'* and achievement of oneness in dance. But understandings of transformation through bodily re-education also aligned well with the emergent discourse on holistic health in the Bay area. Many kinds of therapeutic bodywork have emerged from the Bay area, designed to craft a new healthy, well-balanced psychological and somatic self through adaptations in movement (see also Johnson 1995)[5]. The therapeutics of a guru were well received in a community where yoga and other somatic practices, as well as new age healing and self help groups had a strong presence. Many of these practices

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[5] Several key teachers from somatic practices like Alexander technique or Feldenkrais live and practice in the Bay area.

themselves also draw on foreign cosmological frameworks, such as the cosmological understandings Das was engaging.

The sense of transformation is very profound for some of Das's dancers, providing a sense of the possibilities, and an understanding of the radical effect that can occur, not only for them, but for others as well.

> *At the end [of my solo] people were coming up to me with tears in their eyes. And then all these old generations were fully energised, and people our age who used to play tabla or used to play an instrument said, 'oh my god, you totally inspired me, I'm going back to study tabla, thanks to you'. These parents emailed me saying 'we took our nine-year old daughter and you really inspired her'. So I was thinking, wow, I made an impact on hundreds of people, and I inspired hundreds of people in different ways. Who knows, I was a part of everyone's path – the person who was inspired to go back to tabla, lets say that becomes part of his life, wow – then I was such a meaningful part of that person's life. So then I realised the power of it – it was not just a random performance for myself, just to get a breakthrough for a solo. It was way bigger than that. That was one thing I didn't even think about at first…It was really inspiring, even to myself – if I could do that, then, who knows what I could do. (L.Mohanta, personal interview)*

Through such transformative experiences, dancers are compelled toward their guru's vision, and there are several, like Rina Mehta, who have taken up *their guru-ji's vision* in very meaningful ways.

> *I realised that what we have all set out to do is nothing less than to create dramatic social change in our society - to change the daily, lived experience of individuals and communities through Guru-ji's teachings. To change people's values and to change people's attitudes and behaviour. And we are doing this because our own lives have been so dramatically altered- touched, empowered- by Guru-ji's teachings. (R.Mehta, email communication)*

The encouragement to give back to their communities and to society, which was promoted in Chhandam as the ideal of *seva* and *tyaag*, sacrifice and selfless service, was taken up by students who sensed that personal transformation could have a larger effect. This is not a theme I have explored here, but I bring it in as an example of just how this agency – born of relationality – can also flow out into broader social relations as an agency of social change.

Going Through the Fire

I feel the need to take a step back, and reiterate to the reader, that a growing sense of self, accompanied through training, and subjection to the guru, is not entirely a pleasant experience. This point cannot be forgotten. Das will tell you himself that many dancers have left. In fact there was a time when all but three dancers had left in the early years. For most, being near the guru is an ongoing challenge. From a distance, the relationship is easy to idealise. But up close in daily interaction, experiences are trying, uncomfortable, unpleasant, and stressful. Das would often joke that his students hate him. In some ways, that is his goal: to get under their skin. That is part of the trial he has crafted for his disciples. That is part of the process of 'going through the fire' as he has described.

> *I believe that there is a harmony and disharmony, one who can teach you harmony no matter what through your path and you can reach the highest of feelings. High in the sense that you feel one with everything. My Guru-ji, Pandit Ram Nayaran Misra, used to say that. Become one with everything. I think that is the path. A guru's training should be that to push through the fire. Actually, in Charles Dickens' book, David Copperfield, Charles Dickens, the great Victorian author says, "The best of steel comes out of a lot of fire." In many cultures they all say the same thing. Go through the fire, go through the fire, go through the fire. What does that mean? That means, go through the agony so you reach your ecstasy. No agony, no ecstasy. So, there aren't any sugar-coated pills that you would like to hear. You know, like our "PC" culture nowadays. "Oh, you did well. Oh, how beautiful." That is a PC culture. Sure, it feels nice but there is no accountability. So, a guru has to be always accountable, always vigilant, and always should be on the case of the student. Guru is between father and mother, and brother, sister and friend. It is all put together. (Das Interview with Yasmeen-Shaikh 2007)*

'Always on the case of the student' was a way to describe Das's approach. Das never let students get too comfortable. But as he points out, this 'agony' always came with an 'ecstasy', felt through the dancing body. An experience of 'highness', *anand* (joy) or *bhakti* accompanied student's experience of the dance. It was an apprenticeship of extremes. Students understand the necessity of enduring this trial, and of going through the fire, in order to reach the loftier goals of becoming a kathaka, an end that is inextricably connected to the larger cosmologies of achievement of oneness and self-realisation.

Not all students desire to continue in this manner. The demands are high. Ultimately, you do what your guru asks. Students remain subordinate. This does not lessen. In some ways, in fact, it too expands along with a growing sense of agency and a growing sense of

responsibility and indebtedness. Students in disparate locations, with minimal contact with their guru, particularly struggle with this ongoing subordination. Dancers striking out on their own, carving a niche for themselves as dancers in other locations, have been less successful in maintaining their relationship. Such forced independence brings with it a different sense of autonomy that is in some ways, beyond the range of the guru. The absence of the guru for extended periods of time results in a weakening of the affective and emotional dimension of the guru-shishya *parampara*. For a time, as with Chhandam dancers in San Francisco, the anticipatory horizons of what the guru wants can be sustained for a certain period of time. But where the guru is so central to the entire sensorial transformation, his extended absence makes such sentiments difficult to sustain. Several dancers have managed to retain this connection, but the distance plagues the relationship with difficulties.

In recent years, Das's awareness of the need to secure the next generation, and sustain the lineage, has perhaps granted more flexibility and freedom to his senior dancers, and those carrying out his work. But he has continued to provoke agitate and disrupt at the first sight of people becoming too content.

> *And he said very resolutely that he has always believed that each and every one of us has the potential to be great, do I not, he demanded, Do any of you not believe this? He was just trying to stir things up, people were getting too comfortable, and so he wanted to cause some agitation, and make people uncomfortable.*
> *He said he will cut people off, unless they are willing to give their heart and soul to Chhandam. He also went on to say, that the teachers will all be moved around, that they think it is 'their branch' and so he critiqued their tendency to feel any owner ship over the school, and added "I don't say this is MY art". (field notes 2009)*

Despite all the discomfort, stress, and frustration, there are enough students who continue to stick around, and who return. This cannot be explained merely as a passionate attachment to our own subjectification or dependency – students experience a growing sense of self, as an expanded agent. And they also feel their lives to be more meaningful. They feel more fulfilled. As disciple Seema Mehta explained, 'Guru-ji has opened my eyes, without dance, it was an empty life – emptiness'.

<center>*   *   *   *</center>

Producing Bodily Knowledge: Crafting Bodies and Selves

The knowledge whereby one lives is not necessarily identical with the knowledge whereby one explains life (Jackson 1996: 2). The intersection of both kinds of knowledge occurred in teaching and learning kathak dance, reflecting and refracting, complementing and contradicting one another in ways I have shown throughout this dissertation. The transportability of bodily practices, such as kathak, as they are re-situated in, and move between multiple sites, has brought ways of knowing the world into new focus, encouraging reflection and explanation of that which had previously gone unsaid. In this sense, learning dance, especially in a lineage that is a product of migration and movement between nations, has provided a rich context in which to investigate the relationship between these different ways of knowing and explaining the world. Critical in this phenomenology of learning has also been the importance of the background lived world or environment within which we were learning. Ways of knowing, as I have shown, are bound up with our being in the world, with the 'place' or 'total environment' within which we live.

This ethnography is also, in part, a contribution to the phenomenological claims that 'knowledge of the mind is neither ontologically prior nor superior to knowledge of the body' (Jackson 1996: 34). Kathak dance, as its own discipline, produces its own knowledge, independent of our attempts to explain and intellectualise it. Meaning and experience exist in the movement of the body itself. It is from the perspective of an apprentice that I have described the ways in which we can apprehend the world in the ways in which we move through it – I refer here both to the movements of the dancing kathak body as well as the larger movements of migrating bodies. Here, I emphasise a point that has been made by my predecessors in anthropology and phenomenology – that 'knowledge in the body' is in no way inferior, and in fact, in dance, must be prioritised over other forms of discursive knowledge. But, as with kathak itself, my repetition of my predecessors takes fresh nuances. Like the repetitions I have discussed throughout this thesis, this repetition is also one that does not simply repeat that which has gone before, but one that enables a response through adapting the techniques and methods of our own scholarly tradition, in attempt to get better and better at perfecting this argument. To follow this metaphor of learning in dance, it is also through rehearsal of these arguments

that we are able to layer additional nuances and new ways of understanding onto the tradition within which we work. It is also a point that deserves new repetitions, despite the now well-worn emphasis on embodiment and practical knowledge in our discipline. This is not only because of the historical bias that has preferred the 'knowledge in the mind' and ingrained a larger neglect and devaluing of bodily knowledge. It is also because, as anthropologists trying to understand the world, such bodily-based practices provide for us opportunities to create new knowledge within our own discipline. The very frustration of not being able to describe those elements of lived experience that seem to be beyond words provides the pretext for creativity. Amongst other things, this dissertation is a contribution to this growing field of study that attends to the particularities and subtleties of lived experience.

The experience of learning and training in kathak dance in the current global epoch, one defined by mass migrations, increasing interconnectivity, and ongoing flows of knowledge, brings with it a new spectrum of instabilities and contradictions. The guru-shishya parampara that I have described in this ethnography is a product of movement between India and America – a corollary of transnationalism which brings with it a new set of challenges for dancers in both locations. But the challenges in themselves require innovative and sometimes radical responses, both for teachers and learners. It also produces new ways-of-being in the world that respond to the kinds of crises and anxiety that transpire out of dislocation, immigration, and emergent multicultural societies. I have also used this examination of learning – of the ethnographically particular and concrete – to illuminate wider issues in anthropology. These include the potentiality of flows and the transformations of transnationalism, as well as of its limits. I have explored the experiences of place-making that still adhere to the age of globalisation, as well as and the less explored question of the limits to which entire 'places' can be moved. The spatial located-ness of practice, and of place as a materialised site of practice continues to shape the way in which people move, emote and relate to one another in particular ways. One of the overarching themes of this thesis is one that has preoccupied much anthropology in the last decade, namely, the intersection between agency and power. I have tried to show that hierarchies of power and knowledge still leave room for creativity and agency. Seemingly opposed ideas of subordination and agency, nevertheless coalesce in the body of the learner, and contribute to the emergence of a new self, a kathaka.

> **Chhandam School of Kathak**
> **The Nine Principles**

1. सदव्यवहार और तहज़ीब
"Sadvyavhar aur Tehzeeb" - Attitude and Etiquette

One must approach the study of Kathak with humility, an open mind, and respect for oneself and for the Guru.

"My Guruji was more concerned with how I walked into the dance class than with how I danced." - Pandit Chitresh Das

2. प्रशिक्षण
"Prashikṣhan" - Study and training in *abhinaya*, the art of mime and expression, and the four elements of Kathak

Kathak comes from word *"katha"*, meaning story, and the *kathaka* is the storyteller. *Abhinaya*, or the art of expression and mime is at the heart of this story telling. A *kathaka* must study and train in *abhinaya* and in all four elements of kathak dance: *tayari* (virtuosity of technique, readiness), *laykari* (deep understanding of rhythm and timing), *khoobsurti* (beauty and grace), and *nazakat* (delicacy and subtlety).

3. रियाज़ मेहनत के साथ
"Riyaz mehenat ke sath" - Systematic practice with deep exertion

The *mantra* at Chhandam is "Practice, Practice, Practice" with hard work and exertion.

"Panditji has taught us how to tap the Divine energy in ourselves through the power of practice. …When I am into deep practice and the initial resistance of physical and mental exertion subsides, I enter a realm where there is no "other" - where time is no more."- Michelle Zonka, student of Pandit Chitresh Das

4. सर्वज्ञान
"Sarvgyan" - Complete knowledge of kathak

To gain true knowledge of the art form one must also study Indian history, philosophy, mythology, the ancient Indian texts, Indian music, and the sophisticated mathematics involved in the Indian classical system.

5. उपज
"Upaj"- Improvisation

As the core of Kathak dance, Upaj leads to true freedom of expression and can only be achieved through training of the body, education of the mind, and riyaz with

mehenat. Spontaneity is an integral aspect of everyday life - one must learn to be sharp, keen, and focused to handle life's unexpected occurrences.

"Freedom comes from refined discipline with responsibility." - Pandit Chitresh Das

6.. शिक्षा, प्रचार, और सुरक्षा करना
"Shiksha, Prachar aur Suraksha Karna" – **To educate, promote and preserve**

In order to be a *kathaka*, a student must not only educate and train himself or herself, but must also promote and advocate for the art form amongst friends, family, in school, at work, and in the larger community and society. In doing so, students will ultimately preserve the tradition for generations to come.

7. त्याग और सेवा
"Tyaag aur Seva" – **Sacrifice & selfless service**

Through these teachings and training at Chhandam, students will ultimately adopt the values of selflessness and sacrifice. These values must manifest both within the context of their study of Kathak and also permeate in other aspects of their lives by giving back to their communities and the society by and large.

8. साधना
"Sadhana" – **Devotional practice for life**

When the dance becomes a spiritual practice, a way of life, it becomes *sadhana*. Inspired by the great *sadhus* and *yogis* of India, Pt. Das developed Kathak Yoga, a ground-breaking technique which takes Kathak into the realm of spiritual practice, requiring of the practitioner to bring mind, body and spirit into unified focus. In Kathak Yoga, the dancer simultaneously recites the *nagma*, plays an instrument, and executes complex mathematical patterns. Chhandam students from the beginning to advanced levels are trained in the technique of Kathak Yoga.

9. गुरु शिष्य परमपरा
"Guru-Shishya Parampara" - **Guru-Disciple Tradition**

A "Guru" is "one who removes the darkness" through direct knowledge and training. Knowledge is imparted through the developing relationship between Guru and Disciple.

Pandit Chitresh Das was trained by his Guru, Pandit Ram Narayan Misra, in the traditional *guru-shishya parampara*. After many years of intense study and adherence to the Nine Principles, students at Chhandam may also enter into a one-to-one relationship with the Guru through a *gandhabandan* ceremony, signifying a lifelong commitment to the art.

"Dance in such a way that your dance becomes one with everything." -*Pandit Ram Narayan Misra, Guru of Pandit Chitresh Das*

MACQUARIE
UNIVERSITY~SYDNEY

Ms Monica Dalidowicz
Department of Anthropology
Division of Society, Culture, Media and Philosophy

14 December 2007

Dear Ms Dalidowicz

FINAL APPROVAL LETTER

Title of Project: Trans-cultural bodies and contested histories: A multi-sited study of kathak dance
Reference Number: HE23NOV2007-D05562

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Your responses have satisfactorily addressed the outstanding issues raised by the Committee. You may now proceed with your research. This approval is subject to the following condition:

1. Please forward a copy of the information and consent form signed by Pandit Das when available.

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:
1. Approval will be for a period of twelve months. At the end of this period, if the project has been completed abandoned, discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are required to submit a Final Report on the project. If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. The Final Report is available at http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/forms.
2. However, at the end of the 12 month period if the project is still current you should instead submit an application for renewal of the approval if the project has run for less than five (5) years. This form is available at http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/forms If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report (see Point 1 above) and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).
3. Please remember the Committee must be notified of any alteration to the project.
4. You must notify the Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
5. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University (http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics).
6. If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide Macquarie University's Grants Officer with a copy of this letter as soon as possible. The Grants Officer will not inform external funding agencies that you have final approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Grants Officer has received a copy of this final approval letter.

CRO File: 07/1527   **ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE (HUMAN RESEARCH)**   Portrait (85%
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY (E11A)
SYDNEY, NSW, 2109 AUSTRALIA
Secretary: Ph: (02) 9850 7854 Fax: (02) 9850 8799 E-mail: kdesilva@vc.mq.edu.au
http://www.ro.mq.edu.au/eth_hum.htm

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Dr Margaret Stuart
Director of Research Ethics
Chair, Ethics Review Committee (Human Research)

CRO File: 07/1527   ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE (HUMAN RESEARCH)   Portrait (85%
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY (E11A)
SYDNEY, NSW, 2109 AUSTRALIA
Secretary: Ph: (02) 9850 7854 Fax: (02) 9850 8799 E-mail: kdesilva@vc.mq.edu.au
http://www.ro.mq.edu.au/eth_hum.htm

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MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

11 March 2009

Ms Monica Dalidowicz
3044 wheeler Street
BERKELEY CA 94705 USA

Reference: HE 23 Nov 2007 – D05562

Dear Ms Dalidowicz,

<u>**Renewal Approved**</u>

Title of project: "Trans-cultural bodies and contested histories: A multi-sited study of Kathak Dance"

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Approval for renewal of the above application has been granted, effective 1 December 2008.

The following are standard requirements attached to approval of all projects:

1.   Approval will be for a period of twelve months. At the end of this period, if the project has been completed, abandoned, discontinued or not completed for any reason you are required to submit a Final Report on the project. <u>If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed.</u> This form is available at:
http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/forms

2.   However, at the end of the 12 month period <u>if the project is still current </u>you should instead submit an application for renewal of the approval if the project has run for less than five (5) years. This form is available at:
http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/forms If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report (see Point 1 above) and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

3.   Please remember you must notify the Committee in writing regarding any alteration to the project.

4.   You must notify the committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

5.   At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Karolyn White
Director of Research Ethics
Chair, Ethics Review Committee (Human Research)
cc. Dr Kalpana Ram, Department of Anthropology

ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE (HUMAN RESEARCH)
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