

**MAPPING ODISSI: TRAINING, PRACTICE AND
PERFORMANCE IN THE PRESENT CONTEXT**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled, "**Mapping Odissi: Training, Practice and Performance in the Present Context**", submitted by Aastha Gandhi, the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**, is her own work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of this or any other university. We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

This dissertation titled, "Mapping Odissi: Training, Practice and Performance" submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aastha Gandhi', written in a cursive style.

Aastha Gandhi

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CONTENTS

	Page No.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
LIST OF FIGURES AND LIST OF PLATES	iii
CHAPTER I · INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction to the research	
1.2 Literature Review	
1.3 Methodology	
1.4 Case- studies	
1.5 Scope of the study	
CHAPTER II · CONSTRUCTING THE CODES	19
2.1 Odissi: An Overview	
2.2 Constructing Odissi	
2.3 Structuring the Presentation and the Practice	
2.4 Presentation of Odissi	
2.5 The Emerging Odissi Body	
2.6 The Subdued Voices	
2.7 The Dancers	
CHAPTER III · TRADITION AND TRANSITION	45
3.1 Divas: The Young Cultural Ambassadors	
3.2 Expanding the Canon	
3.3 Going Beyond the Gurus	
3.4 Questioning the Canon	
CHAPTER IV · ODISSI BODY: CONSTRUCTION AND PERCEPTION	92
4.1 Method of Teaching	
4.2 The Institutes	
4.3 Current Nemesis of the Teaching System	
4.4 The Imminent Voices of Odissi	
CHAPTER V · CONCLUSION	125
BIBLIOGRAPHY	131

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1 <i>Tribhangi</i>	80
Fig. 2 <i>Chauka</i>	-
Fig. 3 <i>Araimandi</i>	-

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Plate 1	81
Plate 2	82
Plate 3	83
Plate 4	84
Plate 5	85
Plate 6	-
Plate 7	86
Plate 8	87
Plate 9	88
Plate 10	89
Plate 11	90
Plate 12	91

CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the research

The research work is an attempt to delve into the current scenario of Odissi, as the title suggests, more precisely into its training, practice and performance. The research aims to draw a trajectory of the dance form, through its teachers, performers, policy makers and patrons, to analyze the current status of the form vis-à-vis the bodies dancing it. It aims to observe if dance is used merely, as a text, meant to be ‘read’, ‘reviewed’ and ‘edited’, or if its used as a language for creation of other texts, by the dancers depending on their own understanding and proficiency over the language. Further, re- viewing the status of dance, as a source of self-knowledge or for propagating a cultural repertoire. The dancers who were moulded into the nationalist/ post-colonial mode have stayed in the same structure and ideologies of the form as handed over to them by their *Gurus*, conforming to the given notion of aesthetics and generating more images within that structure. The research, from its very onset did not involve a large number of case studies, in terms of students, institutes, teachers or *Gurus*, because it does not aim at drawing a consensus on the current practice of Odissi. However, it has included the institutes, dancers, choreographers which represent the form, at various stages: ranging from the most renowned institute- in terms of the sheer graphics of its performances through the year- the institute living up to the legacy of the most acclaimed and recognized authority on Odissi, the institute striving to set a benchmark for itself- by adopting a different method of teaching- and the institute which takes pride in giving an alternative form to Odissi. Also, the pioneers who brought world- wide recognition to the form and those who are now ready to fill up the spaces created by the former, became an integral component of study.

The entry point to the research work is the current scenario of Odissi, which cannot be seen as a result of a linear development in any way, although the form, as we see it today

through its presentations, does seem to be monotonous, calling for a desperate change. It is the very disturbances, within its practise, which propel one to engage with the form at a more penetrative/ academic level. **The present research does not intend to trace a historical evolution of the form, but does look at its history, as long as it is relevant and responsible in framing the present structure. Although, it is necessary to delve into the much contentious history of Odissi dance, the current research work does not offer much scope to do so due to the time limitations.**

The researcher's experience of learning Odissi provides a primary source of delving into the form, its practise and teaching. The training in the dance form further offers a space where one accepts and imbibes the teachings of the Guru, yet is left pondering over many other thoughts- the method of devising a technique, differences between the styles, the causes which propelled Gurus to branch out through their own style, the way it is perceived by other students, the relevance of a 'classical' dance in their modern urban life-style, the relationship with the form for those belonging to the region and those born outside the region, which gave birth to the dance form, to enlist a few.

Given the researcher's position as an Odissi student, the objective at the onset of the research work was to see if the dancers or students give a thought to the learning process, the construction of dance, perception and perusal, levels of understanding of the body and the objectives of learning 'classical' dance. **'Thinking' about the dance is not usually a part of the teaching process, and eventually being a silent learner is expected and encouraged, knowingly/ unknowingly on the part of the teacher, as this is the very pattern in which he/ she learnt the form.** One, then, does tend to think how relevant is the form in the current scenario, if the students are blindly following the method set by the Gurus, without bringing any innovative change to the process of teaching and questioning the very existence of the form.

Thence, the important focal points of study, which causally intersect each other, in spite of being segregated under three different categories, and formed the core of the fieldwork, are:

1) *Guru- shishya parampara*

The research work aims to explore ways in which the history, as the practitioners and the guardians of the dance form have formulated it, used it and propagated it: if they have created any kind of leeway where the younger generation, the upcoming dancers can use dance for aesthetic explorations, as a tool for looking at its history, to portray lived experiences and to make its performance a lived experience, and not just a presentation of a 'dying tradition'. The absence or presence of the freedom, and the space available to shift the boundaries of the form, need to be questioned. The research probes into these very boundaries of the form, as a fixed structure, which gives no scope to its performers to look beyond the "given" text and, then, looking into what becomes the ultimate usage of dance, if it is not living up to its goal of liberating the body, rather binding it, within blindly aped codes and structures.

One needs to examine and question such undercurrents within the form, which cause tension in its growth, in the genesis of movement, in the growth of its aesthetic substance and need to be dealt with beyond the level of performance.

It is essential to look into the major interventions, if any, made by first-generation dancers, which directly put the control of its practice in their hands. Not attempting to go beyond what they received from the Guru in terms of dance vocabulary, their innovations were limited to mere repetition of the items composed by the Gurus. Since the Gurus were preoccupied with the function of extending the form and establishing it as a classical dance, once the objective was achieved, the form was eventually fixed into a single structure and hence possibilities of further creations and innovations in terms of dance grammar did not receive much attention. The research work aims to look into the leeway set by the Gurus within the form which could be experimented with, if any, and areas that were strictly not meant to be challenged. Consequently, a majority of dancers hardly negotiated with the Gurus to bring in changes in practice, body, projection and aesthetics of the form. The former established their position in cultural circuits and were soon recognized as pioneers of the budding dance form, bringing more colour to the new

image of the nation. Their interaction with the form as a performer and as a teacher was limited. Their response to the notions of gender as perceived and projected in the dance form, forms another core area of study.

The centres for proliferation of the form, which mushroomed all over, played an important role in deciding the new codes for the *Guru-shishya parampara*, as soon as Odissi was ordained with the status of 'classical'. Through these institutes the dance practise and its *parampara* were firmly established and propagated. Hardly, any difference can be marked out between the functioning of the institutes and the teaching methodology, which were set up in 1950s from those, which are coming up now and their functioning under the affects of commercialisation, globalization and modernization. In this context it is necessary to understand the process and reason for changes in the attitude of the students, audience, and institutions.

2) Diversity in Practice

Odissi was established within a specific mould. Using the same fundamentals Gurus went on to build their own style, which was further popularised under their name, and thus claiming it to constitute a huge variety. However, no sooner than later, it was one style of Odissi that established its monopoly over the market. Consequently, it was the teachers and practitioners of this style which began to set market equations for all other styles of Odissi, further determining areas of 'expansion' for other styles. The research work tried to look into the growth of this style, which remained very static in its approach towards the growth of Odissi, *in toto*, to maintain its own status- quo. It becomes necessary to look into the evolution of the style when its practitioners start looking for options in folk, contemporary and modern elements and the leeway created by the Gurus to encash on the 'diversity' factor, innovation etc. with the prerequisite of remaining authentic and abiding by the rules set by the latter. In the absence of the Gurus, it is essential to observe the growth of the form under the Guru's successor, who are now the decision- makers and preside over the codes of "authenticity".

Most of the establishers of the dance forms, performers as well as teachers, claim their style to be different than others, churning out a lot of 'choreographic' productions, which are mostly a product of solo compositions being converted for group presentations, merely working on different permutations and combinations of the same set of movements. Solos also largely follow the accepted, conventional repertoire, set by the Gurus in 1950s.

3) Aesthetic sense in Odissi

It is necessary to understand what propelled the Gurus to structure Odissi's body as we see it today, in its most conventional and market-accepted form. The existing Sanskrit and regional practices which drove them to consolidate Odissi body from various folk and traditional practices. During this process the Gurus, accommodated different regional forms working on their specific aesthetic sense, disagreements and conflicts in ideas soon lead to divergence into different styles, post-*Jayantika*. One would like to analyse how the aesthetics of a given form become fixed under a single notion and what repercussions that has on its growth? In addition to the current repertoire of performances, contexts, themes, style and response of students to the same, it is essential to study the history of Odissi's formulation and the goals, which drove its patrons and sculptors, and their perception of the same. Drawing through these evidences and arguments one tends to look into debates of 'authentic' v/s 'inauthentic', technique v/s repertoire and 'classical' v/s 'contemporary', as seen through the "changing aesthetics" of the form.

One needs to probe into the "lived" materiality of the body¹, not simply by examining its codes but by scrutinizing the practices, which systematically constitute and mould the dancer's body. **It is essential not only to look at the guiding principles of a culture but also to intervene in its ideological discourse, which lends 'normality' to the hegemony of uneven cultures. One needs to realize that it's not simply a change of cultural contents and symbols but the very site on which cultural identities are inscribed that needs to be probed into. The construction of culture needs to be seen as different from mere invention of tradition.**

¹ Seemantini Niranjana, *Gender and Space*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2001.

This research work is an attempt to intervene in the classical dance world through post-colonial, feminist and global readings in Odissi- its form, performance and the Odissi body. It aims at identifying the institutions, beliefs and value systems underlying the dance world, which are connected with broader cultural contexts, to examine how dancers and women are positioned in society, to identify the uses of the female body in Odissi, to question the availability of the body as a site for prescribing gender roles through dance for intervening these systems itself. The chapters, building on the aforementioned issues, have been structured broadly, beginning with the history and construction of the codes of Odissi dance. The nationalist and post-colonialist ideologies which drove the Gurus to create a form, aping the 'classical' mould as set by others, the propellants behind the assimilation of a few selective elements to adhere to the 'classical' status, and omission of a majority of regional forms, are discussed in Chapter- I. The study then discusses the new set of students who joined Odissi Gurus, after already establishing themselves in other classical dance forms: their motive for learning Odissi and staying within the form, and giving Odissi a national and soon, a global pedestal. They became the icons and cultural ambassadors of a newly independent state. From then on, the pedagogy as formulated by the Gurus and further authenticated by the first generation dancers, due to their unquestioned acceptance and dissemination of Odissi is dealt with. Expansion and transition of the form, in 1980s and 1990s becomes an inevitable gradation in its evolution, as a consequence of cross-cultural conversations as well as stagnation of the form, which is felt by many, during this period. The last chapter looks into the confrontation of Odissi, the unquestioned dissemination of the *parampara* by the teachers, its perception and relevance for the current generation of students. Although, this trajectory lends a certain chronological order to the text, the research however, does not suffice by looking at it in terms of the past, present and future of the form.

1.2 Literature Review

Post Colonial Writings

Given the paradigm of the research work, the available material on Odissi dance - books, publications, articles, journals and e- publications - were extensively studied, including those which first recognized Odissi as a part of the cultural repertoire. It is found that the historicization of the form was an integral part of its establishment as a “classical” dance. Also, over the time, the writings have not developed with the growth of the form. Therefore, it is necessary to see, how the channelization of a dance form in a particular way, determines the course of its writings, where the mainstream writings on Odissi still follow the set pattern of heavy visual documentation and an introductory information about its mythic origin, history, architects, repertoire and dancers, ignoring the social and political aspects of the reconstruction process and evolution of Odissi afterwards. Through the study of the available material on Odissi, it becomes obvious that like the dance form, ‘research’ on the dance form has also become stagnant, owing to the restricted goals of its patrons, reformers and performers. This material, however, provides a peek into the process of formalization of a “classical” dance structure, how it was propagated and glorified further and became an aperture, for a specific section of the society, to look into their past. The writings on Odissi, ranging from the 1950s, till now, can be grouped under following categories:

1) **The introductory, informative or biographical writings on dancers:** The shaping of the form to a large extent depended on its initial writings, which arose in the 1950s, and proliferated it further, leading to its acceptance as a classical dance. Its emergence along with other cultural writings on India, both by Indian and western scholars, these had a significant role to play. A standard code is followed in these writings to historicize the dance. Beginning with mythologizing its birth and then tracing a linear continuity in its development from ancient period to the medieval, with a short downfall, it is rescued again, owing to the contribution of a few “enlightened” ones, who claim its position as one of the forerunners of India’s most “classical” cultural symbols.

The early writings mythologize the origination of dance. Building on these lines, scholarly, critical and personal accounts by dance enthusiasts were written and published extensively. Fabri, Khokar, Pani were among the first few to acknowledge Odissi as a classical art. Regional, and later, national publications came out with substantial writings about Odissi, along with articles on the folk performances, *bhakti* literature, temple sculptures, music and theatrical arts of Orissa. Reviews as well as personal and critical writings on the dance form, such as Kala Vikash Kendra journals were also published extensively.

The Indian state, as a part of its policy to preserve and promote such practices through its art institutions such as *Sangeet Natak Akademi*, Indian Council for Cultural Research and Indira Gandhi National Center for Arts and so on, has generated writings to achieve the objective of propagating dance as the face of the nation. Interestingly, the departments of culture and tourism come under the same ministry in India. Policies are formed in such a way that the dances are eventually propagated with a view to develop tourism as a means to generate more revenue. In addition, the current scenario of Indian dances is such that if practitioners have to acquire a considerable state patronage and recognition they have to abide by the state policies, adhere to the rules set by the latter, ultimately conforming to the status quo as defined by such agencies. It was therefore essential to look into the government publications and **official writings** on Indian dances, both by the tourist division and the cultural department, with the most recent ones published under the title of “Incredible India”. These have assisted in glorifying the dances by bracketing them into museum pieces solely for “entertainment”².

2) Writings that position classical dances as a part of the cultural repertoire: Khokar and Vatsyayan brought Odissi to the cultural scene of India through their writings. Sunil Kothari, Dhirendranath Pattnaik and others, have mainly contributed in valorising and historicizing the form. Their writings are an essential study, for the research work.

² Initially, classical dances were looked upon as emblems of the nation’s culture and the upcoming generations took pride in this legacy. Recent times, on the contrary, have witnessed a spurt in more “flaunty- display” of dances meant solely for tourists, mostly foreigners, in heritage buildings, to add to the “classical” aura, which is often supported by the Gurus through personal experiences and interactions with other dancer-friends.

Most of the writings till this day, follow the same pattern of eulogizing the form through a lot of visually appealing material combined with basic information on the dance form and are lacking in any kind of analytical observation which may be made through their own personal experience. Marg publications on classical dances are used as a prototype by the dancers who have penned a book in their own name, devoid of any biographical experiences, such as those by Mansingh, Gauhar and Raut³.

3) **Historical writings on Odissi:** It was only later that the Gurus' role as the founders of the form was acknowledged and written about. The writings, such as those by Hejmady and Kothari, looked into the history of the form once it had established itself. Kothari traces its path from a divine space of temple precincts (*natamandapa/ devasabha*) to the new post-colonial, urban space of secular public halls (*janasabha*), from *devadasis* to educated, urban women (Kothari, 2001; 1).

In the initial phase of proliferating the dance form through writings, the role of revivalists was overlooked, to prove its classicism and to trace an unbroken continuity in the tradition. It was much later that Gurus were recognized as the flag bearers of the dance form and scholars became more vocal about their role in its formulation, which was not limited to merely contributing to its revival, but that of designing it in a whole new way for the proscenium stage. With the new dancers coming from well- educated urban families, the authority of the Gurus over the form was recognized and they became more vocal about it. The writings of Hejmady and others played a vital role in establishing the role of the Gurus⁴.

However, the formative process of embedding the regional or Sanskritic elements into the form for the construction of the performing body is not clear, as these writings never delve into the process of composition of the dance form, often leaving a huge lacuna between the dance-writing and the dance practice as seen and experienced. Another

³ Mansingh, Sonal, "Incredible India: Classical Dances", ed. Manju Gupta, Wisdom Tree, New Delhi, 2007
Raut, Madhumita, "Odissi, What, Why and How: Evolutions, Revival and Technique", B. R. Rhythms, New Delhi, 2007.

Gauhar, Ranjana, "Odissi: The Dance Divine", Niyogi, New Delhi, 2007.

⁴ Hejmady, 1990 and 2002

factor which widens this gap is the merging of history with myths, where authors take a leap in their writings of dance as described in the Vedas, to dance as practised by the Gods and taking it forward to the epics and the dance practices described in the latter (Vatsyayan, 1997). The various regional dance forms are often quoted arbitrarily, giving laxity to the historicization of the dance form.

However, Vatsyayan does mention that the current form of Odissi is reconstructed from fragments available in different periods and milieus. She fails to, or chooses not to delve into the actual process of constructing a dance form, the process of sieving through the available visual and textual material and performances, the process of making it finer to suit the body of urban, young, women dancers, the shift of perspectives of Gurus on moving from theatre companies to dance institutes et al. These are very crucial areas, which are amiss in the initial writings on Odissi and are talked about only fifty years later, in the twenty first century.

Dhiren Dash, a dramatist and scholar of theatre and dance, laid down a different perspective to the formulation of Odissi through his articles in Kala Vikash Kendra journals. He describes the structuring of new repertoire of Odissi. He looks into the original format and scrutinizes how the earlier practitioners and dance-masters structured it. He also talks about the different styles of Odissi, its mechanization and repetition due to commercialisation of *Guru- shishya parampara*, which called for immediate attention.

Most of these writings failed to see dance as a politico- cultural outcome of the regional need for a cultural geographical presence and recognition in the newly independent state. Odissi was recognized as a problematic area much later. Pathy, goes beyond the clichéd perspective of existing writings on classical dances and attempts to view Odissi **“in the new global situation in relation to a regional identity embedded within an empirical geography and not as an isolated phenomenon”** (Pathy, 2007; 1) (emphasis added). He questions the very notions of authentic, traditional, modern and contemporary, which keep changing with time, and states, **“revivalists were people who prized authenticity, but the dance they created or fabricated was not authentically traditional but**

authentically contemporary” (Pathy, 2007; 32) (emphasis added). He also looks into Odissi’s similarity to Bharatanatyam, owing to the influence of southern culture on Orissan arts due to its close physical proximity with Andhra Pradesh, a similarity which had not been taken into account by other ‘historians’ to avoid the claims of it being called a mere regional variant of southern dance forms and thus, lacking in its “classicism”. His experience and knowledge of visual arts of the region, gives him a broader perspective to view the performing arts, place them in similar spaces, and draw an analysis of mutual exchange of arts and culture between regions.

4) Re-searching Odissi: The Academic Writings

The new writings on Odissi, arise from the study derived from one’s own engagement with the dance form, tracing its history to deal with its limitations. Although there have not been many writings analysing the form, those by Tandon (Tandon, 2005) and Chatterjee (2004; p.143- 157) provide a substantial look into its history, practice and technique.

Tandon emphasizes on personal understanding of the tradition. Her engagement with the questioning of Odissi begins at the level of a personal quest for self- realization and is vocalized and structured through her academic research in the same. Resultantly, for the first time, codes and the rules outlined by the Gurus are questioned, and an attempt is made to look beyond them.

Such discourses are relevant as they make an intervention into the writings of Odissi as they do not solely intend to cite the history, evolution and current practice of Odissi, unlike the earlier ones; the primary search here is rather concerned with Odissi’s relevance in the current scenario as opposed to that of authenticating it by tracing evidence from the past.

Tandon, although, establishes her research with a historical overview, through medieval architecture and sculptures, to further substantiate her understanding of Odissi's technique and to separate facts from the myths, building a diverse perspective for the dance form, which is traditional and yet not devoid of a contemporary perusal. However, she aspires to bring about a complete "revitalization of the *parampara*" through her work.

Chatterjee questions the structures of linearity on which the historical models of postcolonial India are based. These structures became the legitimising factors, in the absence of any other knowledge source, to claim ownership of a civilized classical culture in any understanding of history, under the influence of Western and European models of historicizing. Such models are used to build the history for the forms, which are conceptually non-linear and where past performances were never recorded and transmitted only through oral traditions. Chatterjee questions that the forcing of these very structures on Indian dance forms, and to develop a notion of its historiography, provides a disjuncture between the form and its revived version, visibly exemplified by all 'classical' dances of India; "the "classical" claim is thus complicated: while it accurately reflects the long, if interrupted, histories of these forms and their complexity, it is also based on grand narratives about elite art and a singular aesthetic framework"(Chatterjee, 2004; 147). She breaks the notion of an emerging generation of concert dancers representing "spiritual consorts" of God in any way. They are rather professional dancers who are "dancing as much expressions of personal artistic excellence as ritualised spiritual articulations."

Also, one cannot overlook the fact that both, Tandon and Chatterjee, unlike initial scholars/ writers on Odissi, are engaged in practising the form at an individual level. Thus, the primary source for them is their own engagement as a practitioner of the form, unlike initial writers.

Academic writings on post- colonialism by Indian authors were a crucial part of the study. The writings of Ania Loomba, K. N. Panikkar, Romila Thapar, Homi Bhabha etc, gave an in- depth understanding of the ideologies and history of colonialism and the

formation of post-colonial discourse as a response to it, along with gender and caste politics, issues of sexuality and colonialism, and the intersection of feminist and postcolonial thought. The writings on nation and the building of the nation as a critic of colonial history, written by Partha Chatterjee and others, were also studied.

Gender, Culture and Writings on Body

There are hardly any writings on dancers and the dancing body by Indian scholars. None of the dance writings problematize the body and the dance. The approach is mostly that of glorifying the form. However, there are postcolonial writings that deal with the issue of gender and women in cultural practices, songs, and writings. Charu Gupta's "Sexuality, Obscenity and Community" throws light on the dominant notions of "nationalist" thought, which pervaded northern India in the early 1940s, aimed at building a new image of Indian woman by completely obliterating the "perverse" practices from the folk culture. "Recasting Women", which is a compilation of essays in colonial history, edited by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, locates the position of women in the popular culture, their marginalization in the society and the process of sanctification of the Hindu woman who becomes the icon worshipped as Mother India in popular culture to lay claims to nationhood, gives an idea about seen and unseen forces and how they were acting on the woman's body - inside and outside the house, on the stage and in print, thence creating and propagating stereotypes. Tulika Sarkar's "Hindu Wife Hindu Nation", a seminal study on the prevailing, and propagated, notions of an ideal Hindu wife amongst the upper and middle classes, helps look into the ideologies which were shaping the image of a "civilized" Indian woman, as reflected in the upcoming "classical" dance practices.

Books by western scholars on the feminine body and dance, such as those by Judith Lynn Hanna, Lizbeth Godman and Andre Lepecki were quite helpful to develop a methodology for studying dance *vis-à-vis* the body. Although the feminist models used here lack in providing points of contact with the Indian case, they are useful for a study of the dancer's body as the site for cultural critique.

1.3 Methodology

Odissi has mainly been studied with a historical, descriptive or journalistic perspective, as visible in the writings of Kapila Vatsyayan, Mohan Khokar, Sunil Kothari, Dhirendranath Pattnaik etc. Hardly any research has been carried out which questions its existing form and its relevance in the current cultural scene of the state. This gave an advantage for the research work, where one could use different methodologies in the absence of any one particular methodology to study the dance, its teaching, practice and performance. Ethnographic, phenomenological, hermeneutic, historic, feminist modes were used to analyse the current state of Odissi. Taking the construction of Odissi as the vantage point, its meaning in relation to the construction of the meaning within its various settings, a phenomenological- hermeneutical and historical approach was used.

While looking at the historicization of the form, secondary sources were sorted, due to the absence of revivalists, scholars and Gurus who played a major role in designing the form and its history. Since, the research work had a limited scope, secondary sources are cited wherever necessary, including articles, journals and publications on Odissi dance and interviews with the dancers and gurus.

Feminist and post- colonial discourse became the basis for investigating gender codifications in the dance form, because it was the urban women dancers, who joined the male Gurus, at a very nascent stage of its revival. They were shaped under the specific ideologies of gender and sexual codes, through aesthetics and thematic content of the form; the constructed Odissi body was carried forward through the manipulated conditions of historicity in order to naturalize gender notions and their material effects so that they appear normal and inevitable. Costume, body image, movement vocabulary, training, technique, narrative and structure of the dance further assisted in the transmission of these values.

Since the research deals with the form in its present context, it required recording the voices of the current generation and their perception of the dance form as learnt and

performed and the *parampara* as taught by the teacher and as received by the student. Interviews and conversations with teachers, students, Gurus, institute- heads, dance critics were carried out during the field- work. Attending rehearsals and regular class sessions became a part of the field-work, at times inviting and involving engaging conversations with the students beyond the class-room space.

1.4 Case Studies

Keeping in mind the area of research work and the given time duration, six Odissi dance institutes were initially chosen for the study as sample representations of current Odissi scenario on the Indian dance stage- three each from Delhi and Bhubaneswar. However, during the course of fieldwork, more dancers and teachers were included and interviewed for the relevant areas of study. Interviews of Kiran Segal and Madhavi Mudgal, the pioneers, who after establishing themselves in one form shifted to Odissi, became an essential part of the research work. Where Bhubaneswar is the place of origin of the form, it was in Delhi that it created a wider space and scope to reach out to the world dance market. It is only very recently that Orissa started propagating its dance form through festival spaces; until now they were primarily organized in Delhi, where Odissi had acquired a sufficient space and audience. The particular institutes were chosen so as to provide an insight into different styles of Odissi and the ideals and essence of Odissi as developed by each of the Gurus, and hence the teaching system devised by them and followed by their successors. The details of these institutes are as follows:

Delhi:

- 1) Jayantika- Guru Mayadhar Raut's School of Odissi**, presently run by his daughter, Madhumita Raut. He was one of the Gurus who played a crucial role in the formation of Odissi. A vital part of *Jayantika*, the forum held in 1958, he went to *Kalakshetra* to study ancient dance texts. He specialized in the study of *mudras* which later contributed to the designing and restructuring of Odissi. His daughter who runs his institute established in the 1980s in New Delhi, is one of the front rank performers of Odissi.

- 2) **Gandharva Mahavidyalaya/ Madhavi Mudgal:** These two names have become synonymous to Odissi on the Delhi stage. It is one of the primary institutes catering to a strong student following, with young aspirants making their mark on the Delhi stage. A well- renowned danseuse, Madhavi Mudgal, follows Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra style of Odissi and is considered as one of the most able performer and teacher of his style.
- 3) **Nrityashilp- Guru Surendranath Jena Odissi Dance Foundation:** Being supervised by his eldest daughter, Pratibha Jena Singh, the institute offers a distinctive style of Odissi dance. The classes are held at Triveni Kala Sangam in Delhi. It is essential to analyze the space given to/ available for an unconventional form, not following or teaching mainstream Odissi and, then, look into how the students converse with the form; their aspirations to step beyond the given limitations in performance and historical space and their approach to form, performance and its teaching method.

Bhubaneswar:

- 4) **Srjan- Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra Odissi Nrityabasa:** Established in 1993, Srjan is a primary institute in defining and designing Odissi body and the performance, canonization and proliferation of the same. Currently his son, Ratikant Mahapatra, heads the institute.
- 5) **Tridhara:** Run by Gajendra Panda, Tridhara was founded by Guru Debaprasad Das in early 1980s. This institute established Odissi as one of the mainstream classical dances and served to increase its popularity in Orissa and all over India.

6) **Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Odissi Research Centre:** Established in 1986, it is an autonomous institute run under the auspices of the Government of Orissa. It has four more branches within Orissa established as its research wing. Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra himself taught here. Currently, it is headed by Ramhari Das as its Chief Executive Officer. It provided another dimension to the study because, unlike others, it is not a private tuition center and the method of teaching here is devised by the state. Also, it gave an insight into the working and teaching method of the institute, the difference in the understanding of students towards dance, where the Gurus serve as a visiting faculty, and its subsequent affects, given that the system works on a strongly time- bound teaching pattern.

7) **Chittaranjan Acharya' s 'The Legacy of Art':** It defines itself as an "academy of dance and music". Headed by Acharya, who has learnt the three prominent styles of Odissi, it went on to research and create a different teaching system, specifically designed for 'specially- abled' students, moving beyond what he learnt from the Gurus.

Senior dance students of these institutes were interviewed, through a series of conversations and questionnaires. This age slot was chosen specifically because most of them, at this point, are involved in learning, performing and teaching the form. They have reached a level where they understand the form and have decided their objectives of dance. Teaching the dance form helps them to look at their own training in Odissi through a wider perspective.

During the research work, a need was felt to record the voices of those dancers who were trained under the Gurus at a later stage, such that they could not occupy positions of the pioneers. However, these dancers are well established as Odissi' s prime exponents of the present generation and continue to perform within the classical style. Sharmila Mukherjee, Reela Hota and Sujata Mohapatra are some of these names. I would also like to bring to notice that although the first generation

dancers are well- established teachers of the form, it is only the first batch of Gurus, who because of the sheer fact that they revived the form and established their own styles, are referred to as gurus in the current text. This is to avoid any confusion or contentions regarding 'Guru' as a prefix, for only a few dancers of the later generation are referred to as gurus in common usage.

1.5 Scope of the Study

Paradigm of the current research work, modeled on the trajectory of Odissi dance, can be seen as **reflective of the state of all classical dances in India**. Past discrepancies of formulating a **single structure for all these dances inevitably influences their present**. Therefore, the study was propelled forward by **examining the existing writings on Odissi**, which have dealt with the form in a limited way, overlooking the socio- political and cultural undercurrents that affect its existence and survival. It calls for a deeper engagement with **the method of teaching, construction, and perception of the Odissi body**. The research does not, however, speculate on its future, but reflects on the problems faced by the current generation of practitioners, which calls for an urgent re-viewing of the form.

CHAPTER II

CONSTRUCTING THE CODES

2.1 Odissi: An Overview

Odissi dance has originated from the eastern state of Orissa. It was recognized as a classical dance only in the 1950s. It is currently practised and taught through modern institutions, practicing *Guru- shishya parampara*, remoulding the system to suit the contemporary lifestyle of both the Gurus and the *shishyas*. Traced from the *Odra Magadhi* style, which finds mention in the *Natyasastra*¹, conceptualised and popularised as a direct descendant of *Odra- Nrutya*, “Odissi was named as such in 1955, at the suggestion of poet, playwright and musicologist, Kavichandra Kalicharan Patnaik, signalling a **clear regional and cultural specificity: Odissi is the dance form that emerges from the state of Orissa**” (Chatterjee, 2004; 145) (emphasis added). The dance form includes *nritta*, pure dance performed on rhythm based mono- syllables (*bol*) and *nritya*, meaningful dance and *abhinaya* involving narration/ depiction of a particular theme or a story. The Odissi repertoire of present day performances constitutes all these elements of dance, beginning with *Mangalachran*, an ode to a particular deity, which includes *manch pravesh*, *pushpanjali*, *isht deva- vandana* and *trikhandi pranam*, is followed by a pure dance item, *pallavi*, based on a specific *raga*, which aims at exploring the mood of that *raag*, through movements in dance with varying *taal*. *Pallavi* is followed by an *abhinaya* item, which is based on a story line, more often deriving from *vaishnav* themes. The dancer has the liberty to perform more than one *abhinaya* or *pallavi*, concluding the recital with a highly elated *moksha* or a *dasavatar*. Usually, the Sanskrit or Oriya texts are used for Odissi performances, but the norm is followed by a few and many more dancers now resort to use other Indian languages as well, to present themes which have more relevance for them and their audiences. The teaching process begins with a basic *pranam*, to the Guru, Gods and mother Earth to seek their blessings for a smooth journey during the learning process. The Guru usually begins with basic steps, which acclimatize the

¹ An ancient treatise primarily on theatre (*nata*), also dealing in dance and music, claimed to be written by a sage called Bharata Muni between 2nd c. B.C. and 2nd c. A.D.

student's body to the fundamental positions of the form: *tribhangi*² and *chauka*³, and provide a necessary grounding to the body in the Odissi grammar. *Khandi* and *arasa* are small dance sequences which are then taught to initiate them into different *taal* used in the Odissi system, along with introducing more nuances of the form, like *bhramari* (turns), *chari* (walks) and *bhaav* (emotions), where the fundamental positions come into motion, with an elaborate use of *mudra* (hand gestures).

It includes both male and female following, but largely it was the female students, second generation onwards, who came to the forefront and took the dance form to places. Amongst the current generation as well, the majority comprises of female students⁴. Four major dance festivals are organized by the state, in collaboration with state tourism, across the cities, annually⁵. Other major festivals are organized by institutes, headed by high-profile Gurus, or their successors, in collaboration with state and private sponsorships, suggests towards the growing popularity of the form⁶.

² *Tribhangi*: as the name suggests, it means three bends at the neck, the waist and the knee, in opposing directions, i.e. if the chin is tilted towards left, the waist bend towards right and knee towards the left side. One hand is positioned on the thigh and the other one on the waist (depicted in fig. 1).

³ *Chauka*: a symmetrical position, resembles a square, renders balance to the body, where the ankles are placed a foot apart, knees are bent outwards, and arms are drawn out, bent at right angle at the elbow, parallel to each other, palms facing downwards. Face, neck and the body remain straight (depicted in fig. 2).

⁴ Pathy enlists as many as fifteen institutes teaching Odissi in Bhubaneswar itself (Pathy, 2007; 138-150)xxx

www.odissi.blogspot.com: a website "Odissi Dance Group Profiles" lists as many as 416 Odissi "aficionados" from across the globe, and rising.

⁵ Konark Dance Festival, February, organized by Orissa Tourism and Odissi Research Centre
Konark Dance and Music Festival, December, organized by Guru Gangadhar Pradhan's Orissa dance Academy, Orissa Tourism and *Konark Natya Mandap*

Puri Beach Festival, November, jointly organized by Tourism of India, State Tourism, Department of Handicrafts, Eastern Cultural Zonal Centre- Calcutta

Mukteshwar Festival, January, organized by Department of Tourism, Orissa in Bhubaneswar

⁶ **Srjan**, Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Odissi Nrityabasa, alone. organizes four annual festivals (as mentioned on the institute's website, www.srjan.com):

Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Award

"The Kelucharan Mohapatra Award was instituted in the year 1995 by Sri Ratikant Mohapatra, Director of Srjan to confer recognition on an individual involved in the process of contribution towards the vast areas of performing arts".

Marga Darshana- Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Purush Dance Festival:

"An attempt to go beyond the usual annual dance and music festival. The effort is to instil a continuing sense of purpose in the young male dancer, a determination to overcome all odds, to push oneself to the very peak of perfection, time after time, year after year".

Samsmaranam: "A whole day of the anniversary event on 7th April every year is planned which includes a number of dance recitals by senior and junior disciple alike, video film on Guruji, as well as a memorial lecture by eminent persons illuminating the vital aspects of Guruji's life. Mainly his contribution as a percussionist to the development of the Odissi Mardala instrument, his exposition of the Odissi form as a dancer himself and last but not the least, his contribution as a choreographer who enriched Odissi dance vocabulary over a span of fifty years".

Modern day Odissi claims to be a direct descendant of temple ritual practices of *devadasis*, in the temples of *Puri* and *Konark*, and sculptures which represent these practices in its most magnificent form on the temple walls of *Konark*, *Rajarani*, *Mukteshwar*, *Brahmeshwar*, *Lingaraj* and others. Such a claim however is contentious considering the ideologies and objectives, which were the driving factors for the revivalists of Odissi.

Much has been said about the history and the origin of the form, practices which influenced it, personalities that sculpted it and performers who made it into what we see Odissi as today. However, this research work aims at identifying and delving into the many contentions, conflicts and changes that the form took to arrive at its 'neo-classical'⁷ *avataar*; from an unorganised, local form to a systematized and recognized art, transferring it from one generation to the next, from *devadasi* practices to structuring it into a rigid, unquestioned pattern of teaching under the Gurus. From a temple practice, which was comparatively flexible in terms of grammar and movement structure, it became bound in multiple ways, by references to traditions, to grammar and to the *Natyasastra*, in its chase to attain "classicism".

2.2 Constructing Odissi

The fragments of the past act as building blocks for the present. In case of post colonial India, the cultural identities were constructed and expounded as conditioned by the experience of last two centuries (Thapar: 1987, 40), evidence for which is

Deesha: " An annual festival being organized in Kolkata by Srijan's Kolkata Chapter, has cherished an objective of extending the horizons of the Odissi heritage and create a special and permanent place for this distinct dance tradition in the world of arts".xxx

Shyamhari Chakra, is currently the correspondent of The Hindu newspaper in Bhubaneswar. He writes on arts, culture and tourism. He also writes for www.narthaki.com, Nartanam dance quarterly, Sruti and Attendance dance annual, states, "we can't say that these kind of festivals, like, Gangadhar Pradhan has his festival, Deesha Festival, Konark Festival, etc., don't take Orissa as a whole. They are not judicious and are not considerate about other styles, what is needed is a government body or a foreign body where Odissi of all styles, from different corners of the country, or from all over the world, are represented. Government should do it because it can plan something at that scale and also has the infrastructure, however Konark festival is organized by the state, but they don't invite international Odissi performers, perhaps they have not yet thought of it" (in a personal conversation with the research student, October 2007).

⁷ As used by Vatsyayan to refer to the revived form of "classical" dance practices in India (Vatsyayan, 1997).



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sought in the pre-Christian era, the ancient times, when culture existed in its “purest” form. Cultural symbols are constructed continually with shifting ideologies of the society. History, thoughtfully constructed and deliberately transmitted, is used to authenticate and legitimise these symbols. Largely determined by dominant political and social formations, the interpretations of the past are fabricated to serve the contemporary requirements. A cultural object is defined not only by its visual, religious or ritual aesthetics but also by its social and political causes. Equally significant are those engaged in proliferating the object as culturally relevant. The object then stands to symbolize not simply what it is made to portray externally, but also, if probed a little, it reveals an in-built system of ideologies, aspirations and ambitions of those who construct, patronize and legitimise it.

The Gurus

Odissi dance is a case in point. It was the local bred, theatre practitioners, Gotipua trained dancers, percussionists or relatives of *mahari* (temple dancers) who became the authors and authoritarians of Odissi; the Gurus⁸. Beginning with mythologizing its birth and then tracing a linear continuity in its development from ancient period to the medieval, with a short downfall thence, it is historicized as being rescued by a few “enlightened” ones, along with the elite and intelligentsia of cultural wing of the government of India. Odissi, then on, claimed its position as one of the forerunners of India’s most “classical” cultural symbols.

Myths were provided to give history a stamp of validation. Especially because here, the distinctive line between the two often gets blurred; rather, it is deliberately

⁸ **Guru Pankaj Charan Das:** came from a traditional *Madeli* family, who gave *mardal* accompaniment to *maharis* attached to the Jagannatha temple. Also, trained in *akhadaghara* (centres for training in gymnastics, music and dance) and *Raslila* troupes, he also learnt popular items of *Gotipua* repertoire, *Bandha-nritya* and *Thali-nritya*. Later, he joined Annapurna Theatre, as a dance teacher, in Cuttack.

Guru Deba Prasad Das: came from Cuttack district, he was exposed to music from his early childhood, as his paternal grandfather was a violin player and trained him in traditional music of Orissa. He was trained at an akhada and later joined Annapurna Theatre where he learnt basics of various classical and folk dances..

Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra: came from a traditional *chitrakar* (*patachitra*- painter) family of Puri. His father was a *khol* player, and trained Kelu in the same, providing a base for playing *pakhavaj*. He was trained in Gotipua dance and also a *Raslila* troupe, thereafter he joined Annapurna Theatre and trained under Guru Pankaj Charan Das. (Mohanty, 1990: 7)

blurred. Gods and supernatural beings perform active role-play with humans, which easily makes certain social assumptions acceptable, rendering smoothness to the process of historical reconstruction and its dissemination. The earlier writings, such as Coomaraswamy's 'Dance of Siva' (1948) and Projesh Banerjee's 'Dance of India' (1941), along with the later ones supported by the patrons and the *akademies*⁹ further helped mythologize the origination of dance to a great extent.

It was post revolt of 1857, that Indian intelligentsia felt the need to confront the past and an intellectual quest was initiated. Introspection into the cultural past became a common feature and dance was inculcated into the picture, like other arts and traditions, by the onset of 20th c. For the Indian intelligentsia the primary objective was to trace the path to the past and to construct it again with relevance to the present. This was however guided by the colonial perception of the 'natives'. To counter this, a different approach was opted to construct an alternative history guided by the objective of claiming parity with the West. It is in this light that one needs to view the revival of cultural practices, their only claim to authenticity being direct descendant of ancient ritual practices and treatises. It developed a sanskrit concept of tradition and tended to overlook the other multiple traditions of the subcontinent. Thus, the form at its very initial stage became bound by certain codes of "privileged" practices and principles, which became the defining guidelines for its construction at each subsequent stage.

Upper caste reformers, such as those of Bharatanatyam regarded scriptural sanctions a necessary prerequisite for all reforms and revival (Panikkar, 2007; 137). Odissi gurus completely aped the pattern set by the former by following the same codes and scriptures, claiming authenticity from direct inheritance of *devadasi* practices, creating new vocabulary for movement from the temple sculptures, along with a continual effort to distinguish it from the same, through its fundamental positions and specific regional forms.

⁹ Government publications (Tourist Division, Dance in India, 1958). Kala Vikas Kendra journals and Sangeet Natak Akademi journals. Documentary on Classical Dances of India produced by Films Division of India.

Unlike Bharatanatyam, where the revival of the dance form was headed by the Gurus who belonged to the Brahmin caste, and reformed to its utmost “pure” form to make it acceptable to the emerging upper and middle classes, Odissi followed a different trajectory where although a similar format of claiming authenticity by being an heir to ancient practices was established, Gurus did not belong to Brahmin caste. They were not traditional Gurus, nor came from the families who followed dance as a *parampara*. In case of Bharatanatyam, with its institutionalisation, which was spearheaded by Rukmini Devi Arundale, the dance Gurus lost their jurisdiction over the form. It was cleansed, systematized and formalized under Rukmini Devi, considering the demands of the emerging nation and its idea of nationalism (Venkataraman, 2005; 123). The Gurus were compelled to take a backseat and abided by the comprehensive, informed and articulated version proposed by Rukmini Devi. Resultantly, the dance form came largely under the institute of Kalakshetra and thus was officiated by the state¹¹. In case of Odissi, it was the Gurus, who, from the onset of its institutionalisation, supervised the project.

The *Guru- shishya* lineage in Odissi is very recent¹² it is just three generation of Gurus, beginning from those who taught the recognized Odissi Gurus and senior most dancers, namely, Kalicharan Patnaik, Mohanchandra Mahapatra, Singhari Shyamsunder Kar, Durlabh Chandra Singh, Suren Mohanty and others. Their **dance teaching was very “intuitive and impromptu”**; it was meant for the dance pieces in plays and thence not systematized, as they had not received a formal training under any dance Gurus. It “involved spontaneous expressions set to a choreographic order”,

¹¹ Kalakshetra, established in 1936 at the Theosophical Society in Adyar, a suburb near Chennai, moved to its new grounds in 1960s and was taken over by the government of India in 1993 when it was declared as an institute of national importance by an act of parliament, source: www.kalakshetra.in.

¹² Prior to modernization, the *guru- kulas* were situated in forests where teachers and the taught lived together, the Guru being supported by the royalty. It was an integrated teaching involving the *shishyas* taking care of everything in the *gurukula* from household chores to outside work and education. Temples also served as centres for teaching and learning of various arts like language, literature, sculpture, painting, music and dance. *Akhadas* and *bhagwatgharas* later developed as institutes where local dance forms like *Gotipua*, *Sankirtana*, *Rasalila*, *Krisnalila*, *Ramanataka* and *Sakhinata* were taught and practiced, following rigorous training system. It found support in the local kings. *Guru-shishya parampara* was also firmly established in *sankirtana dalas* across the villages. (Pathy, 2007; 129- 130)

deriving from their experience conceiving performances for *Jatra* and theatre. (Pathy, 2007; 136- 137)

The first generation of Odissi Gurus were specifically employed as dancers or dance masters in commercial theatre companies and *jatra* parties where they were performing and teaching dance; Guru Pankaj Chara Das, Guru Deba Prasad Das, Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, Guru Mayadhar Raut and Guru Mahadev, began their careers as dance masters in theatre¹³. They were borrowing *bols* from one source, lyrics from second and movement grammar from third, which lent arbitrariness to the structure of Odissi¹⁴. This made the *Guru- shishya parampara* very disjointed and disjunctured, giving leeway to anybody to become a Guru, forming his own set of codes for Odissi and structuring the grammar as per his individual interest and aesthetic sense, making the Odissi grammar highly varied and dispersed. Also, one could structure the course and the codes of teaching as per their specific objectives. Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra designed short- term, month- long capsule courses, so as to serve the demand of the growing consumerist market, for outstation students, to manage time and distance limitations. He also designed similar workshops for international workshops, popularising his style by demanding less in terms of time and effort, leading to a quick leap in the frequency of his students, resulting in deterioration of the quality of the dance form and thus inviting resentment from other Gurus¹⁵.

¹³“The theatre people who in fact were responsible to help Odissi crystallize into a distinguished dance form and evolve into a full- fledged dance form were conveniently forgotten. The dancers of theatre companies realised its importance as a distinctive dance form, revived and reconstructed into a classical art. Their importance first as dancers and later as gurus grew out of measure and they preferred to erase their humble past when they were struggling hard to survive as petty dancers or dancing boys. Therefore no biographer or dance historian working in the present scenario wishes to dig into the past and has to remain content with five (*Guru Pankaj Charan Das, Guru Deba Prasad Das, Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, Guru Mayadhar Raut, Guru Mahadev*) or four (sans *Guru Mahadev*), or three (sans *Guru Mayadhar Raut*) Odissi gurus.” (Pathy, 2007; 141)

It was only when Guru Mayadhar Raut suggested the use of prefix Guru, with his name, that others realized the need to follow suit so as to add more respect to the form and its practitioners, and to be able to confront the ridicule from Bharatanatyam critics and revivalists head-on (from conversation with Guru Mayadhar Raut, May, 2008).

¹⁴“*Mahari* dance on stage was adopting the style of the then prevalent *gotipua mudra* and mixed with Odissi *ukuta* (mono syllables, recited with dance movements, also called *bol*) and *pallavi*” (Pathy, 2007; 140).

¹⁵Madhumita Raut, daughter of Guru Mayadhar Raut on changing patterns of teaching in Odissi; “we started having half- baked dancers after some point in Odissi. “instant learning, instant money and instant fame” became the norm and then you lose out on the quality. they didn’t have the patience. In those days, my father and his colleague used to be very vocal about the way things were happening in Orissa. Kelu babu was teaching somewhere in Kala Vikas Kendra or some place else, I don’t

These movements grew mainly in the urban centres and provided a reason for Gurus to migrate from rural countryside to the cities, initially Cuttack and later Bhubaneswar and Puri, in case of Odissi. M. Nagabhushan Sharma, examines the transformation of Indian dances as a result of such socio- economic and political factors. He states that it was for economic reasons that Gurus preferred to migrate to the cities to teach the new “non- hereditary” class of disciples. Also, the new space for refining and reviving their dance tradition provided the Gurus with greater access to the seat of power and that meant “more profitable opportunities” (Sharma, 2007; 13). The Gurus after taking up teaching as a full- time career, used to move door- to- door, to teach students. For a very long period they continued to teach in state- funded institutes or the ones established by wealthy patrons of the arts¹⁶. It was much later that they established their own institutes¹⁷.

They found major support in urban women who joined as students, had strong political affiliations or had already made their mark as artists. These women had attained or inherited a position of repute and recognition in the cultural arena of the society and their influential background propelled the Gurus to the world stage. It is often acknowledged that the Gurus later became doyens through the success of their pupils, as also exemplified by Sanjukta Panigrahi and Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra,

remember. but my father gave this content for newspapers in Orissa that what you are doing, by making 5- years course into a 3- months course, you are making half- baked dancers, that becomes instrumental in reducing the quality... summer courses were different. there were refresher courses for revision, which is fine but you must have foundation course for at least 3 years including *pad- chari, khandis, arasas, mudra vinayog*, the teaching is incomplete without giving emphasis to the foundation course” (conversation with Madhumita Raut, May 2008).xxx

“The Guru also considers this temporary arrangement fruitful by selling his ‘items’ to such students who on their part make more money through teaching and performances. This is not proper learning but adhocism.” (Pathy. 2007: 149)

¹⁶ Kala Vikash Kendra was established in 1952, Cuttack. Bhubaneswar Kala Kendra, was established in early fifties followed by Rajdhani Kala Sansad and Lalit Kala Pitha. Soon, Odissi institutes emerged in Balasore, Baripada and Puri, establishing the form as a popular “classical” art in the whole coastal belt of Orissa (Pathy, 2007; 144).

¹⁷ Guru Mayadhar Raut established Jayantika in 1980s prior to which he was teaching at Shriram Bhartiya Kala Kendra, Delhi.

Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra established Srjan in 1993, prior to which he was teaching in Kala Vikas Kendra, Cuttack and Odissi Research Centre, Bhubaneswar.

Guru Deba Prasad Das established his institute Tridhara in 1980s, prior to which he was teaching Odissi at Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya, Bhubaneswar. His disciple Guru Gajendra Panda, now runs it in Bapuji Nagar, Bhubaneswar.

Indrani Rehman and Guru Debaprasad Das. The dance practices, too, achieved recognition under their name.

They belonged to the middle class, educated in western system, going through an internal conflict between colonial v/s cultural, which was instigated more by the current social and political influences, which subsequently, led to a search for the 'roots', found in the belief of belonging to a highly classical and civilized society, as opposed to the perception of the natives held by English. A path was chosen where the past was re-viewed with respect to understanding of the future. Thus, the recognition and transformation of indigenous cultures, first initiated as a central project against colonial domination, was further propelled by the intervention of the ideological structure of the state, along with the engagement of local intelligentsia, had various forces at play. Consequently, it acquired a strained form, posed in response to Western concept of civilization and culture, intermittently fused onto the local traditions and cultural practices¹⁸. It is this ideology, which stands supreme at the basis of each of the retrieved art forms of India today.

Dislocation from place of origin to greener pastures also brought changes in the *guru-shishya* relationship. This phenomenon perceptibly led to an advent of modernisation and hence, commercialisation, into the teaching process, which was regarded to be more of a pious nature in the erstwhile practices. This changed with the urbanization and institutionalisation of art practices. After being recognized as saviours of a dying art form, Gurus were awarded with several accolades for their work, by the state and central governing bodies. As a result, they centralized their efforts on building their own autonomous institutes, mobilizing funds for its functioning, organizing promotional festivals and sensitising media, which escalated their studentship tremendously¹⁹. They now became dancer- choreographer- managers for these

¹⁸ "When Odissi dance was reconstructed, the revivalists gathered bits and pieces from several extant performing art forms and made these into a common acceptable repertoire. In the process, they created a standard language, a kind of which after being used very often turned sterile." (Pathy, 2007; 115)

¹⁹ Guru was regarded successful if the media and administration cared for him and if he was able to go out on foreign trips and organize festivals (Pathy, 2007; 147). So much so that even festival or institute brochures highlight a detailed list of Gurus' participation in festivals and foreign tours, with no mention of his/ her innovative compositions and choreographic works.

institutes, employing their children or senior disciples as teachers (Pathy, 2007; 146-147). They propagated their position not simply as the designers of the form but became its founder- guardians, presiding on the structuring of Odissi body, its grammar, the influences, the sources, the history, the course, the experiments and innovations and the future Gurus. It was out and out a form propounded and propagated by male Gurus, denying any kind of acknowledgement to the *devadasis*, for being inheritors and preservers of the form, nor did they give the due to urban woman practitioners, who were not recognized as “Gurus” for a very long time. The accolades for them came much later, in the form of state awards. Thus, taking the reins in their own hands, by binding the teaching process to the strictures they devised, avoiding any outsider or state to acclaim that authority over the form, made it more code- ridden and strictly bound. They even commanded a certain kind of authority over the institutes that were affiliated to the state²⁰ Thus, it can be said that for the Gurus, **“the aim was not concerned with the past as much as to serve the present. It was not the revival of past which held importance but to selectively appropriate it and to use it for pragmatic reasons”**(Panikkar, 2007).

It was a three- fold process where involvement of the Gurus, escalating interest of the upper/ middle classes, the essential textual authority certified by the intelligentsia along with the support of the state helped Odissi to gain a “classical” status overnight, which set a benchmark for the other styles to follow and claim their name to fame²¹.

2.3 Structuring the Presentation and the Practice

Odissi, initially spelt as Orissi²¹, is claimed to have descended from *Odra- Magadhi* style, mentioned in the *Natyasastra*. The revivalists established it in continuation with the *bhakti* movement, saw dance as an ode to divinity in the images and in the ritual performances, establishing a chronological link from Jaina period to Vaishnavism (Pattnaik, 1972). However, the texts on *Tandava* are not included precisely because

²⁰ Odissi Research Centre was renamed Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra Odissi Research Centre recently after his demise. Although other Gurus also taught in this institute, naming it after the former, displays a certain kind of monopoly, which still exists in the market pertaining to highly influential studentship he has left behind.

²¹ For more, on debate over the nomenclature of Odissi, refer to Pathy, 2007

these practices don't hail from the *Natyasastra*'s principle of dance and hence left out of the process of reconstruction.

Few went further and claimed it to be even more "pristine, primitive and primordial" than Bharatanatyam, which placed Odissi nearer to the tradition of ancient Indian temple dancing (Fabri, 1960).

The critics questioned the claim because Odissi was seen as a mere regional variant of Bharatanatyam. Also, even though the revivalists of Odissi trace its lineage to the sculptures embedded before *Natyasastra* was written, the *tribhanga* begins to appear only from 8th c. A.D. in the temple art of Orissa. Origin of *chauka*, the second basic position in Odissi grammar, is equally doubtful. Pathy claims that it is neither derived from *mahari* nor *gotipua* dance practices. From the earlier traditional practices, *chauka asana* can find traces only in the stance of *Hiranya Kashyapu*, the king in *Prahladnataka*, practiced Orissa. He further states that it could only be for a "psychological and populist reason", to link Odissi with the stance of Lord Jagannatha so as to gain authority, and nurture a reverence for the form in the minds of the people. This could not be attained in the whole of Orissa, as the form still lacks recognition in northern and southern Orissa; its popularity has remained confined to the coastal regions²². Amongst the visual art of Orissa, it can only find traces in the *Saura* motif (Pathy, 2007; 116).

The sanskritic *mudras* were later inculcated in the dances, only after studying the concerned texts. Till then, it was primarily the regional *mudras*, which were used and performed *Gotipua nrutya* and those performed in the beginning of a theatrical performance.

Along with *Gotipua* dance, *devadasi* ritual practices are regarded to be the progenitors of current form of Odissi. In actuality, it was largely the former, which was used by

²²Students at Odissi Research Centre belonging to Sambalpur region of Orissa, also claimed the same as found in the conversations, during the field-work.

the Gurus to reconstruct the form²³. The *devadasis*, however, resided in the cities, which developed as centres of learning and seat of power. These centres developed into modern cities and thence the Gurus, who are unlikely to have witnessed a *mahari* performance earlier in the villages where they resided, migrated to the cities along with their theatre troupes. By this time the *mahari* practices had already been banned. Unless, the Gurus hailed from a *mahari* family, such as Guru Pankaj Charan Das, there was no way they could have established a link with *mahari* rituals. The dance form they practised prior to its institutionalisation mainly drew influences from *Gotipua* dance practices, folk dances and theatre performances. Also, initially they continued to perform dance for theatre troupes²⁴, which were travelling all across the state and were slowly acclimatized to the developing dance practices in the cities.

Other elements such as sculptures, *pata chitra* paintings, *tala patra* manuscripts are claimed to be used during the process of formulation of the dance. They drew evidence mainly from sanskritic texts, such as *Natyasastra* and *Abhinaya Darpana*, to find a place in the larger framework of 'nationalist' culture. Bose claims that it is the latter to which movement structures of neo- classical dances can be traced (Bose, 1991; 6).

The excluded practices were denigrated to the imposed categories of folk and tribal, stemming from an alien model. Pathy states that revivalists deliberately left out the dance forms, which were labelled folk, so as to avoid weakening of their claim to make Odissi "classical"²⁵; thus constraining its growth by relegating its identity to a single, unchanging source and ignoring the dynamism existing within. The Gurus

²³Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra extensively used his training in *Gotipua* style to formulate Odissi, and at present this *gharana/ paddhati* of Odissi is most widely known, practiced and performed world over (Mohanty, 2002).

²⁴Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra was working under the directorship of Guru Pankaj Charan Das at Annapurna Theatre in Cuttack (Mohanty. 1990; 8).

²⁵"The revivalists codified certain dances into "classical" and those which were left out are still stuck to that state, with any similation between the two was considered undesirable." (Pathy, 2007; 115) *Chhau nata* was given much promotional support by academies and state and central government agencies, in the form of academic and promotional support with the efforts of Jivan Pani and Dharendra Nath Pattnaik. It was through regular lecture- demonstrations, articles and conviction of eminent scholars, which redefined its look, and hence *Chhau nata* acquired a semi- classical status whereas *Prahladnataka* is still relegated to folk (Pathy, 2007; 125).

justified the revived form by claiming adherence to the demands of proscenium stage, where the form had to take a more attractive and aesthetically appealing guise²⁶. Validation from the state provided the final stamp, which certified the “classical” status of the dance form.

2.4 Presentation of Odissi

The reconstruction process of Odissi involved unquestioned aping of presentation of Bharatanatyam’s repertoire. The Odissi repertoire was built on the same lines; *mangalacharan* replaced *pushpanjali*, followed by a pure dance item, *batu*, a refined version of *thai ghara nata* of *Gotipua* tradition, which became *sthai nata* in Guru Deba Prasad Das *gharana* was conceived as a pure dance item replaced *alarippu*; *pallavi* (two kinds; *swara* and *vadya*) was another pure dance item which followed after *abhinaya*. *Abinaya* set to *Gita Govind* or Oriya poetry followed next in the repertoire, whereas Bharatanatyam had *jatiswaram*, *varnam*, *padam*, as *abhinaya* items especially written for dance compositions. A Bharatanatyam recital concluded with a dance based on *nritta*, performed on *bols*; *tillana*, ending with a *shlok* dedicated to the God or the king, it was termed as *moksha* in Odissi. There were discrepancies in the formation of this repertoire and suggestions of two main Gurus of Odissi, namely Guru Pankaj Charan Das and Guru Deba Prasad Das, went unheard, with a view to construct a form which, even if not authentically linked with the actual living traditions of Orissa, would be at least “classical” in nature, by virtue of its linkages with sculptures, *sastras* and resemblance to already established repertoire of classical dances. It is in this regard that *batu* was included in the repertoire which provided elements of classicism to dance, by emphasizing visual plasticity of sculptural forms (Pathy, 2007; 48), and found its main benefactor in Guru Keluchran Mahapatra²⁷. The repertoire as constituted by Guru Deba Prasad Das replaced *abhinaya* with *nartana* and had *natangi*, taken from *chhau*, as its last item, instead of

²⁶“We have to continue to make efforts to enrich Odissi while keeping its fundamentals intact. Only then will we attract more and more people to appreciate it. It was quite a different situation when the form was confined to the temple precincts for the devotion of gods alone. Today, when it has to catch the fancy of hundreds of people in auditoriums round the world, it has to be much more dynamic, imaginative and presentable. It all depends on who is innovating and how. Out of ten experiments only one may succeed” (Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra in an interview with S. P. Nanda, source: Pathy, 2007; 151).

²⁷The repertoire was designed by Guru Mahadev Rout and popularised under the name of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra. For more on formulation and inclusion of *batu* refer to Pathy, 2007; 47.

moksha. He also interchanged the order of performance of *pallavi* with that of *abhinaya* (Dash, 1979; 38).

The *mahari* dance practice was a part of a ritual²⁸ performed as an offering to the Lord, with a clear distinction between *nritta* and *nritya* aspects of dance; performers recited *bols* with some dances and had to sing along, in others. None of these dances, *mangalacharan*, *batu*, *mokshya* or *dasavatara* was ever performed by *maharis* in the sanctum sanctorum of Puri temple. A slow dance, it was completely based on “spiritual consciousness and was wholly devotional in character” (Dash, 1979; 41). The popularised Odissi repertoire is just a refined form of *Gotipua* dance tradition. *Gotipua* repertoire, which had to be stretched from fifteen minutes to at least an hour and a half long performance, in order to follow the standardized code of a classical recital, gave space for innovation of new items as well as using those from the traditional practice. However, the Gurus stuck with the repetition of *pallavi* and *abhinaya*.

The costume also aped the five- stitched Bharatanatyam costume designed by Rukmini Devi, giving up the regional style of adorning the sari, as practised by *maharis*²⁹. The jewellery became more aesthetic and appealing in its design and rendition. The mishmash of gold and silver was given up, as worn by the *devadasis*, and a more uniform code of silver jewellery, preferably rendered in Orissa’s regional filigree style, was finalized. The headgear (*tahia*) and the belt (*bengapattia*) were specially designed giving Odissi its distinguishing symbol from any other classical dance. Jagannatha replaced Nataraja on stage, following the unquestioned codes of ‘sacredness’.

It was already an accepted fact that to become a part of already existing ‘classical dance’ it was possible not by virtue of vocabulary but by virtue of history, *Guru-shishya parampara*, tradition and principles. By asserting to be a part of the similar

²⁸The *mahari nritya* repertoire constituted; *Dhupa Nata* (*mangala arpana*) displaying nine kinds of *bhramaris*; *chaka bhaunri*, *netra bhaunri*, *hala bhaunri*, *kula bhaunri*, *kaala bhaunri*, *kalaa bhaunri*, *keli bhaunri*, *jala bhaunri* and *kara bhaunri*, followed by *patuara nritya* (*panti pallavi*), *sabha nritya* (*nritya pasars*), *hera nata* (*dandamands nata*), *chitan taranga*, *abhiseka* and *bheta* (*pata shringara*). (Dash, 1978- 79; 42)

²⁹Also many Odissi schools use ‘half- sari’ for rehearsals and classes, following the dress- code of Bharatanatyam.

past, the dance form created a niche within the genre, by formulating a standardization of practise, teaching and presentation. The rigidity of the form as structured by the Gurus; being selective in their allegiance to elements to give the form a desired shape, choosing those that were aesthetically appealing and obliterating the rest, demanding strict adherence to *Guru shishya parampara*, although restricting the growth of the genre, ensured larger audiences and students. It channelized the growth in a particular chosen direction, which added to the artificiality of the form and confirms its irrelevance with time. One needs to question the position of “purists” who laid the rules of ‘authentic’ and inauthentic’ and failed to appreciate the process of growth and change, aiming to maintain their status quo. As a result they thrust the dance form to a status of a mere museum piece, attaining the national status yet confining its evolution to the land where its ‘roots’ belong³⁰. As Tandon states, “Gurus however seem to have failed to appreciate the importance of the stages of their own creative journey and to facilitate a similar process in their students. They have demanded instead that this **created tradition** be continued as a final form” (Tandon, 2005; 130) (emphasis added). She recognizes the fact that mental policing becomes an integral part of the tradition, as taught and practiced, so much so that the structure has developed an “**in- built psychological resistance to change**” (emphasis added).

2.5 The Emerging Odissi Body

Prior to Odissi; Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Manipuri and Kathak had already acquired the status of classical dance, proliferating the idea of “Indianness” on the world stage and disembarking the notion of authenticity through traditional practices specific to their states, Tamil Nadu, Kerela, Manipur and Northern states respectively. These dances followed and appropriated a certain kind of body structure: straight and angular in case of Bharatanatyam, bold and strongly masculine in Kathakali, straight and vertically up right in Kathak, graceful and supple in Manipuri.

³⁰The form is pursued as a cultural symbol and tradition, emphasizing the affiliation to one’s state. The loyalty to this tradition takes such a strong mode that any kind of experimentation or innovation in lyrics, poetry, and structure is regarded to be a sacrilege, even by the current generation of students (conversation with students at Odissi Research Centre, Bhubaneswar, October, 2007).

Odissi on the other hand developed a strongly feminine body, exhibited by the three bends of *tribhangi*, deflection of the torso and the hip from the central, vertical line, added to the curvilinear form of the body. It was shaped ideally to communicate feminine aesthetics, projecting and highlighting the feminine in human body. It was constructed and principally projected and grew as a woman's form, under the experienced hands and ingenious minds of the Gurus. The boundaries of sexuality and sensuality, adhered by Odissi, were determined by the demarcations of "classicism" set by Bharatanatyam. The most difficult task faced by Odissi revivalists was to follow the blueprint of "classicism" built by Bharatanatyam designers, yet desist from falling into the trap of aping its structural vocabulary. Hence, *tribhangi* (fig. 1, p. 80) and *chauka* (fig. 2, p.80) became the two fundamental positions of Odissi, deriving their structure from regional sources and yet highly distinct from Bharatanatyam's *araimandi* (fig. 3, p.80)³¹.

These poses rendered a very feminine structure to Odissi, unlike the rest and became the defining criteria for most of the dancers, already established in other styles, to shift to Odissi. Both Kiran Sehgal and Madhavi Mudgal acknowledge this as the reason for discontinuing with the practise of Bharatanatyam and Kathak, respectively, and full-fledged taking on Odissi. Here is an excerpt of interview with both of them, conducted during the fieldwork, on choosing Odissi and carrying on with it professionally:

Kiran Sehgal: *"Odissi to me is best suited for a woman, it is extremely feminine. Not that it has its own moments of vigorous tandava dancing, but to a little extent. Major part of it is very feminine. I think it complements my personality. Others might not agree, might find it a very boring dance form. For me it is very complete, aesthetically... Most of the dance styles are very beautiful. But Odissi is very feminine; structure is curvilinear, best suited for a woman"*.

A: *Why did you shift from Bharatanatyam to Odissi?*

Kiran Sehgal: *I was originally trained in Uday Shankar dance style because of my mother who danced in that style. Later I took to Bharatanatyam, Odissi of course was*

³¹*Araimandi*: Basic position of Bharatanatyam, with heels joined together, toes apart, knees slightly bent and facing outwards.

not known then, as most of us the senior dancers who are practising Odissi, and we were earlier, yes, dancers in Bharatanatyam or Kathak or any other dance form. I shifted to Odissi, somehow it was... in the beginning it was not very intentional I was asked to perform both the dance styles and I was also learning both the dance styles side by side although I was already performing in Bharatanatyam. When I started performing professionally in Odissi there was a moment when I used to perform both the dance styles in the same evening. Initially of course there was a lot of excitement but gradually I found that there was an emotional friction within me because, first of all getting involved in one dance form and then with the gap of just fifteen minutes in the interval to change into, outwardly I would change from one costume to another, hairstyle and all I would change. But inwardly I would still be on a high with one style and by the time I came out of it I was already performing the other style but was not doing full justice to it, I was uncomfortable, very uncomfortable, that is the word. But dheere dheere bhagya kaho ya jo bhi, (slowly and gradually, call it my luck or whatever), I don't know, but I started getting more work in Odissi. There could also be another reason that because there could be a language ease. I speak Oriya, badly of course, but I understand it. And I felt a little more relaxed. This could be one of the reasons. But I also felt that I was not doing justice to either style because invariably reflection of one would come into another so I shifted."

Madhavi Mudgal: *"I was performing Kathak and then I continued with Odissi, because it was very close to what I felt for dance; subtle, very lyrical, very understated, I mean my style, now of course other things are done. As for me, understatement is the key, what is not given out loudly has more strength for me."*

Differentiating from other styles on the movement structure, along with the music, which was neither Carnatic nor solely Hindustani, gave a different texture to Odissi's presentation. Also, since the dance was first presented in short sequences it gave much time to the audiences to develop a taste for it and allowed it to grow. By the time these dancers took up Odissi, both of them, like other dancers, had already gained some recognition, therefore creating the audiences for a new form did not pose a problem. Consequently, since the dance form was still to gain a stature of its own, it provided more scope to these dancers to gain more popularity, given the less amount

of competition from local Oriya dancers, who were very few till 1970s, they had much prospects to play a pioneering role, following Indrani Rehman, Sonal Mansingh and Sanjukta Panigrahi, and thence did not deviate further to any other dance style.

The ideal imagery of woman, which was consolidated from two main sources: the image of a respectable woman of the family (specifically middle and upper class portrayal of a Hindu family woman) and the ideal, Indian feminine image portrayed on the temple walls, became the main source for the Odissi body. The objective was to homogenize the cultural practices, to obtain a uniform national culture, keeping the regional variants intact, minus their profanities to serve the emerging modernity in the nation without transgressing its ethics, morals and values.

The intelligentsia, the Gurus, the patrons, poets and artists, largely a male-dominated group structured the female practices, appropriating the form to their idea of femininity and Indian classical culture. They were guided by the nationalist idea of 'new woman', which was constructed as a contrast to the modern woman of the west and distinct from that of the lower caste, indigenous outspoken woman. The new image of the woman was constructed restoring the idea of nationalism as the main objective, which designated inner, sacred, spiritual world as a female domain, whereas all that was material, outer and profane became the area of male. The nationalist idea aimed at combining and realizing both the areas effectively, "with cultivation of material techniques of modern western civilization while retaining and strengthening the distinctive spiritual essence of national culture" (Chatterjee, 2006; 238). The home-bound woman became the representative of all that was ritual, spiritual and religious, relegating her to the codes of traditional patriarchy but with a new role-play in solidarity with the nation's strive for asserting its status of "high culture". The boundaries of home and the world became flexible to the extent her femininity was not threatened. The woman for middle class was educated in such morals that would make her associate with and support the idea of the 'new woman'. The dancer woman, with the quest of realizing her "self", agreed to inculcate the same in her body. Also, the inner was considered to be a sanctified area where no influence of the colonizer was permitted. The process worked on the principle of making modernity consistent with nationalist project. Idealized by the dancer's body, which enunciated all that was religious and spiritual, yet performed in the new secular space

of proscenium, which became a model of modernity. Dancer was situated in the role of mother or goddess, on the stage, which served to erase her sexual- self in the world outside the home. The spiritual quality exercised by women was realized as a mark of civilized nation. The themes of the dances concentrated on *bhakti* or 'refined' form of *shringar*, coming from the so- called classical practices of the upper caste- educated Indians. They cleansed all that which was profane, lowly and unacceptable in the *devadasi* or folk practices of their region. Becoming westernised meant losing your spiritual values. Building on these criteria the dance form became more constricted where experimentation of any kind was taken to be sacrilegious.

The line of **form displayed by the temple sculptures** became the guiding principle for the dance and its imagery. However, the hip deflection was used to that extent which would retain the "pure" and "clean" imagery of woman on stage. Thus the exaggerated hip and torso deflections, as also displayed in folk styled movements, were done away with. The sculptures were used so as to acquire the stamp of 'authenticity', to project the idea of a great past and a continuing tradition, (refer to Pl. I (p. 81) to see how temples continue to form the basis of validation for the form and its history, in its popular imagery) and the movements were subjected to scrutiny when they crossed the moralities, prescribed by the revivalists.

The sculptures are wedged in the temple walls as permanent epithets of a particular period, symbolizing the characteristic ethos of that era. The dancer, on the other hand, presents a live enunciation of the sculpture. The form of woman, in flesh and blood, very much living and a part and parcel the present cultural context, although takes- off from the eternally embedded and fixed epitome of beauty; the sculpture, the former is bound by strictures of the society. The notions of beauty exemplified by the two merge for a moment and play as a mirror image to each other and yet, again, that image is broken by the sheer dynamics, which the dancing body has been engrained with and along with it, many socio- cultural complexities.

Pathy notes how this imagined entity of an ancient dance form plays on the contemporary body of the dancer; "we do not see this body as a biological entity, but we superimpose from our memory and culture on this body a different vision. As a result of interpretation the real becomes unreal and what emerges, as the dancing body

becomes an imagined entity. The body language of the bio body gets transformed and then is linked to this hypothetical entity and becomes universal. This language for our common understanding still remains the body language. The dance (Odissi) is constructed on the hypothesis which is built with the help of visual, textual and shared gestural language. Beyond the body, tradition has created a hypothetical or imagined body that now claims to be iconic- the iconic body with a language” (Pathy, 2007; 112). The socio cultural notions of the body projecting all that is feminine and beautiful in Indian culture became the base for (re)structuring the form. The process included, “civilizing” and “sophisticating” the *Gotipua* and *Mahari* dance forms, rejecting the acrobatic movements of *Bandha Nritya*, the form polished the crudeness present in the *Gotipua* form and refined it to an extent such that the upcoming new generation of women dancers could easily grasp it. Not just the form, but also thematically, the dance aimed at projecting ideals of femininity regarded as eternal, widespread and unchanging. Ananya Chatterjee throws more light on this point by drawing attention to the method of composing Odissi items, where Gurus deliberately subdued the embedded sensuality of the style, to avoid any kind of doubt regarding its “classical” status.

“When Odissi was reconstructed in the 1940’s and the 1950’s and the songs were choreographed by leading Gurus, it seems that some of the erotic physicality inherent in the style was subdued in order to emphasize the spirituality. Indeed it seems that the performance of sexual desire and sensual pleasure drew critiques about the “vulgarity” of the form, which in turn led to questions about its classicism, where supposedly passion is interpreted through a physicality sublimated in spirituality” (Chatterjee, 2004; 149).

The Gurus did not belong to the Brahmin caste, nor did they come from traditional dance families, except Guru Pankaj Charan Das, who was born into a *mahari* family. Their religious, ritual practices, status in society and notions of ‘sacred’ and ‘ideal’ woman seemingly differed from that of Bharatanatyam Gurus. Their perception of dance, in public arena, was determined by their respective backgrounds and influenced by their experience in theatre companies, which were mostly doing mythological plays.

The Gurus lacked knowledge of the Sanskrit texts till then, which were extensively used, to seek authenticity to the form. The discrepancy is that in opposition to what Gurus claim to add antiquity to the form, the texts are more often medieval, and not ancient, except for the *Natyasastra*. Also, the Sanskrit terms were fused onto what was being practiced as Odissi at that time. Hejmady notes that it was only when Guru Pankaj Charan Das saw a book on dance by Projesh Banerjee, *Dances of India*, and for the first time became aware of the use of *mudras* to express the meanings of the words in the poetry. It was then that for the first time in Odissi tradition he used different Sanskrit *mudras*. “Till then Odissi had employed traditional *mudras* only in a limited way.” (Hejmady, 1996; 11) This implies the process of how traditional practices are explicitly Sanskritized to attain the status of “classical” clearly in an enforced Western notion of the term. Oriya terms for foot positions, hand gestures, walks and other movements were replaced by Sanskrit nomenclature with due reference to ancient treatises. A grammar was established which was regional in appearance, yet drew claims to be Sanskritic, in character.

Thus they drew information and influence from various sources and all these elements were joined together making Odissi a “free- style” dance grammar (Pathy, 2007). The revivalists were laying down the definition of “authentic” during this time and formed an organization called Jayantika³². In case of a revived form, the new product as depicted and practiced becomes the established norm and gets the stamp of “authentic”. The most renowned style of Odissi, that of Guru Kelu Charan Mahapatra, gained quick acceptance and popularity and still stands to the claim of being the most “authentic” Odissi, whereas rest of the styles are either struggling to gain the status of being accepted as “Odissi” or for a substantial studentship, which has depleted over the time with students learning different styles from different Gurus at the same time, the distinguishing lines in the grammar diffusing with every generation of students.

The construction of Odissi involved a gruelling task but was acted out very arbitrarily. The Gurus never innovated on the aspect of choreography (Pathy, 2007). Even the revivalists had not determined the principles of choreography in terms of Odissi vocabulary, nor were it known through *maharis*, or through their teachers; the temple

³²Jayantika was formed in 1957, as a forum to consolidate Odissi, but dissolved in 1960. (Pathy, 2007; 50). (Dash, 2003; 34).

priests, as Jayantika never consulted them. Ultimately, conjoining all the elements and stretching them to a required time-length for a stage recital became the represented and performed Odissi.

The image of the sacred and the secular were coalesced. The dancer and the performer in the private domain of the temple, the *devadasi* dance practices, and the dance itself in the public domain, from *Gotipua* performances, were brought to a newly created urban space. Here, the “exclusive” and the everyday “folk” came together and aimed at projecting “correct” representation of Odissi. The structure was intelligently “cleansed”, “devulgarized” and “sophisticated” so as to adapt to the bodies of new dancers and appeal to the tastes of new urban audiences. In Hindu imagery, where the females also find a powerful, avenging, destructive and sexually potent depiction in form of *Kali*, *Durga*, *Chamunda* and others, Odissi built on a more docile, submissive, loving, nurturing and motherly image of the feminine, suggesting the ideologies embed in and projected through Odissi body. Hanna notes that dance has the potential to influence attitudes and behaviour. Observational learning of sex roles is a recognized area in performance studies. Kohlberg and Baudere state, “an individual tends to reproduce attitudes, acts and emotions exhibited by an observed model, whether live or symbolic. Modelling of gender-related dominance patterns may occur through observations of dance performances that convey information purposely or unintentionally” (Hanna, 1998; 196).

Odissi gained a classical status overnight with the determination of the Gurus, who explored ancient Sanskrit texts, the visual material and other prominent dance practices. The research however was not acute enough, given the immediacy, and hence most of the other practices and available texts were left out. Pathy notes that the ancient sculptures not just lent authenticity but provided immediate visual support, whereas paintings, undoubtedly a product of the market, were kept aside for this did not appeal to them as a useful pictorial evidence, in their fight for the cause of classicism. Thus the form that came into being, was idealized as the epitome of feminine beauty and chastity, specific to its regional orientation, yet catering to the values and principles promoted at the nationalist level, both locally and internationally. The form was structured in a way, which intended to retain the sexual

lexicon as depicted on temple walls, but in its utmost graceful, sophisticated and refined manner.

2.6 The Subdued Voices

Practices of *Sakhi palas*³³ and other folk style dances were excluded, or their inclusion was not acknowledged which contained an earthier, typically Oriya dance language and this raised angst amongst few. “The Oriyanness of the dance terminologies which would have provided a regional flavour to the dance was not taken seriously,” stated Deba Prasad Das (Pathy, 2007; 32). Folk- styled exaggerations were strictly avoided which according to few Gurus “contaminated” its classical purity. The borrowings from dances of southern Orissa, categorized under ‘*dakshini*’, were never explicitly stated. These codes were strictly followed to avoid the claims of Bharatanatyam revivalists of Odissi being a mere regional variant of Bharatanatyam. Such rules lent certain rigidity to the form and its structure, which prohibited the use of other Oriya dances for the upcoming generations.

The process of reconstruction was not free from prejudices, also evident through the process of *Jayantika*, which deliberately chose a few forms and left out others. The codes standardized by *Jayantika* were also not unanimously accepted. The Gurus separated and followed their own specific styles post- *Jayantika*. The Odissi, which followed the codes, standardized by these Gurus was accepted as “classical”. Exploration and experimentation of any kind was considered to be deviation from the norm, often drawing criticism for those who did not follow the mainstream Odissi or worked on other Oriya elements giving them a different structure such as that of Guru Debasprasad Das³⁴ and Guru Surendranath Jena. It is the voice of a few which became the recognized Odissi voice and the body designed by them. gradually gained support from the institutes and became the standardized Odissi body, gaining monopoly over

³³For more on Sakhi palas and their dance practices. refer to Pathy, 2007.

³⁴Students of Guru Deba Prasad Das and Guru Pankaj Charan Das were performing different *bandha nata* such as dancing on the rim of brass plate and performing *chira* (split), *Gangavatarana karana* (*sagadi*) and *bhekasana* (frog leaps), but mostly it was ignored by the styles which became more known and visible and practiced, given the more simplified dance grammar they evolved. (Pathy, 2007; 134) Also. Sanjukta Panigrahi, had learnt *bandhas* from Guru Deba Prasad Das, but were wiped out from her dance memory after adopting Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra’s style.

the Odissi dance market, institutes, festivals and workshops held across the globe³⁵. The easier body structure, uncomplicated technique, repetition of movements, and short-term crash courses devised by the Guru evidently led to its proliferation across the world in a very short time. Eventually acquiring the support of the authorities, purists and scholars this dance style gained a status quo and continues to maintain it, over the time acquiring the authority to lay down the rules of authentic and inauthentic, right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable in Odissi.

The Gurus also learnt techniques from other Gurus, which was hardly acknowledged once the form was established. More often, due to their promotional skills and reach to the centre of power and influential studentship, they were regarded to be original composers of certain dances that played a pivotal role in defining Odissi dance³⁶.

It was the traditional performances, as opposed to classical³⁷, that few Gurus conferred with, namely Guru Deba Prasad Das, who stuck with the traditional aspect of Odissi whereas others were actively engaged in refining it (Hejmady, 1990; 16). Dash clarifies that all that was related with *Saivism/ Tandava* and *Tantrism*, i.e. the many *yogic asanas* as practised in *Bandha Nritya* were conveniently obliterated. Why they were eliminated from the neo- classical Odissi is anybody's guess (Dash, 1979; 40). The trajectory of Odissi gurus as seen by him was different than what came to be later known as the "trinity of Odissi". Dash outlines a different history of Odissi, where Guru Mahadev Raut and Suren Mohanty are regarded to first attempt a new codification of the repertoire of Odissi, which was very unsystematic till late 1940's. The format established by them constituted of ten dances, out of which first five were later combined to make the first item in an Odissi recital i.e. the *mangalacharan*. He is very critical of the Odissi practices and revival during the early 1950s and clarifies that the form of Odissi, as was being propagated during that period, was in no way

³⁵ Mostly those who learnt under Guru Pankaj Charan Das, namely, Guru Gangadhar Pradhan, Niranjan Raut, Yamini Krishnamurty, Priyamba Mohanty, Sanjukta Panigrahi, Minati Mishra, Aruna Mohanty, eventually shifted to Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, becoming the stalwarts of his style. (Ritha Devi, SNA journal, 2001; 55)

³⁶ Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra learnt some dance techniques from Guru Dayal Sharan, in his formative years, and *Dasavatar*, which is acknowledged to be choreographed by Mahapatra was composed by Guru Durlabh Chandra Singh. Guru Mohanchandra Mahapatra taught Guru Deb Prasad Das *bandha* and relative exercises. (Pathy, 2007; 136- 139)

³⁷ For more on the difference between traditional and classical, refer to Pathy, 2007.

close to the tradition of *Mahari Nritya*, as practised in the temple of Lord Jagannath, at Puri. Also, '*Gita Govind*', according to him, was never danced to, in the temple; it was only meant to be sung and so was '*dasavatara*' (Dash. 1972; 40).

2.7 The Dancers

In 1947, with the passing of "Madras Prevention of Dedication of Devadasi Act", all temple dance practices were banned, in the province of Madras, but influenced the consciousness of most English educated Indians regarding *devadasis* (Marglin, 1985; 8). Resultantly, upper caste women were not permitted to take to dance. The scenario changed with the revival of the dances and their 'cleansing' under the avid guidance of the Gurus. The woman dancers were shaped under the Gurus and submitted to the conventions, which were streamlined by them. The dance training was not limited to a training of the body, but also conditioned their minds specific to the gender role, through grammar, thematic content, dance movements replicating prevalent status quo and techniques of presentation through costume, music, setting and lighting. In case of Odissi, dancers like Sanjukta Panigrahi and Indrani Rehman who joined the Gurus in the very nascent stage of the construction of the dance also contributed to the process of reconstruction by drawing from their previous training in Bharatanatyam³⁸. However, driven by the market flows and accepted norms of imagery of woman on stage, they too, submitted to the prevalent sexual prejudice displayed in the dance form and enhanced further the conventional imagery of woman, which had already been set by recognized classical dance forms. Even though it was the male Gurus who dictated the terms of the learning process and constructed the dance practice, the students coming from educated urban backgrounds willingly submitted to the norms, dance providing them with a window to culture and Indian value system. It established each of them as a new woman of the emerging independent nation, entrenched in the traditional system of religion and family with a modern outlook garnering from the education they received and their exposure to multicultural avenues, built them into the cultural ambassadors of the newly independent nation,

³⁸Sanjukta Panigrahi had been trained under Rukmini Devi Arundale at Kalakshetra in Bharatanatyam for six years. Indrani Rehman had obtained her training in Bharatanatyam, under her mother, followed by further training under Prof. U.S. Krishna Rao and Pandanallur Chokkalingam Pillai, before joining Odissi.

presenting to the world the “highly civilized, classical and sophisticated facet of Indian society”.

Unlike *devadasis*, the new dancing women were not “spiritual consorts” of Gods. They were the dancers of modern India, who articulated an equally professional outlook in terms of artistic excellence as much as their overtly stated, ritualised, spiritual self.

CHAPTER- III

Tradition and Transition

Two concurrent movements were ignited by the nationalists as part of the independence struggle to claim the position of Indian culture vis- a- vis that of the west; cleansing of the lowly practices and resurrection of the 'pure' upper caste practices. Hindu reformers, for whom the new criteria for civilization and culture was based on the western notions of a civilized society, intended to do away with the obscure and sexual, which was mainly associated with the lower caste, and with the popular and the 'frivolous', as a part of the revivalist movement (Gupta, 2001; 105). The respectable values of the middle and upper class emphasized on the domestic domain as the core of spirituality; the woman of the house was given the position of sole custodian of Hindu ethics and her image was portrayed against that of outspoken, self- indulgent, western- educated woman and brash folk woman (Sarkar, 2003; 35). This image of the woman became an essential marker of the Hindu cultural identity, which defined the image for the emerging dancing body; the auspicious, civilized body invoking, practising and representing all that is "pure" and "sanctified". The dancing body of the woman shifted from the popular space of *mela* or the ritual space of the temples to a more dignified and secular space, deriving from the colonial idea of civilized entertainment; the proscenium stage, best suited for the middle/ upper class woman who had by now taken on the role of the preserver and mediators of Indian culture. The new space was more regulated and constricted defining a different set of rules of performance. Even though it was secular, the space was still gendered and produced a gendered notion of the dancing body¹, enhanced by the manner in which the

¹ Women are almost universally accorded a lower status as compared with men. Are these perceived hierarchical differences between the two sexes due to natural (biological) differences or cultural (socially constructed) influences? Not just in Indian thought but also in western thought, women were restricted to the inner domain, being representative of nature, based on their capacities of reproduction and mothering, limiting their activities in public sphere (work, politics). Different feminist schools questioned the positioning of women's bodies in this context, whereas others called for a celebration of female body "which had been continually undermined and devalued through patriarchy's separation from and hatred of nature and by extension, women" (Thomas, 2003; 35).

dance imbibed and translated the spatial limits and boundaries through the body. Even though the space was profane, a distinction was clearly marked between the classical dance space and theatre space in modern India. Dance space was characterised by elements such as traditional floral decorations, presence of the idol on the stage and non-ticketed shows, even though it existed and competed in the same cultural arena as modern theatre, which had more free, politico- economically defined space. These facts break the notions of dance's direct inheritance to the religious practices and bring to notice its apparent secular objective of entertainment and representation of Indian cultural repository, making the disjuncture between the dancing bodies and the tradition, which was carefully concealed during the process of reconstruction in *Jayantika*, more visible.

Also, in case of the former, even though the body was that of an educated, city-bred, urban woman, the elements constituting the performance, clearly marked the difference in hers being an auspicious and refined body, as opposed to the inauspicious one. Thus the adornment of traditional bridal attire², an offshoot of a *mahari's* traditional costume, to mark its auspiciousness, and refining it according to the costume designed for and adopted by Bharatanatyam practitioners, became the norm. Anything other than this norm or beyond the codes laid down by the Gurus was strictly considered "impure" and became unacceptable. The dichotomous framework of pure/ impure and auspicious/ inauspicious thus marked the institutionalisation of dance as a discipline. If viewed under this axis of polarity, many concepts and ideologies defining Odissi become clearer, as seen in contrast to, say, contemporary Indian dance, which might use the classical form as its technique, but is more manoeuvrable, is not regulated in the way classical dance is, by a fixed repertoire, fixed space, does not adhere to a particular style of music and is not bound to follow specific codifications of costume.

Neeranjana, taking off from Butler's conceptualisation of construction of a gendered identity, suggests that body is not a passive object; it is rather a lived body, a situated

² Odissi costume includes a bright silk sari, worn as five-piece stitched costume, by majority of the dancers, along with heavy elaborate jewellery including a choker, a longer necklace, armlets, bracelets, a belt, anklets, bells, earrings, a piece placed on the bun, a *seenthi* (a piece placed on the hair and forehead) and *tahia* (the headgear).

subject, and a confluence of both materialist/ biological body and cultural practices. It is an active being which inhabits the gendered spaces and identities, such that the feminine ideals and sexual orders are mediated through the body. However, embodying the roles is not a pre- decided, deliberate effort on the part of the subject, instead, “the subject who enacts gender, in being grounded within a materiality of the body, is always already constructed” (Neeranjana, 2001; 123). Thus, the discourses live in and through the body. Also, the notions of “proper” feminine body mark boundaries for the “ideal” female body, as against the “improper” one. Therefore, a performative body can best be understood as an embodiment of recognized, accepted and learnt feminine ideals.

It is in this light that one needs to understand the developing Odissi body situated in the urban arena of the upper/ middle classes. “Space is not a mere site of action; in fact, the social is always constituted through the spatial, with the experience of the lived bodies forming the basis of a mediator across these spheres” states Neeranjana, (2001; 115).

The proscenium space is in itself a profane space, politico- economic realm of which was concealed under the ritualised guise³. It is also the female body and “auspiciousness” as embodied and represented by her body, which extends into the space. This can be better understood by looking at the positioning of the feminine body in this space.

“Training not only constructs a body but also helps to fashion an expressive self that in its relation with the body, performs the dance.” (Susan Leigh Foster, 2003; 241 Jane C. Desmond) It was after all a specifically feminine body, taking off from the poses depicted by temple sculptures and *gotipua* dance. *Tribhangi*, the position highlighting the curves with special emphasis on the isolation of the torso from the lower body, or controlled deflection of the hip⁴, becomes the basic posture and all movements are derived from, flow into or end in it. *Chauka* is a more rooted basic position of Odissi, which

³ No tickets are charged, till date, for a classical dance performance, the entry is by invitation, or it is an “open to all” event. *Diya* (the lamp) or a *rangoli* in the foyer, marks the change in space. It is no more the profane space of a proscenium, with the sole purpose of entertainment. All these elements aim at taking the performance space to another level, which is not profane and not yet sacred.

⁴ The deflection varies for different styles. In some styles it is the isolation of the torso which is emphasized whereas in others the jutting out of the hip is considered to be appropriate to achieve desired distancing from the central axis.

emphasizes a markedly strong difference from a fluid *tribhangi*, providing stability to the dance, since it has a centralized, symmetrical structure. However, it is often rendered with fluid torso movements, sideways, with the neck moving in *tiraschinna*⁵, lending an overall feminine appearance to the body by manoeuvring the body to attain more lyrical and flowing movement. With a gruelling training period, the technique gets embedded into the dancer's body such that it becomes a practiced natural for the dancer and the dancer is able to associate her expressive self with that acquired dancing body.

It was just the dance form and its presentation, which depicted the traditional, whereas the social body of the dancer was completely situated in the modern lifestyle, which required an absolute professional attitude towards one's chosen career and the stipulated power plays necessary in garnering a much-desired economic and social leverage. This was made achievable through one's class, political affiliations and manoeuvrability in international circuits. Observing the list of pioneering divas of Odissi dance who had already attained or inherited a position of repute and recognition, it is discernible that their familial background and influential status played a significant role in determining their position as stalwarts of Odissi and simultaneously created an identity and recognition for the dance form itself. This list would roughly constitute the following names:

Indrani Rehman- Daughter of Kathakali and Bharatanatyam dancer Ragini Devi⁶ (Esther Sherman) (1896- 1982). Indrani received training in dance from her mother, Prof. U.S. Krishna Rao and Pandanallur Chokkalingam Pillai. Mainly, inspired by her mother to learn Odissi, she was later encouraged by Dr. Charles Fabri to propagate the emerging form; "we both toured the State and accumulated a lot of experience in Odissi dance form. When we were back in Delhi, we resolved to get this dance its due place among the classical dance- forms of India. I have no hesitation to tell you that Dr. Fabri's contribution in popularising this dance form was very big indeed" (Misra, 1992; 10)

⁵ *Griva Bheda* (neck movements) as prescribed by the *Natyasastra* are; *sundari*, *tiraschinna*, *parivartita*, *pratampita*. When the chin leads the movement of the head, towards left or right, and the head is tilted in the opposite direction, it is called *tiraschinna*.

⁶ "I found myself cast in the role of a pioneer with a mission to revive the classical dance in India"; Ragini Devi (Misra, 1992; 3).

(emphasis added). She was also crowned as Miss. India for the year 1952. After she had learnt a few Odissi items from Guru Deba Prasad Das, she started including them in her performances from 1957 onwards⁷. If her mother, Ragini Devi played a pioneering role in taking Kathakali and Bharatanatyam to places, it was Indrani who walked the same steps, thirty years later, by taking Kuchipudi and Odissi to the international stage.

Sonal Mansingh- Described as “the most persuasive ambassador for Indian dance” (Misra, 1992; 117). She was born into an influential family. Her grandfather was one of the early governors of free India, and she was introduced to dance by her mother, who was a keen student of music. Some of the great contemporary artists of the time were frequent guests at their home. Her tryst with dance began with Manipuri, then Bharatanatyam under Prof. U. S. Krishna Rao and his dancer- wife Chandrabhaga Devi. She presented her Bharatanatyam *arengatram* in Bangalore in 1961, when she was just 17years old. The entire cabinet, dance teachers, royalty and artists bore witness to the recital. She learnt music too and later received training in Kuchipudi from Guru Vempati Chinna Satyam but never included it in her performances⁸. She learnt Odissi on her father- in- law’s insistence, Dr. Mayadhar Man Singh, under his friend Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra from 1964 onwards. From 1968 onwards, she was representing the country, on all official tours with people of high profile, such as Damayanti Joshi, Begum Akhtar and Ram Narayan along with the then Prime Minister of the country, Smt. Indira Gandhi⁹. She chose a career in dance over a the role of a diplomat’s. She continued her Odissi training under Guru Mayadhar Raut, whence Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, being a good friend of the Mansingh family, disowned her.

Sanjukta Panigrahi; She hailed from an orthodox Brahmin Oriya family. Her mother had gained an appreciation of art from her own family who were deeply interested in the Chhau dances. She was trained under Guru Keluchran Mahapatra, joined Kalakshetra at

⁷ The brochure of her performance in Lucknow, in 1965, mentions; “she has danced in all the five continents as a soloist, winning laurels for her country.” (Misra, 1992; 10)

⁸ “ Kuchipudi is not religion- based like Bharatanatyam or Odissi, the other two styles that I perform. It is more secular and more directed towards popular entertainment. It is better suited for dance- dramas” *Sonal Mansingh* (Misra, 1992; 119).

⁹ An entourage organized by I.C. C. R to accompany the Prime Minister was sent and then later in 1970 she was sent to Japan by the Government of India. (Misra, 1992; 120)

the age of eight and thereafter learnt Kathak, for some duration under Guru Hazarilal (placed in Bombay) on a scholarship provided by the Government of Orissa. She was giving Bharatanatyam performances while continuing with her training in Odissi under Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra. On the insistence of Dr. Charles Fabri, she too concentrated her energies on the growth of Odissi.

Kiran Segal: Kiran Segal is a leading exponent of Odissi dance. She was initiated in dance by her mother Zohra Segal. She was first groomed as a Bharatanatyam dancer by various Gurus, namely, Sadashiv Shetty, Sadashiv Aiyer, Naana Kasar and K.J. Govindarajan. Subsequently she received training in Odissi under Guru Mayadhar Raut.

Madhavi Mudgal: She was born into a family of artists. She received her initial training in Kathak and Bharatanatyam, at Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, one of the pioneering arts institutes in Delhi, which was set up by her father in 1939. She continued to perform Kathak for a while and then completely engaged herself in the practice of Odissi dance, initiated into the form by Guru Hare Krishna Behra and further trained under Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra.

Sharon Lowen: Originally, hailing from U.S.A., she was trained by Minati Ray in Manipuri dance. She received further training under Guru Singhajit Singh, Ranjini Maibi and Thangjam Chaoba Singh, from 1973- 75. Then on she came under Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra and started with her training in Odissi. She also learnt Chhau and became the first woman dancer to perform it. Prior to her Indian sojourn, she had acquired Bachelors and Masters degrees in Humanities, Fine Arts, Asian Studies and Dance from the University of Michigan and came as a Fulbright Scholar to continue her studies in performance. She continues to teach dance in India.

Visibly, the dance form came to be practised mainly by urban middle/ upper class women, many of who were already practitioners of other classical forms, and known for that. If not formerly trained, they were sent specifically to acquire training in Bharatanatyam or Kathak, after a basic training in Odissi, which wasn't yet formalized, to

come back and apply a similar mechanism to its structure and became the new authors of the Odissi body. These are the women who had strong political affiliations or had already made their mark as artists.

3.1 Divas¹⁰: The Young Cultural Ambassadors

Given such familial backgrounds, one needs to draw an overview of the festivals these young divas were performing at, the sponsors and the patrons for such high-profiled programs. They were performing for domestic cultural festivals, predominantly for the youth and frequently sent on government-sponsored tours, accompanying politicians and official entourage of the state, to an international diplomatic sphere, aimed to build the image of the nation. One needs to understand the state of the nation, which had recently gained independence and was striving to establish as a self-sustaining, civilized and cultured nation. In this sense, one needs to look at the role played by the classical dancers, as against the folk dancers who were limited to domestic “*lok utsav*” kind of spaces or republic day parades, to showcase India’s cultural diversity. The former, on the other hand, catering to a different audience, were often sent for international congregations or for welcoming foreign dignitaries in the state-sponsored festivals¹¹. It was these young women, educated in the western system, yet well-versed in Indian culture, who actively took on the role of cultural ambassadors¹². The young dancers were not just performing but, also, holding demonstrations and teaching Odissi outside Orissa and abroad, with the support of the government, they were propagated and recognized as the icons of the emerging nation, living in modern times, yet embedded with traditional practices and Indian value system, complying with and propagating Nehruvian idea of a modern India.

¹⁰ “**Diva** [Italian from Latin= goddess.] A distinguished female (esp. operatic) singer, a prima donna”
“**Prima Donna** [Italian formed as Prima + Donna] Orig., a person of high standing in a particular field of activity. Now chiefly, a temperamentally self-important person.” (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles, Fifth Edition, Volume 1 A-M, Volume 2 N-Z, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002)

¹¹ Refer to Sangeet Natak Akademi journals and annuals for the performances in the formative years, exclusively organized for international VIP’s or for ‘festival of India’ series in international arenas.

¹² Indrani was the first to be titled as the “cultural ambassador of India”, likes of Sanjukta Panigrahi and Sonal Mansingh, followed suit (source: <http://www.hinduismtoday.com/archives/1999/7/1999-7-16.shtml>)

Around this time, Gurus were not performing for theatre groups any more. They were completely engaged with expanding the Odissi repertoire and teaching the non-hereditary group of urban non- Oriya women. To popularise the dance form within the state, they were also simultaneously composing a lot of group dances and dance dramas, based on mythological stories, taken from *Jatra* themes. They had started teaching local students after an institutional space was available to them by the state or by local, wealthy, art lovers. As a result they had ceased to perform, they were mostly accompanying their students to international platforms and important festive spaces within the country, as a Guru, guide and percussionist. It was much later, with much coaxing on the part of their students that they came back to the stage as a full- fledged performer¹³. It is often acknowledged that the Gurus later became doyens through the success of their pupils, as also exemplified by Sanjukta Panigrahi and Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra and Indrani Rehman and Guru Debaprasad Das and thus became the face of new India.

The dance maketh the dancer or is it vice- versa?

The dance their bodies represented, came from the “ancient east; the land of maharajas and elephants.” They represented not just any other dancing body but an age-old civilization, a philosophy, a value system. However, the role of this oriental body was not merely restricted to proliferation of its traditions, but also to orchestrate interactions and discourses regarding the same. The female dancers were chosen over the male body of the Gurus, who did not have influential background, lacked comprehensiveness and communicative skills in the foreign language and were not compatible with the nationalist image of India, which revered itself in the new feminine *avataar* of

¹³ “It was here in Gandharava Mahavidyalaya when he was giving a workshop, he was teaching us some *ashtapadi*. Even his teaching conveyed an in- depth study of the subject. I used to tell him that you have to perform this *ashtapadi*, he said “no, I have left it (stage performance) now”. I told him “you must do it and we have a stage right here”, and that’ s when he performed after a very long time. A: When was this? Madhavi: 1970 or ’73, or earlier. I am not really good with dates. That’ s when he performed for the first time and then at Kamani, a full fledged one night of performance, and then slowly of course all over the world” (conversation with Madhavi Mudgal on Kolu Babu coming back to the stage, February, 2008).

“*Bharatmata*”¹⁴. Also, of course it was the dancers who organized these tours and the Gurus accompanied them as percussionists. The notion of the feminine body cannot be rooted out; it was the female dancers who completely took on the multicultural, global stage, barring a few such as Uday Shankar, Ram Gopal and Guru Gopinath; for this reason it was female dancers who became the cultural representatives of the nation, as against male gurus. It was through their name and fame that a new dance form was hailed and received a strong appreciation from local and international audiences, and was immediately conferred with the “classical” title¹⁵.

Undoubtedly, it raises a crucial question; whether it is the dancer, which maketh the dance, or is it the dance that maketh the dancer?

Gurus, since the heydays occupied the position of revivalists, the founders of the form. The first generation dancers were perceived as subordinates, hardly ever identified as those contributing equally to the creation of the dance form. Whereas the dancers became the prima donnas, their image was propagated as the face of young, exuberant nation, the codes and rules were still formulated by the Gurus, confining the role of the dancers to that of mere carriers of an ancient legacy. So much so, that they were not even recognized as “Gurus”. It is very rarely that an Odissi dancer/ teacher would use “Guru” as a prefix to her name, even after devoting a substantial part of her life to dance, whereas the male dancers started using “Guru” as a prefix much earlier in their careers or were granted the same from their Gurus¹⁶.

¹⁴ The country’s image was eulogized in the form of a Goddess, which started as a movement in 19th c. and was adopted in shaping nationalist image through cultural practices; visual, literary and performance, post independence (Sangari, Vaid, 2006), (Sarkar, 2001).

¹⁵ Ironically, it was with the first Sangeet Natak Akademi award which was conferred upon Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, (instead of a senior artist like Guru Pankaj Charan Das, who was former’s Guru, nor even to Guru Deba Prasad Das who had been involved in popularising Odissi across the globe) that Odissi was finally accepted as a “classical” form.

¹⁶ Minati Mishra, one of the senior- most Odissi dancers, also served as the Principal of Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya, where Guru Deba Prasad Das and Guru Pankaj Charan Das were employed as teachers under her, she was not allowed to use the title (in conversation with Dinanath Pathy, Pathy, 2006; 82) .

Perhaps because at the time, when she headed the institute Gurus were still present and teaching. The rules of the form were strictly bound by them. However, it is only now that dancer- teachers like Aruna Mohanty, Sujata Mohapatra, Sujata Mishra, Sangeeta Dash, Bijayani Satpathy are recognized as Gurus by their students, and have worked to attain this position, and run their own institutes to propagate Odissi language, but yet not conferred the use of the prefix Guru. xxx

To ponder further on this subject, two major interventions in the history of Odissi need to be looked at. Firstly, Indrani Rehman's entry into an international beauty contest, as the first Miss. India, in the year 1952 and secondly, Sanjukta Panigrahi's "experimental explorations" at Odin Teatret, from 1980- 1996, and the interventions into the form thereafter.

Indrani Rehman was chosen as the first Miss. India, by Indian press, to participate in the first ever Miss. Universe pageant in the year 1952. Her photographs in classical dance poses adorned the cover page of all major dailies of India, on this event (D' Souza, 1999). She not only represented a pristine beauty, well mannered in western etiquettes under her mother's guidance, with an unmatched stage presence, but also a body which represented the most ancient classical dance form of India- Odissi. A woman, who moved around in the most elite and affluent circles of the country, she was already an established personality before she embarked on the path of learning and popularising Odissi dance. She represented the image of an ideal Indian woman entrenched in traditional systems, with a modern outlook, who carved a niche for herself in the social and political circles of the country, through her art. It is interesting to note why an Odissi practitioner was selected as Miss. India. It is the dance form that claims to portray femininity in its most beautiful, pure and divine form and its direct inheritance from temple sculptures add to its mystique. The Odissi body was thoughtfully carved to depict the cultural values and codes valorised by the upper caste. Why a dancer practising any other dance form was not chosen, is the question that arises here. Firstly, Indrani's being the most prominent name in the influential circuits, secondly Odissi body offered much more agile and curvilinear postures, as opposed to Bharatanatyam's taut and upright structure, which made Odissi's imagery more appealing for the specific requirement of such a beauty pageant, can be speculated as few reasons for her acquiring the title, inspite of the fact

Sanjukta Panigrahi , in an interview with Susheela Mishra; "The young men are better teachers because they are also trained in *Pakhavaj*- playing." (Misra, 1992; 133- 134). Young male dancers were referred to as gurus much earlier by their teachers; the Gurus, for obvious reasons of indicating the carriers of lineage of their *parampara*. Also, it is Ratikant Mohapatra, head of Srjan (Guru Keluchara Mhapatra Dance Institute) who is referred to as a Guru, and not so for Sujata Mohapatra, who is actively engaged in performances and teaching at the institute.

that she was already married and was not legally legible for the title. Also, Odissi had just “arrived” around this time; a newly discovered, fresh imagery of dance, not only attracted rave reviews but also provided a much wider scope for manoeuvrability and usage for the body dancing it. It was a mutual course where not just the dancer but also the dance form stands to benefit from those practicing it. It was Indrani’s crowning as Miss. India, and later her representing the country at an international platform, which brought the much needed recognition to the dance form and to the Gurus.

Sanjukta Panigrahi’s venture at Odin Teatret¹⁷ began in 1980, after her first meeting with Eugenio Barba in 1977. Over the time, she collaborated with him and other artists on various projects. With an objective of understanding his own tradition, by placing it in confrontation with that of the others’, Eugenio placed together, artists with different cultural backgrounds with the purpose of carrying out a transcultural analysis of performance. At Odin, Sanjukta played the role of a primary dancer from Asia for more than a decade and even served as a member of its pedagogical committee. She collaborated with Barba and other artists from around the world for various projects, from 1980 to 1996 before her demise in 1997. She even directed western actors for “**Shakuntala among the Olive Trees**” (1993) that involved, Opera singers, Odin actors, Odissi dancers, musicians and performers from different cultures and styles, with the central idea being rediscovery of a collaboration, where “Barba was to divulge into the literary classic (Kalidas’s *Shakuntalam*), it was somewhat removed from his interests as dramaturg-director”. With the purpose of finding different points of encounter between eastern and western forms, what emerged were non- definitive performative forms by using two parallel approaches to create this production (Scheno, 1996; 93). The presence of a "collective mind" comprising of some thirty scholars and directors who collaborated

¹⁷ “The Odin Teatret, which continues to produce new and exciting works, was originally formed in Oslo, Norway, in 1964. In 1966 the company moved to Holstebro, a small town near the west coast of Denmark, where it has been based ever since. In its 23-year history the company has mounted productions ranging from intimate studio pieces, for audiences as small as sixty or less, to huge street spectacles encapsulating whole villages at a time. The Odin has traveled extensively in Europe, South America, and Asia. It has established a major theatre center in Holstebro, where it publishes books, makes and rents films, and mounts workshops in collaboration with artists such as Jerzy Grotowski, Dario Fo, and Jean- Louis Barrault; and it is the only state-supported pedagogical institute devoted to theatre research in Western Europe.” (Watson, 1988; 49)

in Barba's work and the idea, above all, was of a journey in various stages. This gives an overview of the work Sanjukta was engaged in, at the Odin, where she used Odissi as her technical base but digressed to explore it in different contexts- work demonstrations at ISTA, for theoretical research, working through the Odissi body in the absence of a narrative, working and evolving physical ideograms and elemental compositions through improvisations, engaging with the form at the level of minimal textual support and collaborating with other bodies trained in diverse techniques, not at all acquainted with the Odissi grammar. Her body was placed in such experimental sites, which no other Odissi body had ventured into, till then.

One needs to question overruling the possibility of using other Indian traditional dance form, in place of Odissi.¹⁸ Given the presence of Odissi at Odin Teatret, how does the performing body and its structure confront such encounters between eastern and western forms? How did Sanjukta Panigrahi, an Oriya woman, engaged in the practice of dance since childhood, trained under the most renowned Guru of Odissi dance, fill up that space? What kind of interjections, did this endeavor, mark on the trajectory of Odissi?

Barba was drawing parallels between different eastern performative traditions, observing the division of the body, the shift in the centre of gravity and attainment of the equilibrium in the asymmetrical body. He drew analysis of the principles working in Noh, Buyo, Odissi, Balinese dance, Kathakali along with few forms from the west. However, in most of his collaborative projects, namely, Faust, Shakuntala, Jungle Book etc. it was Katsuko Azuma, Japanese Buyo dancer, along with Sanjukta Panigrahi, trained in Indian Odissi, who represented the dance forms of the "Oriental East". The two bodies used different methods of applying opposing forces and tension generating dynamics, in the body.

By this time Odissi had established itself into a solo based performance, whereas till the 1960s- 70s, as was the trend, the dancers used to present individual items from several

¹⁸ Barba did invite some of the most prominent names of Kathakali, but only for a few engagements, his main study and experimentations dealt with Indian Odissi and Japanese Buyo from the East.

forms in a single classical recital¹⁹. It was with Sanjukta Panigrahi that Odissi came to be presented and popularised as a full- fledged solo performance. Secondly, Odissi carried the notion of a typical Oriental dance form, belonging to the ancient temple walls, adding to its “mystique”. The principle of opposing forces between upper and lower body, took a very distinct shape in Odissi’s *tribhangi*, missing from Bharatanatyam’s *araimandi* and Kathakali’s *asana*.

Undoubtedly, Odissi body is deeply entrenched in a traditionalist system, Barba keen on situating it in a different context altogether, like that of an ‘alien’ script; “Faust”, opposite a Japanese Buyo dancer, to observe the movement negotiations between the two. It gradually became a study of differentiating energy principles in Oriental forms. Odissi was a form which was available for experimentation, unlike other classical dances which had more stern boundaries and history, because it had already been almost fifty years since their reconstruction.

As noted by Pavis, in his review of Barba’s “Faust”;

“The function of this adaptation is to erode codified theatrical or choreographic forms that are too specifically honed to single cultures and performance traditions, the better to adapt to the audience’s universalizing demands. Thus, the human and dramatic situation becomes immediately comprehensible, without the mediation of the artistic codes of specific theatrical forms.” (Pavis, 1989; 48)

The involvement of the primary Odissi danseuse, along with her Guru, lent legitimacy to the project. For Barba it was Odissi in its most authentic form, Sanjukta’s dancing body provided a final stamp of validity, with the approval of her Guru. One can only speculate the reaction of other Gurus, or of Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, on such experiments being done in the strictly codified domestic cultural spaces.

¹⁹ “In 1960s and 1970s when Odissi had just come about, 60s in fact was just the beginning. Indrani Rehman used to present one Kuchipudi item, one Bharatanatyam, one Odissi and one Mohiniattam. That kind of trend was there, Yamini Krishnamurthy followed, then Sanjukta Panigrahi and Sonal Mansingh bought Odissi as a full- fledged, full- length evening recital. Priyambada Mohanty was of course the first one to present it. That was the beginning” (In conversation with Madhavi Mudgal, February, 2008). Also refer to the interview with Kiran Segal, Chapter- I.

Barba intended to decodify the original structures and view their interactions when placed in western thematics. The Odissi body, along with Buyo, provided an ideal tool to substantiate his performative renditions of eastern structures on western mis-en-scene²⁰.

However one needs to note that such experiments received the consent of the Gurus, only in the international "experimental" space, which was not regulated by traditional strictures, and hence did not pose a threat either to the sanctity of the form, or to the dancing body²¹. The ideologies of the *parampara* exercised a stronghold on the

²⁰ "His Faust returns finally to its point of departure: a Western vision conveyed by Eastern traditions reworked by a Western director ending up with a sketch which bears all the distinguishing features of Western mis-en-scene. This unification is realized also by the neutralization of one theatrical and cultural tradition by another, by the discovery of transcultural values, by "the constant factor in cultural variation"... The neutralization is also achieved by frequent parodies of one codification by another-for example, when Azuma (Faust) drunkenly attempts *mudras* imitating Panigrahi (Mephisto). The parody of one form by another implies the ability to imitate, but above all to quote, rewrite, in short, to appropriate. This parody can easily become metatextual, since it implies a reflection on forms and the means of surpassing them."
(Pavis, 52- 53 *ibid*)

²¹ Sanjukta Panigrahi, with her Guru, Kelucharan Mohapatra in an interview with Schechner;

SCHECHNER: You've seen many forms that are not Indian-Japanese, Chinese, Western and, Guruji [term of respect for Kelucharan Mahapatra, Panigrahi's teacher and co-performer], I know that you acted in Western style Indian theatre. What effect, if any, did those contacts have on your work?

MOHAPATRA [translated from Oriya by Sanjukta Panigrahi]: When I see other forms, I try to find out what is similar to ours. A few positions in Western ballet and in Indonesian dance, for example, resemble our dancing. Yesterday, when I saw the Japanese dance [buyo] I felt it was devotional, with items based on mythological or historical themes, like ours. When I first saw Chinese opera I felt it was based only on acrobatics. But after yesterday's dancing [by Pei Yan Ling, a woman specializing in female warrior roles] I know that it too has stories and acting, gestures and dance. Do any of these affect me? **I have so many years in my own tradition, I am so firm in it, that it is very difficult to conceive that any other form would affect me.**

SCHECHNER: And what about for you, Sanjukta?

S. PANIGRAHI: As with Guruji, so with me. Odissi has gone so much inside me that I see other forms and appreciate-"this is good," "this is beautiful," but when I come back to Orissa I cannot think about anything else except my own form. Looking at something else for one or two hours will not change any of my ideas.

SCHECHNER: But what do you think about two things that happened here at ISTA [International School of Theatre Anthropology Congress]: On the first day, you improvised with other people dancing other forms, actually responding to them immediately, on the spot; and, yesterday, you were following Eugenio's [Barba] directions. This wasn't traditional odissi dancing. Did you enjoy that? Was it useful? S.

PANIGRAHI: I'll tell you a very important thing now. The first times I came to ISTA, we had real fights. Eugenio and I. He would say, "Would you please do this or that," something that was not in my tradition. I would not do it. I used to get upset he used to get upset. Literally, I used to cry. Then afterwards, I thought to myself, "What is wrong with experimenting? Experimentation shouldn't affect me. Maybe by experimenting something new may come out. So let me try. And if some moment comes out within my form which may not have occurred to me all these years, let me think about it." Then slowly I started

dancers, and “safeguarded the form against such threats.” Consequently, such works, or even their later performances, did not find much espousal in the domestic sphere, of teaching, practicing and performance, which was more regulated and constricted in its functioning.

It is then essential to look at what was designated as the **canonized Odissi body**; imbibed, endorsed and disseminated by the first generation dancers. Who were the dancers who stuck to the canon? What was the leeway available within the canon, which could be explored and experimented with, under the consent of the Gurus? Who were the dancers delving into such explorations? In what ways did they try to expand the canon? What were the interactions with the Guru during such an experimental course? What lead dancers to frequently change their Gurus, sometimes even shifting from one style of Odissi to another? How does the technique, then become over-binding on the dancing body, ultimately leading to “exploding of the canon,” if at all, in the case of Odissi?

Pathy identifies this as a tension between the “representation” and the “canon”, between the two lies the “politics of interpretation” which is in actuality “politics of interpreters” (Pathy, 2007; 290). The constant effort is to be identified as belonging to the structure, to

working with him. And now I know him well, I don't get annoyed or angry with him. SCHECHNER: Has anything ever come out that surprised you and that you used?

S. PANIGRAHI: Not any movement. But at the ISTA in Bonn [1980] Eugenio talked about tension and the spine. I started training with Guruji when I was only four years old. At that age I couldn't have asked him, “Should the spine be this way, should the tension be this way?” What Guruji did, I imitated. In our tradition we do without asking. But after the ISTA at Bonn, I tried to realize in each posture where the correct tension should be and what the correct position was. All that became clearer to me. SCHECHNER: What was your reaction, Guruji, to Sanjukta experimenting?

MAHAPATRA [speaking in English]: So many things, so many ideas from experiments. New ideas come in, new points. Some new idea comes in; I introduce it into my Odissi dance. [In Oriya, translated] I am a director. I go around the world and I see many things. Many things come into my mind. I am always experimenting, all the time. While experimenting I may do correct things, I may do wrong things, but when I do something that satisfies me, then I present it. But how you present it finally, that is different. In every age, every artist carries the tradition further. So every artist has the right to create but within the basic technical framework, according to his or her own cultural traditions.

SCHECHNER: But how does Guruji feel about what you did with Eugenio yesterday, Sanjukta?

S. PANIGRAHI: It's all right as an experiment, but if I do this on the stage before an ordinary public, he'll kill me.

(Schechner, Zarilli, 1988; 130- 132)

the “authentic” mould and yet confront a constant need to go beyond the prescribed limitations and to explore something new.

He sees the reason for this tension in a multicultural society, which influences and changes the expectations that the spectators have from a dance performance. Such cultural transformations lead to “integration” and “incorporation”, resulting in cultural struggles over literary canon and curriculum, which “causes stress over the defining and control of legal pedagogy.”(ibid, 291)

An Oriya dancer, Sanjukta Panigrahi was herself breaking bonds and performing on modern poetry, she was also dancing to *Bengali*, *Maithili* and songs in *Braj boli*. Her experimentations at ISTA for the “Theatrum Mundi” project, called for an interaction with other dance and theatre forms. “In such performances the choreograph is abstract and the actions are expressive. Sanjukta, after performing and participating in these workshops, must have felt the need to incorporate new elements in the realm of Odissi to make the dance form really international, multi- lingual and multi- cultural” (ibid; 297).

3.2 Expanding the Canon

Sonal Mansingh, one of the pioneers in establishing Odissi as a classical dance form, has danced to folk songs, modern poems, *bhajans* composed by Mirabai, Tulsidas and Surdas, which are non- Oriya songs. She holds the belief that dancer being an individual, living in a society. is affected by it and responds to it, “she does not exist in a vacuum. Society’ s functioning has an impact on all individuals, especially artists. If an art form does not reflect the existing milieu, it stagnates” (Kumar, 2005; 87). She was delving into Indian philosophy and found relevant subjects in myths, legends, stories, *puranas* and *sastras*, in relation with contemporary issues. She has made an attempt to comment on these through her various choreographic productions such as *Manavta*, *Mukti*, *Samanavaya*, *Mera Bharat* and so on. She sees contemporary as a continuum of ancient or traditional, not in opposition to it (ibid; 89). According to her, “in Indian tradition, especially in the aspect of arts, there was never a definition of “*shuddhata*” (purity). It is

neither mentioned by Bharata in the *Natyasastra*, or by Abhinavgupta and Nandikeshvar. The sound of the word “*parampara*” (loosely translated into “tradition”) itself denotes that it keeps going on and on. When something goes on continuously, it will go through certain transformations. It will change. When a stone rolls down, it changes its shape. A river affects and changes the shape of many stones and pebbles flowing along with it, because it flows endlessly. Therefore, it is not proper to assert that some thing would remain as it was at the time of its birth. Hence, it is not right to talk about this concept called “purity” (*toh yah shuddhata ki baat.karna bekar hai*); Sonal Mansingh (Mishra, 2007; 9).

The most convenient component to experiment with was the language. The first generation dancers started incorporating songs, devotional and patriotic, in their ventures, from non- Oriya sources. Given his market- friendly approach to dance, Guru Kelucharan Mohaptra was also delving into non- Oriya lyrics for dance- dramas and ballets. However, the traditional repertoire still followed the codes by sticking only to Sanskrit and Oriya poetry. There are some dancers who have tried to present a modern story, a historical event or respond to an immediate socially relevant cause, through dance, usually resulting in a mere narrative description of the theme, lacking in substance by relying on the straitjacketed method of presentation.

To throw some light on what is imbibed as “classical” and the explorations which are preferred and accepted by the dancers, working under the authority of the Gurus, with a view to gain an understanding of how the compositions or rather diversions (if they can be termed so) have evolved over the time from the conceived repertoire, here is an excerpt from an interview with Madhavi Mudgal²²;

A: How popular were the group dances in Odissi when you entered the scene as a solo dancer?

Madhavi: No, at that time there were no group dances being performed in Odissi.

²² Interviewed personally, for the research work, by the research student, interview was conducted at Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, New Delhi, February 2008.

A: What about dance- dramas?

Madhavi: There were a lot of dance- dramas being done in Orissa.

A: When did group dances become the trend?

*Madhavi: Late 1980 and, early 1990s, because a lot of young set of Gurus taught and then... This is my experience, when I teach, soloists may be one in thousand people, 99% of the time there is this person who will go to another field after learning for ten years, after coming at that stage. So you can imagine, for being a soloist you need competence, training, hard work but some other God gift thing (is also needed). There are a lot of other dancers who are very competent and doing a lot of good work. **Being a student of architecture, I thought one could play so much with space. I don't think I have great knowledge of music but my family background helped me gain that base. You see, nowadays people are learning to make new things after learning (dance) for 5- 10 years. You have to know your roots to branch out, without the roots (it is not possible), lots of experiments are being done. I have nothing against them, but unless you are rooted, unless you have the experience, branching out would be meaningless.***

A: And what would it require to build that "rootedness"?

*Madhavi: A lot of training, first thing is to understand the form. It doesn't come by learning the form for eight years, a background of literature (is essential). **I first of all don't believe in social messages through classical dance, see newspapers are a better form of communication. Its not that it cannot be done, of course it can be. But there is so much, so much more that one can do with the roots.***

A: If you are performing Odissi in Chennai or in Delhi, is it the norm to stick to Oriya literature?

Madhavi: No, we (also) use Sanskrit, which is very much a part of all dance forms.

A: Can one experiment with the literature region- wise?

Madhavi: Yes, that kind of work can be done, surely, but when you are starting out the goal should be to stick to the tradition. Tradition is the main base all the time, when you are starting afresh. Tradition otherwise would be dead. If you just see Odissi over the last fifty years, from my own experience, it has changed; change is necessary. But you cannot clear off raga and taal. If you are doing that then you are done! Something else is fine. Tampering with the basic foundation, in my style, you cannot, not (even) think of doing it.

A: How was Odissi perceived at that time against Bharatanatyam and other dance forms? Odissi developed its own language over the time, but then there were Bharatanatyam practitioners and Gurus who were claiming that Odissi is just a regional variant of Bharatanatyam.

A: How were Odissi Gurus responding to that?

Madhavi: I think everybody was doing his or her work. They were just more political people who would write about it. This is just not of any concern. I don't think we should make a big deal out of it. But, yes it was a new form and it was the revival period, Bharatanatyam came in the 1930s and Odissi came in the late 1950s and early '60s, you should give it some time (suggesting that Bharatanatyam had the time to establish itself, whereas it was too soon for Odissi to be recognized as one, so doubts and arguments were bound to be raised at that stage).

A: Now, we have a new form from Bengal called Gaudiya Nritya coming up, to attain the status of classical, what do you have to say about that?

Madhavi: Just as Odissi came up, if it has the content, then surely. For that matter, look at the cultural practices in Rajasthan, they are not like Kathak. There are different forms. But it is difficult (to claim their classicism), you have to have some movements and...you have to have one creative mind that can mould and have so many followers.

A: How do you see the form evolving all this while; the stage presentation, the music, the thematics? What you used to learn under Guruji, and now, when you teach and your students perform, how has the form evolved?

Madhavi; That's exactly what I was saying, over the last fifty years, it began as one aspect of a full evening and slowly Sonalji took it up as one whole repertoire. And that time Ashtapadis were performed more than Oriya songs, Pallavis were there, as were different Mangalacharans, another aspect of the time was what was really happening to the Gurus, at least it was so with Guruji (Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra), they were trying to give it a very classical mould. And now they are trying to seek folk elements. If you saw Gotipua at that time, and yes, every form of that time is a genius, but by that time Gotipua had already sort of degraded and not what it was in 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Now, however a Gotipua performance is almost like Odissi, and some styles of Odissi are almost like Gotipua. They are seeking roots in folk, at that time they were more classical. Now, they are trying to find more regional roots.

A: Why is that so?

Madhavi: May be, dance in Orissa, of course Sanjukta was Oriya, Sonal ji was Oriya bahu, Kumkum and all of them .In Orissa, however, dance was not so popular; there were Odissi festivals outside, Odissi performances outside the state. Now, in the last 5 years, things have changed and happening. I am very happy about that. Now since the last one or two years, a lot of festivals have come up. In 1985, I organized this festival (referring to Angahar festival), after that, I said, "but Odissi festival should happen in Orissa". Dancers from all over the country should go there and get their recognition.

A: So, Orissa as a cultural hub for Odissi, grew much later?

Madhavi: In my opinion I think it came about later. Dance- dramas were very popular. A lot of things were happening there. A lot of interest in Orissa towards the arts was there, but not many Oriya girls would take it up as a profession.

A: So, the majority of the students who were coming to Guruji for training were outsiders?

Madhavi: Those who became known, yes. But, I am sorry; Sanjukta ji was a real stalwart who truly established the form.

A: And why is there a need to go back to the folk forms?

Madhavi: No, the roots are in regional flavour... that's fine. A classical form, you cannot perfect, for me, until you perfect the raga and taal. Without these no classical element would be there.

A: How were the Gurus responding to it?

Madhavi: I don't think they pursue it like that. Everybody does different (things). You may or may not like one person. I am happy that everywhere some search, some research, something is happening. It's a fact that we are doing many more Oriya songs than ever before. It is adding to the repertoire. Unlike Bharatanatyam, where there was so much music composed only for dance; Odissi lacked that. There were beautiful Oriya songs, that are there, but padams, varnams, javalis, tillanas, we don't have them. We have to think of a pallavi right from the beginning. We have to compose every little thing. It's a scary task.

A: What's the process followed when you make group compositions?

Madhavi: Music for me is very important. I don't know if it's a positive point or negative point, but for me without music, nothing comes in dance. At least (not in) Indian dance, in western dance yes (its work- able). Even Indian contemporary (dance) can be done without music, or they just place the music later, they are not even concerned what the music is. I would die. I can't dance like that. I have to feel the music, to dance. A lot of time, music shows me the path for choreography.

It is necessary to gain proficiency over the basics of the dance form, to then delve into it and develop one's own interpretation of the form, to add to its growth and not to leave it as a static object. There is always an unrelenting stress on tradition; everything has to be done with tradition at its base and tradition is understood as what was taught by the Gurus. With such well- drawn outlines, the most one can achieve is a change in

presentation and that's where most of the young Gurus seek to or rather dare to expand the form²³. Depending on one's location and regionality, references for newer elements are sought in various resources; in folk or regional by those based in Orissa or Oriyas and non- Oriya dancers based in Delhi, and modern/ contemporary dance technique by the ones probably based in the west. Although one cannot see it as a plausible differentiation, but mostly the divergences follow such lines. The latter might include those based in Indian cosmopolitan cities, responding to the demands of a multicultural society. What then becomes an area of tension is that which "experiments" are accepted as the expansion of the canon and receive the Gurus' consent and what evolutions are disparaged as "anti- shastric" which gets determined by the "politics of interpretation and interpreters".

By mid- 1980s, the dancers had begun to feel the need to expand and explore the form beyond the canon²⁴. The stronghold of "tradition" curtailed most of them from indulging

²³ Conversation with Ratikant Mahapatra on how has the style and its teaching evolved; "What we do today is a result of a highly refined technique. But today my work is based on my thinking, my ideas. Gururiji is not present any more, but the repertory, which he has left with us; we follow that only by innovating it, bringing newer elements into it. Commonly, what is followed is a *mangalacharan*, a *battu*, a *pallavi*, but when we do it, we can do our choreographic composition "Allah" in place of a *mangalacharan*. Following the definition as prescribed by Gururiji, if we do it according to our own ideas, it won't be wrong. Within the same discipline, keeping to the same technique and grammar, in a common *mangalacharan*; *bhoomi pranam*, *ganesh vandana*, *pranam* to the audience is done. "Allah" has never been portrayed in Odissi before, only we have done it. Fifty years, 30- 40 years, down the line, people will talk about this composition, it will go down in history. We innovate and try to do something new everyday, such as we have done in *Bhaj Govindam*, we have done another production called "Aum." The former is done by playing mainly with stage designing, geometrical designing and technique, because it is a Sanskrit composition, incomprehensible for a common man, and also for us. We had to seek help of a Sanskrit pundit to understand its meaning. We have tried to translate its meaning, the centrality of time in our life, the message of "Geeta" through technical aid and movements' (in an interview with the research student, at *Srjan*, Bhubaneswar, October, 2007).xxx

Conversation with Gajendra Panda (disciple of Guru Deba Prasad Das); "I have done a choreographic production called "Interfacing" in which we show the evolution of Odissi dance, for the first time it is shown how has it evolved from *adivasi* (tribal) dances. I have done ten projects of the same sort, such as "*Jai Jai Padmavati*" and more. After exhausting with the items you have, you will think of doing something new. Keeping traditional practise as the base, we need to take choreography at the higher level, by working on the presentation. Odissi is a classical dance, it is only when shastric codes and *parampara* go hand- in- hand, that a form becomes classical. I fail to understand then, what is contemporary Odissi dance. Main idea is to experiment and add new elements; folk, music, experiment with *taal* and *laya*, within traditional boundaries" (in an interview with the research student, at his residence, Bapuji Nagar, Bhubaneswar, October 2007).

²⁴ The first "East- West Dance Encounter" was organized in 1984, in collaboration with Max Mueller Bhavan Indian Council for Cultural Relations and *Sangeet Natak Akademi* in Mumbai followed by the next

in western forms, for innovation in the practise, within the domestic arena. Resultantly, a search for knowing more about the roots through folk forms of dance, music and theatre was taken up by non- Oriyan performers. Few dancers had already initiated experiments with regional forms such as *Chhau* and *Pala sangeet*,²⁵ owing to the *lasya*- oriented vocabulary, which now posed as a limitation. **Odissi was supposed to have reached its “mid- life crisis” post 1990s**²⁶. On one hand, Gurus were organizing seminars to stress the need for remaining with the “authentic”, not to give in to commercialisation and glamorisation of art²⁷, on the other hand, where most gave in to the dictates of the Gurus, few like Sonal Mansingh, defended the innovations. Gurus and conservatives stressed the need for conforming to the temple form of dance, seemingly to maintain their status-quo²⁸. The tiff between the *Jayantika* followers, and others who denied that repertoire became more apparent.

Re- search of Odissi began in those very regional elements, which were excluded by the Gurus in their “retrieval” of the form, to give it a classical mould.

With the onset of the new millennium, the need for inculcating new elements, with the due approval from the Gurus, became aggravated, such that even a central government body responded to it. Central *Sangeet Natak Akademi* organized a symposium and workshop on “Performing Art traditions of Orissa in reference to Odissi Dance”²⁹.

The symposium reflected the need to inculcate new elements into the form and to gain a stamp of validation from the Gurus, for such explorations. It not simply aimed at introducing the younger generation to the roots, rather seeking the Gurus’ views and

one in Delhi in 1991, following which, classical dancers were exposed to the works of Chandralekha, Uttara Asha Coorlawala, and others. The traditionalists disparaged the ‘encounter’, whereas there were others who started to question the form, even if submissively, but did try to expand it beyond what Gurus had done. Resultantly, so- called ‘choreographic’ works were explored which ended up being ‘group-dances’, replacing the solo performances.

²⁵ Sonal, under the guidance of poet and scholar Jiwan Pani, introduced *Pala Sangeet* and other poems of contemporary poets of Orissa. *Chhau* technique and *Prahlada Nataka* “fulfil Odissi’s crying need for *Tandava Anga*”; Sonal Mansingh (National Herald, Lucknow; 1989) source; *Sangeet Natak Akademi*

²⁶ One of the reports on Odissi’s state of flux and resulting seminars and workshops, carried this as the headline in a popular daily. (The Pioneer, 7th Dec. 1995 New Delhi) source; *Sangeet Natak Akademi*

²⁷ “The Great Guru Deba Prasad Das: Personality and Contribution”, a seminar organized in Delhi. (Times of India, Delhi, 18th Oct. 1994)

²⁸ Times of India, Bombay, 21st Dec. 1993.

²⁹ 11- 14 May, 2003, Puri, Orissa.

consent on what was acceptable in the innovations, being done by first generation dancers in Odissi, which became the defining course- line for the symposium, so as not to pose a challenge to the Gurus' authority³⁰. Gurus however felt that such conscious efforts to "evolve" the form were not necessary, making incongruity in the in- built structure of Odissi more visible³¹. Constant discussions between the notions of "classical", "*shastra*" and "*auchitya*" in a dance form arose as the core areas of conflict between the practitioners. The elements from living traditions which could/ should be included in Odissi became a matter of contention with frequent arguments on what one had seen of the living traditions and the appropriate way of adopting them in Odissi. Seminar spaces were specifically created for self- promotion, reaffirmation of codes (of one style as against the others) and negotiation of boundaries by the senior practitioners³².

Submission to Guru's authority, on the practice and teaching of dance was furthered by non- conferring of the authority of "Guru" to female dancer- teachers. The first generation dancers, namely, Sanjukta Panigrahi, Minati Mishra, Sonal Mansingh, Priyambada Mohanty Hejmadi, Madhavi Mudgal, are not recognized as "Gurus", despite the fact that most of them, except Sanjukta Panigrahi³³, established and headed principal

³⁰ "We, the traditionalists, protectionists get very much threatened by it. To maintain your identity, you need to have the right approach, to influence others you first need to be a master of it." Kumkum Mohanty, stating the objectives of the symposium, in her inaugural speech. xxx

"The enrichment of any art form depends on its ever new interpretations, hidden dimensions being discovered and new facets being illustrated. No art form develops overnight. It is through an ever- evolving process of osmosis, absorption, renewal and research that art form finds its intrinsic strength, character and flavour and it is ever challenging. That is only possible if we allow the form to challenge us to give and take to learn, to see the richness of living art traditions to enrich Odissi. To make it more representative of Orissa's complicated culture"; Sonal Mansingh in her inaugural speech. (Video of the symposium, source; S.N.A. Archive)

³¹ Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra claimed that this symposium was a conscious effort to inculcate regional elements and present it in Odissi style, whereas he "never took anything from the living traditions consciously. We must have taken something from them, spontaneously, but not as a conscious effort. I have done it in my own way and other Gurus have done it in their own". source; video of the symposium, S.N.A. Archive.

³² 1985; Madhavi Mudgal organized first seminar of Odissi, bringing together all the senior Gurus and senior Odissi performers, critics and dance scholars, traditional performers; *devadasis* and *gotipuas* at the Angahar Festival in New Delhi. Since then it has become an annual feature by different schools organizing similar festivals, namely; "International Odissi Festival" by disciples of Guru Deba Prasad das, biennale, "Angarag" festival; the latest entrant, "Stirring Odissi" organized by Sutra in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. These are different from annual festivals of dance institutes, although even they are often organized by a specific institute, in collaboration with state agencies and private fundings.

³³ Sanjukta Panigrahi on the role as a teacher in Odissi Research Centre opened by the Government of Orissa, in Bhubaneswar; "I go there often and give my views. As long as I am busy as a performing artist, I

institutes of Odissi, soon after establishing themselves as performers. Their own contribution to the teaching of Odissi and innovations leading to its evolution were sidelined, despite their contribution to the proliferation of the style and to the evolution of its grammar, since its formative years³⁴.

With the traditional repertoire, which had no solid grounding in the living traditions, working on a fixed number of items, becoming exhaustive, the ambiguities in the structure of the form became evident. Few of the first generation dancers ventured into moulding space and music through dance, to inculcate other forms and languages in their group and solo compositions, or the age-old theme based, narrative dance-dramas with themes sometimes changing from mythological to historical to contemporary and social, these experiments often proved futile with no landmark expansion of the technique and grammar of Odissi. The absence of any kind of “choreographic” training in the Odissi technique can be seen as the core reason.

It is the later generation of dancers who were, likewise, trained under the Gurus, expanded the repertoire, and built by the founders. Most of the institutes presently are run by daughters of the Gurus; Guru Mayadhar Raut, Guru Surendranath Jena or by other first generation students like Gajendra Panda and Durga Charan Ranbir (frontrunner disciples of Guru Deba Prasad Das). The people who had the advantage of being the first few to introduce Odissi on stage became the pioneers, while others who learnt at the same time or a little later, by virtue of coming to the proscenium at a time when Odissi no longer was a new dance, were actually re-performing, and not setting a new tradition.

cannot give more time to it. Later on, may be when I become less busy performing, I may work there.” (Schechner, Zarilli; 1988)

³⁴ Sanjukta Panigrahi: “We have done a lot of research and choreographed items jointly. There is a lot of *adan-pradan*. I seek his approval and he welcomes my suggestions” (Op. Cit, Schechner, Zarilli, 1988)

3.3 Going Beyond the Gurus

Ratikant Mohapatra began his training under his father and Guru, Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, in 1970, when he was five years old. He claims that technique until then was not refined, “it was Guruji who completely changed the technique in last thirty years of his life and the transition is aptly visible amongst his students who were trained at different phases. It is the visual aesthetics sense that Guruji had attained through his talent in painting and by being born in the family of *pata- chitrakar*as that makes his style most resplendent in its visual essence. Earlier *chauka* used to be one foot wide, the feet were quite apart. Resultantly, body’s weight got divided on the two sides, body’s balance used to be disturbed and it was not aesthetic enough. Body swings a lot in that position. Guruji reduced the distance between the feet and reduced *chauka* into *dui mukha pada*, structure remains the same, that of *chauka*, however its *adh chauka* now, the weight was thus brought into the centre. It helps maintain the control of the body and is less strenuous for the dancer. So it becomes easier to move the torso; sideways, or in a circular movement. The change brought by Guruji in the basic body language of Odissi was then inculcated in the dance compositions”.

In his own choreographies, Ratikant tends to tone down the use of stagecraft, considers the use of multimedia to be “*showbazi*”, which acts as a detriment to the individual capacity of a dancer. He applies more elaborate use of lights in his choreographic productions such as “*Allah*”, “*Aum*” and “*Bhaj Govindam*”. He has also explored other music genres apart from Oriya music. His composition *Allah* is based on Aruna Sairam’s rendition in Carnatic style, to Dr. Subhramanium Bharti’s much revered composition. “However, main flavour of Odissi is in Oriya culture and Oriyaness of a localite, which can be portrayed the best by an Oriya girl only”³⁵, claims Ratikant. His latest intervention into Odissi is to build a strong archive, “so that across the world, Odissi is known by one consolidated history, because currently there exist different variations”. His educational, urban background, lends him a methodology to tacitly historicize and appropriate the form through Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra’s style of Odissi.

³⁵ A point stressed by both students and Gurus in Bhubaneswar, hinting their insecurities regarding non-Oriyas having a claim to their culture, also keeping the rights to define the interventions with the style according to the codes established by them, totally denying non- Oriyas any kind of authority.

Madhumita Raut³⁶ is disciple and daughter of Guru Mayadhar Raut:

“If you are strongly rooted in your art, then you are like a rock. So I am trained to be that little rock, because I am under the rock of Gibraltar. So when you are well groomed in your sphere, then you are your own anchor”.

A: *Do you emphasize on solo performances or group?*

Madhumita: *Both, but, Odissi like any other classical dance form, I don't mention Kathakali for its dance- theatre, is solely a solo form of dance, just to make it spectacular and watch it at a superficial level. The entire concept of classical dancing is to explore the rasa theory and that can only happen if it's a solo repertoire.*

Odissi is not Odissi if you don't use Odissi taal, Odissi chhand, Odissi laya. Delhi bred students are deviating from that.

Odissi is so close to Sanskrit and Hindi, students can understand it easily. We do a lot of work based on Sanskrit texts. Oriya and Awadhi are also done, because my personal favourite is Shri Ramcharitmanas. Since I travel a lot I like to take local poetry, Goethe and others, we do on and off.

When you are a Guru's child you are very familiar with literature and all. When I was younger in school/ college, I would pick up a lot of Indian themes; Kalidas, Jayadev, Ramcharitmanas. Off late, say for the last ten years or so, mainly because of my extensive and exhaustive travelling, I have taken up works of other poets; German poets, Hungarian poets, I feel that it is making me evolve as an artist. In classical dance it is quite challenging to show some “foreign work”.

A: *What propels you to take up international poets?*

Madhumita: *I am into Odissi for better or worse, for whatever. And when you are travelling your main aim becomes to communicate with the audience so you want to pick up their poetry you want to tell them about their poetry, you want to convey that art is not a barrier, the main thing is to communicate. And then if you are telling a German about Goethe's work he would understand it better than someone here. He would start approaching Goethe in a different light. Purity of style has to be there, I won't compromise on my dance. That is the challenge; how do you use your Odissi idioms to take up so many, different, wide topics.*

If I know the language then I can use it to express whatever I want to. You can break all boundaries and take up the topics that have never ever been done. One thing Guruji is strict about is the Odissi costume and music. He won't let you dance without the

³⁶ Interview conducted by the research student, at Jayantika centre in Delhi, May 2008.

'dupatta', without the flower, without the belt. He is one of those who made all this when Odissi was recreated, who made all the rules for Odissi. This is where we cannot deviate.

Reela Hota³⁷ has been trained under Guru Gangadhar Pradhan (4 years), Madhavi Mudgal (10 years) and Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra (5 years), is presently working under Guru Bichitranand Swain. On innovations in Odissi and changes in the form and its practise over the time, she says:

"Kelu babu was a lot into it, if I have a revelation I will do it. I did a new choreographic composition when I performed the composition based on yoga and its spiritual aspect. I didn't do a new thing. Twenty years down the line if I have a revelation, I would bring in new elements. It's ok if somebody else does it, it is admirable and that depends on the dancer's capability. The form should evolve with time, with audiences. It is very important for the dancer to connect with the audience., Even shastras prescribe it. You should depict those kind of emotions which relate to different sections of society, you have to better your presentations with evolving society. After all, when you are on stage, you have to be professional in your approach. It is not about making the dance modern, five years, ten years, fifteen years will not make it modern, it's not enough. When there's a revelation and someone creates something that beautiful you can't deny his/her genius".

Reela, on how does she perceive the difference between the work of her Gurus;

"Kelu babu had most depth in his compositions, in his music. He had the sweetest style. He would take one line and make ten- fifteen sancharis out of it. He was a true poet. Madhavi ji experiments a lot with stage and space, don't know if any of Madhavi ji's student can hold the stage without the gimmicks. Art is supposed to speak for itself, given the lights, given the costume, and all the technical paraphernalia, but if you are trying to make art on the basis of it, it doesn't last long. Not so in the case of Madhavi ji. Perfection in art is so high in case of Kelu babu. Gangadhar Pradhan's choreography was very exciting, carried a very fast rhythm, but spirituality is most in Kelu babu's work. Personality of the choreographer comes through his/her work. Gangadhar Pradhan is very market- oriented person. Madhavi ji is very artistic, but not an intoxicated artist. That reflected in their work.

You can't experiment with something, which is so close to the truth. For creating a philosophy you have to be a saint. The way the repertoire was formulated, the classical texts, the 'mudras', the postures included, it is all very yogic. I find people lack the depth in them, the dances based on experiments are very pseudo, and I am a puritan. For me, the way the repertoire has been done that's the way it is supposed to be"³⁸.

³⁷ In a telephonic interview with the research student, May 2008.

³⁸ Reela presented her first choreographic venture in 1998, titled *Atma Mukti*, based on "yogic path to self-realization", music by Pandit Rajan Mishra, followed by *Viswasya Beejam*, presenting the "essence of Kundalini Tantra", music by Gundecha brothers, both were conceptualised by her mother Bijoylaxmi Hota, and choreographed by Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra. The next venture was in 2005, *Ek Lakshya Chaturpatha*, conceptualised by herself, scripted by her mother, choreographed by Ratikant Mohapatra and

Sharmila Mukherjee³⁹: disciple of Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, also trained under Poushali Mukherjee and Sanjukta Panigrahi. She initially learnt Uday Shankar style of dance. She has been teaching Odissi since 1991:

A: The parampara that you are carrying forward, that you learnt and now you are teaching, has it changed? (How? Why?)

Sharmila: To a certain extent it has changed- very few students want to do it as a full time profession, they give less time to it and do not aim for perfection.

A: How has the repertoire/ music changed over the time?

Sharmila: The repertoire has more or less remained the same. The music has changed, become more pleasing to the audience of today. Even dance has to adapt to the exigencies of the changing times. The emphasis is now more on group, new and innovative choreographies, very few want to see the traditional solo repertoire as it was in the past. New ballets, new productions, socially relevant themes, mythology, or current themes; everything is being used now in Odissi.

A: What are the changes that you would want to bring about in the performances/ repertoire/ music/ stage presentation/ thematic and teaching of Odissi?

Sharmila: Performances should be as professional as possible with attention being given to costumes, lighting, stage, and sound. Music should not be too commercial or

music composition by Madhup Mudgal, the dance depicted the “life and philosophy of four women saints in history, from divergent faiths (Sufi, Hindu, Christian and Buddhist)” (www.artindia.net).

All dances constituted a regular Odissi repertoire, with different items, beginning with *Mangalacharan* and concluding with *Moksha*, depicting and exploring the theme; “portrayed through stories, started with *Mangalacharan* on Shiva; originator of sound, dance, music and rhythm, depicted *hatha* yoga in second item; male and female energies have to be harmonised for good health and *saadhna*, which was depicted in this duet showing male and female energies and to attain these you need to do yoga. Yoga believes that both these energies are present in our body, we showed that through Odissi, did not incorporate any yogic *asanas*, only used the texts dealing with Indian philosophy on yoga. These texts say that the deity is within us. The third item was more ballet based, showed folk, historical and mythological figures who attained *moksha* through yoga; Prahlad (*bhakti yog*), Arjun (*karma yog*), Mahavir and Buddha (*raj yog*). I used stories to depict the theme. The performance concluded with *Moksha* which explained what is the state of *moksha*, how did all the miracles happen to different Yogis, whence they attain the state of *moksha*, because in human body, energy evolves so much that it comes to the same level as that of God”; telephonic conversation with Reela Hota, May 2008.

³⁹ Interview was conducted through e- mail, May 2008.

'modernized'. There should be a limit to how much an artist can innovate; should NOT become filmy. Teaching should include theory and practical so that students have knowledge of what they are learning.

A: What boundaries did Gurus set for their students that were strictly not meant to be crossed?

Sharmila: Guruji welcomed new choreographies but insisted that the style and the technique should remain Odissi; not to experiment with fusion etc.

A: How further did you go from these boundaries, to expand their teachings?

Sharmila: I have not taken much liberty. I have tried to stick to what I learnt but I am now creating and choreographing my own items, keeping the style intact.

Sujata Mohapatra⁴⁰: disciple and daughter- in- law of Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, she is engaged actively in performing and teaching the dance style at Srjan:

“Ratikant has done a lot of choreography, I have done very less. I am a performer. If you are involved in choreography then the performance gets hampered and I am not thinking about (doing) choreography. It’s a different part of dance. If you are on stage as a performer you will think about how to capture the audience from the beginning to the end, in your own choreography you can’t see yourself. As a performer I am doing what I have been taught by the Guru, not doing anything extra, right now I am much focussed on that. Later, I will do choreography when I have more experience.”

The next generation dancers stick to codifications designed by the Gurus, the least they expand the canon is at the level of language, themes, space- permutations, group/ solo variations, resultant of the ever- pervading authority of the Gurus. Simply expanding the boundaries marks a facile change that does not hold strong in the long run. To build something new, to create something extraordinaire, it becomes essential to cross the boundaries. What Guru Surendranath Jena developed and achieved through his style, is

⁴⁰ In an interview with the research student, at *Srjan*, October 2007.

an apt depiction of the process which needs to be allowed to be taught and practised, for furtherance of the dance form; imbibing the language, engraining the form into your body and mind, engaging with the form at an individual level, claiming the “ownership” of the tradition, realising the boundaries to be too inane, crossing these very boundaries to create an individualistic style perfected by one’s own vision of dance.

Guru Surendranath Jena acquired a basic training in Odissi at Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya: from the founder Gurus, he learnt the repertoire, the items and the grammar of the form, which he found very limiting. He soon, formulated his own vocabulary of Odissi, keeping to the basics and abiding by the *shastras*. He formed a deviant Odissi technique, which worked on the division of the body into upper and lower half, configuring the exact imagery of the sculptures into his dance, which subsequently forms a movement structure of its own (Pl. 2, p. 82). His compositions broke that very flow which was stressed by “codified and accepted” style of Odissi, and created a different flow out of those very breaks and variations, at the level of *taal*, *bhaav*, frequent variations between *lasya* and *tandava*, the mundane and other- worldly, became the characteristic feature of his style. Sculptures were rendered in his style through a dynamics, which was yet to be incorporated, by any other style. He reflected the society in which he lived, through his compositions of *Chausatha Yogini*, *Achhoot Kanya* and *Shiva Tandava*. His compositions are a confluence of the most intricate poses and highly technical movements along with the most life- like expressions, carrying the portrayal of relationships in its utmost innocence and simplicity. He thus deviated from the structured and accepted norm of Odissi and carved out his own space through his distinctive methodology towards dance⁴¹.

⁴¹ “Guru Surendra Jena, the art- master who after learning the grammar and the essence of Odissi Dance, has wriggled out from the very popularised codifications and have created master pieces of dance items his ‘Konarka Kanti’, ‘Bhubana- Ishwara’, ‘Bhadyeswar’, ‘Roop- Madhuri’, ‘Rekha- Sundari’, ‘Chhaya- Jhatak’, ‘Archana Puri’, and such others, have set the conventionalists in a puzzle to solve in their own methods as to which item falls into which category”. (Dash, 1979; 32)

3.4 Questioning the Canon

With the later generation of Odissi dancers, i.e. the second generation dancers, who were directly trained under the pioneering dancers, issues regarding the freedom to explore beyond the marked territories become important, as they traverse through physical territories of regions and boundaries of performance genres and performance histories. They tend to question about tradition being accepted as a “given” text, merely followed, in “different ways”? If it can be learnt as a language from which new texts can be written, new vocabularies can be created? Does that mean that it is acceptable to talk about these as boundaries? Can one then negotiate with these boundaries? Is the dance then living up to its ultimate goal of liberating the body?

Tradition is not any more taken to be a fixed structure, which one apes, without actually understanding and imbibing it. This can be achieved only through claiming “ownership” of the tradition, by making new work within the traditional structures and satisfying its requirements, says Tandon⁴² (Tandon, 2005; 150).

Evidently, it is only through a personal quest of a dancer that one looks at the form and attempts to research its tradition, and beyond. With this generation of students, trained in Indian traditional as well as western modern parlance of performance and performance studies, not only the performance space but also the academic space, for the first time, is used to look beyond the codes and the rules, outlined by the Gurus, in case of Odissi. Ananya Chatterjee uses her training in Odissi⁴³ and Bharatanatyam to break away from the mainstream classical performances and pursue activism through art. Driven by women emancipation, she found 'Women In Motion', inspired by street theatre practices in India and political theatre practices of South Asia, to highlight issues concerning South Asian women. Her choreographies like 'Kali For Women', 'Bandh', 'Unable to Remember Roop Kanwar' were centred on women's issues; depicting, the force of Kali,

⁴² Rekha Tandon was trained in Odissi under Guru Surendranath Jena, Madhavi Mudgal and Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra.

⁴³ She was trained by Sanjukta Panigrahi in Odissi.

the freedom for woman to dream, the plight of being a *Sati*, respectively. Her latest venture called '*Daak*' or 'Call to Action' was based on people loosing land rights to industries, in her homeland, Bengal as well as in Minnessota, where she resides now. Her movements, deriving from classical technique, intertwine with the social movements to give shape to the theme. Since, Chatterjee is of the belief that, "dance can be a very vital medium in shifting people's frames of mind, in shifting people's bodies to look this way instead of that way" (Combs, 2008). Chatterjee, does not stick to her intervention with Odissi at the performance level only, but goes further to question its structure, through her academic research. (Refer to the Literature Review for more on Ananya' s writings on Odissi dance).

Tandon used Hatha Yoga, Tantric geometric structures, mantras and chants, English lyrics and Western music along with Odissi's basic technique, to evolve her own choreographic movement and sound structure, to realize her meditative- self, and also to make it more accessible to her global, multi- cultural audiences⁴⁴. Tandon's "personal interest lay in developing performance as a meditative events for the dancer/s in which the audiences from different cultural backgrounds could participate and did not find the traditional practice of Odissi in the way it was taught, performed and choreographed, fulfilling this need" (Tandon, 2005; 129).

This raises questions about the prime objective of pursuing a training in dance and to what extent does the current method of teaching cater to the dance student in achieving these goals, because, if self realization is the sole objective of Indian performing arts, as perceived by Tandon, and if other practices like Yoga etc. provide building blocks in pursuing dance in this direction, then why is one bound to abide by the rules of the system and abstain completely from using the "non- Orissan" sources, which according to the rule- makers would thence diminish "Odissi".

⁴⁴ She tries to achieve this through her choreographic works; *Yantra*, *Geetanjali*, *Saraswati* and *Phenomenal Woman* (Tandon, 2003).

The rigidity of the form as structured by the Gurus; being selective in their allegiance to regional elements to give the form a desired shape, choosing those that were aesthetically appealing and obliterating the rest, demanding strict adherence to *Guru- shishya parampara*, restricts the growth of the genre. It channelled the growth in a particular chosen direction, which added to the artificiality of the form and confirms its irrelevance with time. Tandon has aptly stated, “Gurus however seem to have failed to appreciate the importance of the stages of their own creative journey and to facilitate a similar process in their students. They have demanded instead that this **created tradition** be continued as a final form” (Tandon, 2005; 130) (emphasis added). She recognizes the fact that mental policing becomes an integral part of the tradition as taught and practiced. The structure had an “in- built psychological resistance to change”⁴⁵. Tandon contends that “Odissi tradition has remained tied to its notion of “spiritual art” but is in actuality subverting the process of “self- actualisation” and by doing this is in reality divorced from spirituality as defined and understood by the tradition it claims to represent”. The process of self-actualisation/ realization begins with an urge to know about oneself, for which one needs to be attuned to a particular process. The Guru’s teachings in that way guide the *shishya* in a specific direction, keeping his / her persona in view and suggest a way to uplift him from there on. Imitating the Guru forms a core part of training in Indian classical dance. However, it is not simply restricted to that. It is a cumulative process of indulging with the self, taking a lead from the Guru’s teachings, thinking on it and following it. It is a very individual perception, which varies depending on an individual’s aptitude as to which method suits her/ him the best for realizing the self. One’s own evolution within the practice of the form may lead her/ him to explore the form in different ways beyond that of the Guru’s and that is what would make the form “living” in its actual sense.

⁴⁵ Studying and explaining Odissi through western choreological tools, namely; “Laban’s conception of kinosphere and dynamosphere to describe how space is approached in the technique, Valerie Preston-Dunlop’s concept of the choreutic unit and the Manner of Materialization” are an attempt to create an awareness of the form, beyond its “ethnic appearance” by using terminology familiar to international dance scholarship and to expand its audiences. Also, it would inculcate the audiences with a new knowledge about the form; however, the efficiency with which one can use this terminology to discuss Indian classical dance is a matter of contention.

Also, one needs to note that those who dare to question the canon and go beyond it in actuality, are mostly located and grounded in Western parlance of Performance Studies, which provides them a different methodological grounding and a distinct perspective of looking at their classical learning and practice. Given their diasporic setting, they perceive the form as an outsider to the whole system, yet being an insider to its practice. It is the constant emphasis on developing an individual point of reference to the dance form and dance practice, which lends a contemporary approach to their work.

Even though the first generation of Odissi dancers came from similar urban backgrounds, they were rarely concerned with pursuing the form academically; their primary concern was upliftment and proliferation of the form to establish it as a “classical” dance. They grew into the “divas” of Odissi and still retain that position. They strictly adhered to the Guru’s teachings and consequently their choreographic ventures were limited to the format established by the Gurus and accepted in the market. The performance space available to them is more often a defined, artificially created, ethno- cultural space for representing “ Indian Culture” at the global stage, whereas the space used by the former, is a more open and free space. With their training in modern dance, they tend to explore these spaces and the form through a different dynamic structure. They don’t have any positions of pioneers to be taken over. They can either fill up the dormant spaces following the same conventional, accepted route or carve out newer spaces by redefining the vocabulary, by creating their own texts through the base provided by the tradition responding to the need of “self” and “society”.

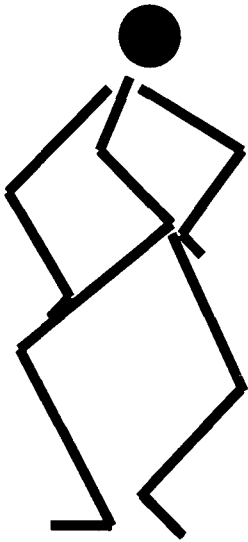


Figure 1 *Tribhanga*

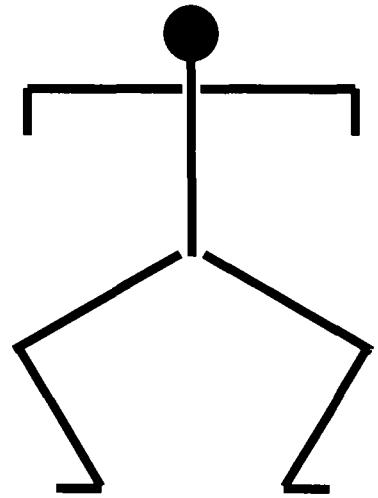


Figure 2 *Chauka*

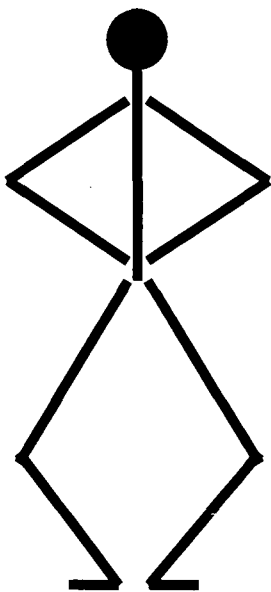


Figure 3 *Araimandi*



Plate 1- Sculptures lending authenticity to the form, popular images as available on the Internet

source: www.gloindia.sulekha.com
www.orissatourism.org
www.srishtidances.org
www.shubhyatra.com



Plate 2- Pratibha Jena renders sculptural poses into Odissi movement, in a composition titled '*Shilpa Chandrika*'. A distinct technique enunciated by Guru Surendranath Jena (notice the division of the body into upper and lower half).

Photo: courtesy Pratibha Jena Singh



Plate 3- A music- class in session at Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Odissi Research Centre, Bhubaneswar, which promotes an integral course of dance training, October 2007.



Plate 4- The Repertory group rehearsing 'Aum', at Srjan, Bhubaneswar, October 2007.



Plate 5- Festival posters of Srjan adorn its library wall.



Plate 6- The Archives at Srjan. Ratikant Mohapatra looks on while a senior student walks by.



Plate 7- Senior disciple Suchi Smita Sahoo conducting Odissi class in the absence of Gajendra Panda, Tridhara, Bhubaneswar, October 2007.



Plate 8- Madhavi Mudgal conducts a rehearsal session with senior disciples, Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, New Delhi, February 2008.

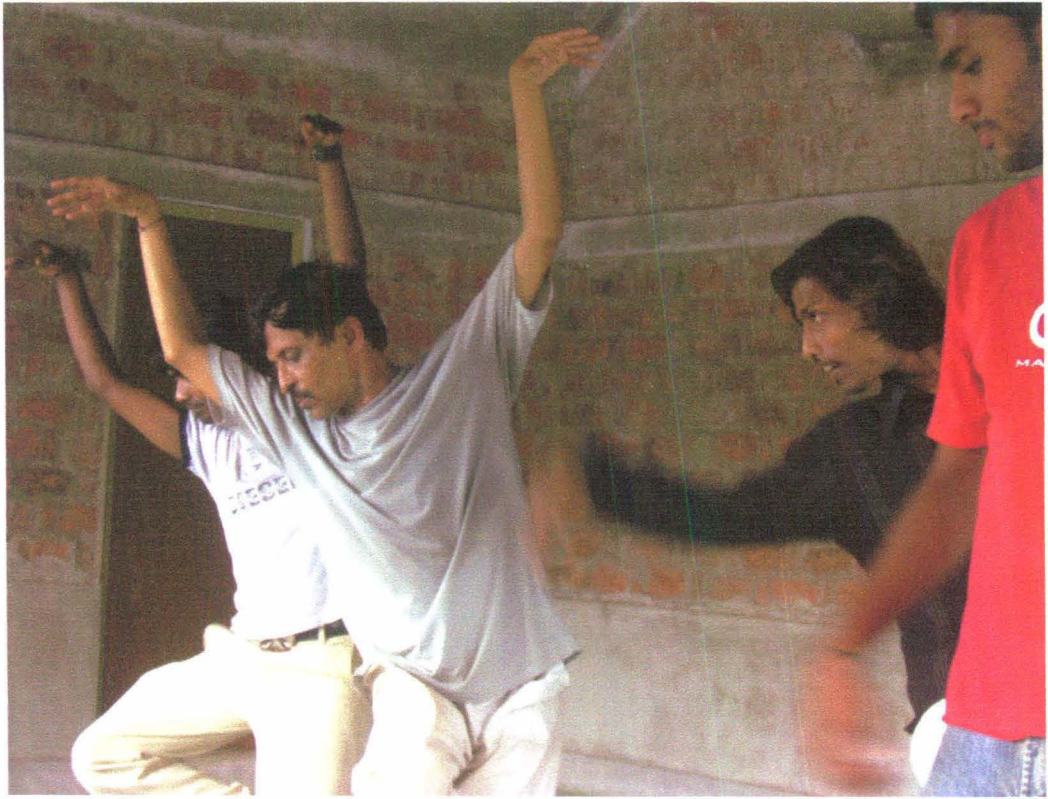


Plate 9- Chittaranjan Acharya choreographing a new dance item with non- Odissi dancers, The Legacy of Art, Bhubaneswar, October 2007.



Plate 10- Madhumita Raut conducting a class at her residence, Guru Mayadhar Raut presides over (notice the colour range of the costumes worn by students), Jayantika, New Delhi, March 2008.

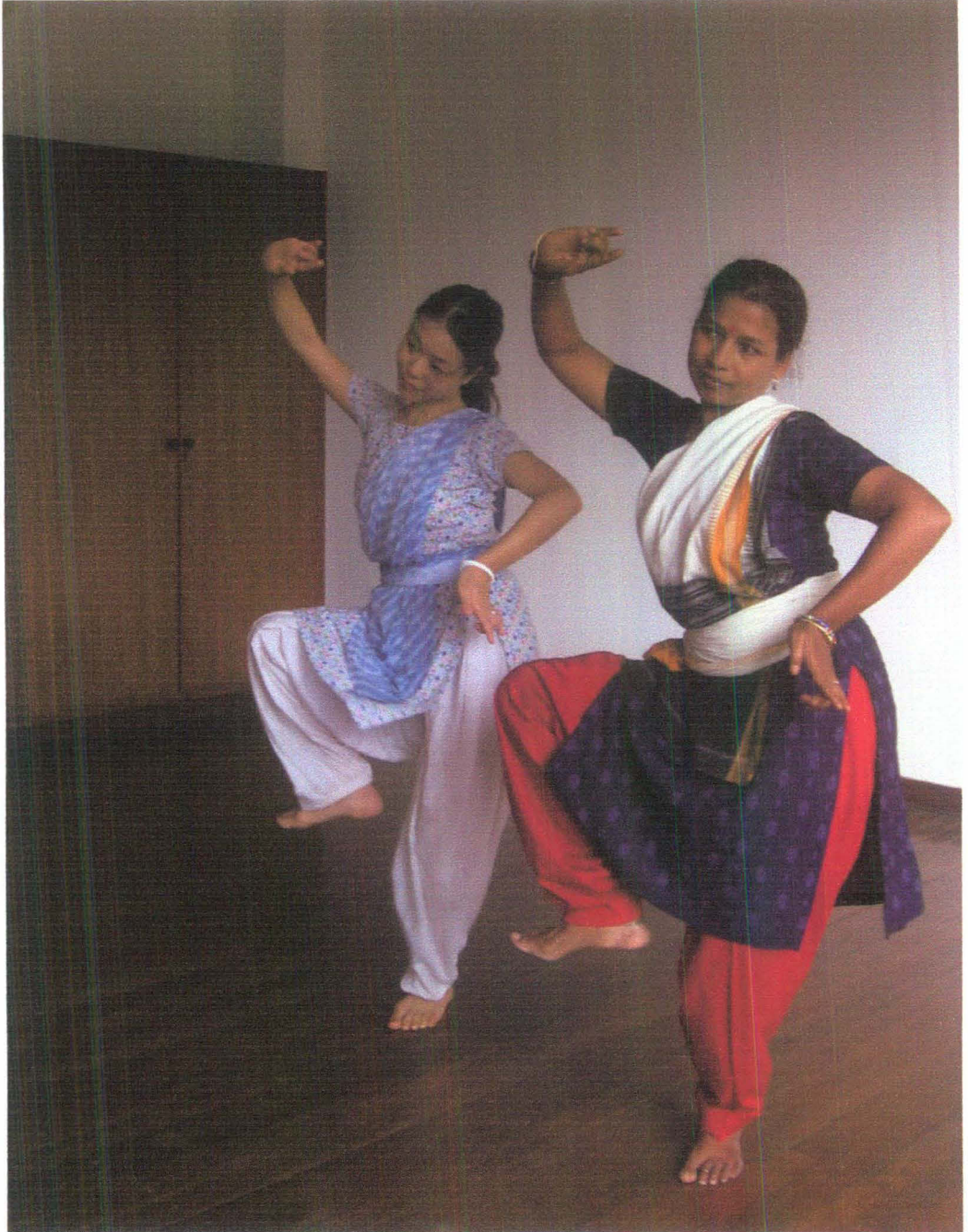


Plate 11- Pratibha Jena Singh conducting a solo class, Triveni Kala Sangam, New Delhi, May 2008.



Plate 12- Diya Sen substituting Madhavi Mudgal, in a beginners' class at Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, New Delhi, February 2008.

CHAPTER IV

Odissi Body: Construction and Perception

The Gurus, or the teachers are institutions in themselves, which generate knowledge, create dancing bodies and nurture their future. Therefore, it is necessary to delve into how they have expanded the boundaries of dance activity over the time, encouraged exclusivity in Odissi or facilitated the acceptance of innovation in the Odissi body. Has the studentship evolved with time? In what way then does it affect the method of teaching and hence the framework of the institution? How do the government agencies affect the functioning of these institutes? What kinds of guidelines are slated for both teaching and performance? How is the framework of a private institute different from that of a government- run dance school? What kinds of performance spaces are developed for their respective practitioners? How do the students converse in this framework? What is the level of satisfaction concerning the teaching system, what are the gaps in communication between the teacher and a student that furthers the gap in aesthetic perception of the dance form and subsequently affects the interaction between the dance form and the dancing body?

4.1 Method of Teaching

Students are mostly taught through a method of imitation of Guru's demonstrations. The explanation of technical manoeuvring of the body depends on the teacher's proficiency in technique; mostly the core process involves imitation with a few guidelines and instructions. If not explained consciously, the techniques of weight- shift, balance, movement and division of body are imbibed through the unquestioned process of imitation. *Abhinaya* pieces are explained along with anecdotes and stories to make the theme clearer, seldom followed by discussions around the chosen story. Understanding of the body, and the form comes with one's own practise, *riyaaz*, which is emphasized a lot during the training period. "*Angasuddhi*" (purity of movement) and "*saustabha*" (purity

of body line) become the defining criteria of one's technical expertise over the form. (Chatterjee, 1996; 74- 75)

Currently, three kinds of institutions can be marked out, which impart both practical and theoretical training in dance: private tuition under Gurus or teachers, dance training provided in universities or government- run institutes, with a well- defined curriculum¹, which are run under the tutorship of Gurus, and autonomous institutes run by Gurus which may or may not be affiliated to a recognized university² that provides the course outline. Gurus or teachers might begin teaching at their residence, in the absence of institutional space, with well- defined class sessions and a course outline, and gradually establish a trust or society under their name,³ attempting to defuse the lines, or to find a common ground between the *Guru- shishya parampara* and the limitations of modern life style. Keeping this in mind, most of the institutes⁴ and gurus conduct special summer courses for their students, who are bound by time and distance limitations.

In a *Guru- shishya parampara*, the Guru decides the curriculum depending upon the capability of a student, whereas in an institutionalised system all students follow a standardized curriculum. The university or state run institutes are commonly perceived as a non- serious system, growing in response to “glamour” and “easily accessible visibility” factors (Chatterjee, 1996; 87) unable to produce serious professional Odissi

¹ Odissi Research Centre (Guru Durga Charan Ranbir and Guru Kanduri Charan Behra serve as visiting dance faculty at the centre along with three other permanent Odissi teachers, with Ram Hari Das, a musician, as its Chairperson) and Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyala (which was run under the principalship of Dr. Minati Mishra and tutorship of Guru Pankaj Charan Das and Guru Deba Prasad Das for a very long time) in Bhubaneswar.

² Gandharva Mahavidyala in New Delhi and Srjan in Bhubaneswar are run by the second generation dancers of Odissi. The diploma given by the latter is recognized by Chandigarh University and Orissa Sangeet Natak Akademi. Gandharva Mahavidyalaya conducts examination and gives the degree under its own name.

³ Madhumita Raut carries forward the style of Guru Mayadhar raut, under his guidance, from their home in New Delhi. They have established their centre under the name of “Jayantika” conforming their compliance to the repertoire and its practise as initially formulated in 1958, under the same name. xxx

Pratibha Jena conducts the classes at Triveni Kala Sangam in New Delhi, where initially the style was taught by her father Guru Surendranath Jena. They have recently established a trust in the name of Guruji, called Nrityashilp- Guru Surendranath Jena Odissi Dance Foundation, so as to provide an institutional basis necessary for further proliferation of the style, given the current trends. No in- house examinations are conducted, however, students are encouraged to give exams conducted by centrally recognized external bodies such as Gandharva Mahavidyalaya.

⁴ For detailed information on Odissi institutes refer to Pathy, (2007; 128- 159).

dancers, for Indian dance training implies a holistic training teaching the pupil a way of life, imbibing in him/ her the values of tradition, the aesthetic sense, religiosity and philosophy behind the dance tradition. It is believed that such training can be imparted only by a personal, consistent guidance of a Guru, with one- to- one interaction and not through the modern class- structure bound by time constraints. Ram Hari Das, serving as Chief Executive Director at the Odissi Research Centre, Bhubaneswar, maintains that:

“Guru- shishya parampara is very essential. Even I was a lecturer in a college prior to this, and I felt that students always wanted to follow the Guru, spend as much time as possible under his guidance. It is necessary to develop a tradition. The method of teaching ascribed by an institute fails to train the students in a holistic way, to develop a complete understanding of the Guru’ s language for which a continual interaction between the two is a must, and lack of this definitely affects the future of Guru- shishya parampara. In a university or institute set- up, however, teachers come, conduct their classes and leave. The total pattern of teaching system needs to be changed, perhaps, by designating one Guru for only 4 or 5 students; the Guru- shishya parampara does not work in a routine method with time constraint. There are two issues coterminous to the situation of the teaching system in Odissi. Firstly, it can be helped either by making a standardized system of education in dance, such that the Guru- shishya parampara is not needed at all. Secondly good professional performers are required, which is possible only through training in Guru- shishya parampara. On considering both these factors, and the fact that it is difficult for Guru- shishya parampara to function in an institute, which might be possible in a university set- up, a private tuition to a student generates a feeling of attachment and identification towards the style. In an institutional set- up, the training is such that the shishyas learn few items from one Guru and few more from another, which is fine, to learn the basics of the form, but that surely won’t result in making another Sanjukta Panigrahi”.

Simultaneously, the same school of thought maintains the belief that it is under the influence of the westernised system of education that the *Guru- shishya parampara* has

faced deterioration, and commercialisation has corrupted the system to a certain extent, resulting in a disjunction in the training system.

Since dance education is a critical juncture in a dancer's negotiation with the dance form, analysis of the institutional space becomes a crucial and integral part of the research work. Most of these dance institutes, serve as an extension of the founder Guru's image himself, his style of dance, his goals, objectives, and work ethics are premiered and promoted under his name such that even after his demise, the institute, the teachers and the students are bound to uphold his legacy. This further defines the functioning of the institute, its course work, morals and values as imbibed in young minds along with the dance structure, thus creating and moulding a desired Odissi body. To understand the prevalent training system one needs to take a look at the functioning of various institutes and their primary area of discourse.

4.2 The Institutes

Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Odissi Research Centre:

Initially known as Odissi Research Centre, established in 1986, it was renamed after the demise of Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, as a homage to the legendary Guru who taught at this institute for several years and later focussed his energies in collecting funds and establishing his own institute (Pl.3, p. 83). The institute is affiliated to the state government and offers training at advanced level, given to those previously trained in Odissi or folk forms of Orissa. A batch of ten students is admitted once in three years, who are offered a monthly stipend of Rs.750. There are also other students seeking "private" training at the centre who pay the same amount and intend to give the entrance audition for getting admission into the institute, the next time around. It is not necessary for the latter to have prior training in dance. Two students from the interning batch are chosen for the repertory, and continue to teach at the centre alongside, with five dance teachers, including two Gurus who are visiting faculty at the centre, namely; Guru Durga Charan Ranbir and Guru Kanduri Charan Behra. Two different styles of Odissi are being currently taught to the same batch of students, at the centre, namely, Guru Kelucharan

Mohapatra style and Guru Deba Prasad Das style of Odissi. The institute also follows a dress code. It is compulsory to wear a half sari during the class, following the uniform codified by *Kalakshetra*⁵; suits are strictly not allowed. Training in music, *taal* and Sanskrit literature form a core part of the course structure, which is considered to be an advantage over private centres.

Srjan- Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Odissi Nrityabasa:

The institute, established in 1993, run by his son Ratikant Mohapatra and daughter-in-law, Sujata Mohapatra, follows a specific course outline, involving minimum six years of training period (Pl.4, p. 84). Dance theory is included in the curriculum, introduced to the students only in their second year of training. The strength of students at the centre is around thirty-five⁶ out of which fifteen comprise the junior batch and twenty students constitute the senior batch, mostly females; however, only ten were attending the practise sessions during the field- work of this research. Few are selected and promoted to the repertory from the senior batch, on completion of their training at the institute; they perform regularly in festivals, and are permitted to continue with their individual work alongside.

Establishing a “strong archive” on Odissi is the primary task at hand for Ratikant currently, so as to consolidate its highly varied history, such that world over, a single, unified history of Odissi is recognized (Pl.5 and Pl. 6 on p. 85) Given the position of the centre and the legacy associated with it, this comes as an obvious move so that one can further establish and validate one’s authority over the form.

⁵ *Kalakshetra*, an institute devoted to the arts, was established in 1936, in the suburbs of Chennai, by Rukmini Devi Arundale. It’s a leading institute of Bharata Natyam and played a primary role in reviving and establishing Indian culture during the struggle for independence.

⁶ Figure quoted by Ratikant Mohapatra, in one of the conversations during field work. (October, 2007)

The institute organizes varied performing arts festivals all through the year (refer to Chapter- I for detailed list of the festivals organized by Srjan). The institute also confers Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Award, annually, to distinguished persons in the field of performing arts, namely, dance, theatre, music and cinema, and grants scholarships, *Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Yuva Pratibha Samman*, to young promising Odissi artists, along with a sum of Rs. 10, 000, he/ she is eligible to attend “cost- free dance- training sessions at the institute for one calendar year”⁷.

Tridhara run by Gajendra Panda:

Initially set up by Guru Deba Prasad Das in early 80’s, this institute was established by his disciple Gajendra Panda after his Guru’s sudden demise. Tridhara symbolized the three streams of dance- classical, folk and tribal- for Guru Deba Prasad Das, and he sought the origin of classical in ‘tribal’ and ‘folk’. Gajendra Panda seeks to establish and propagate the same through his work (Pl.7, p. 86).

Gandharva Mahavidyalaya:

As for her Guru, Kelucharan Mohapatra, preparing a dancing body, was the primary objective of the training, so it is for Madhavi Mudgal and her teaching of dance. The expertise in one’s technique and dissemination of the same to students forms a core area of work in her class, where a reason behind every movement and every expression is explained to the students. Also, it becomes a responsibility of the Guru to guide the student so that she can be a complete dancer and be on her own once she graduates from the centre. Madhavi Mudgal makes it a point to teach everything to her *shishyas* from dance steps, *taal*, music and *mudra* to other essential components for a performance such as make- up, hair, costume, stage set- up, lighting and so on (Pl.8, p. 87). Although, one does accept that the Guru- shishya relationship has tremendously changed with time, but one “cannot claim that the institutes do not produce serious dancers”⁸. The relationship is

⁷ Source: Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Award 2007 Brochure, Srjan, Bhubaneswar, 2007.

⁸ Madhavi Mudgal in the interview conducting during the field work, February 2008.

more open; the boundaries of different life- style are diffused as the present Odissi teachers come from a similar urban educated background as their students. Earlier, if it was the whole system of values and religion, which became a part of dance training, where Gurus imparted knowledge on values, culture and spirituality, in the present context the teachers, in addition, play the role of a friend, confidant and counsellor to the students.

Jayantika- Mayadhar Raut School of Odissi Dance:

Presently run by Guru Mayadhar Raut' s daughter, Madhumita Raut, under his guidance, the institute was started in 1980s, after Guru Mayadhar Raut moved out of Shriram Bhartiya Kala Kendra, to establish his own centre. The institute operates from their residence, in New Delhi. She lays stress on following certain uniform codes for her students, bright coloured suits, specifically shades of red, pink and yellow, "to generate positive energy", which she introduced in her class fifteen years ago, she was praised by her father who recollected that Rukmini Devi used to follow similar code in Kalakshetra. Madhumita also insists on students wearing a *bindi* on the forehead "otherwise during the performances they feel awkward putting on *bindi*, *kajal* etc.". She stresses on certain typically Indian habits, which are good for a dancer's body; suggests that one must sit in the squatted position for at least an hour in a day, which makes thigh muscles more flexible such that floor movements are carried out more easily.

Nrityashilp- Guru Surendranath Jena Odissi Dance Foundation:

Pratibha Jena Singh, daughter and disciple of Guru Surendranath Jena, teaches at the institute where her father first found and established his own style: Triveni Kala Sangam in Delhi. The initial part of training comprises of teaching basic steps, *khandis*, *arasas* and the basic repertoire constituting five initial items, namely; *Ganesh Mangalacharan*, *Battu*, *Basant Pallavi*, *Oriya Abhinaya- Bhangi Chahaan* and *Dasavatar*, as formulated by *Jayantika* and commonly followed by most of the dance styles. After the student becomes comfortable with these items, the training heads towards the specific style created by Guru Surendranath Jena; the 24 basic steps formulated by him, based on the

sculptures on Konark walls, similar to the *karanas* described in the *Natyasastra*, but with a different technique at its basis, are followed by *khandis* and *arasas*. Only then the pupil is taught the items composed by Guru Surendranath Jena. Pratibha Jena stresses on the fact that one cannot simply learn the items, even if one has obtained prior training in Odissi, in a different style, it is essential for him/ her to start from the basics, to understand the technique as it works in Guru Surendranath Jena's style. This is one of the reasons, why the style is not often collaborated with other styles of Odissi and reserves a specific space for itself outside the mainstream Odissi.

The style is also characterized by its costume; the sari is tied in a typical *Sambalpuri dhoti* style, which is not followed by any other Odissi school. The school is quite open and does not mark any restrictions on the students from delving into other dance activities, be it a learning a new form or experimenting with Odissi, however, hampering with the items composed by the Guru is strictly not allowed, one is rather advised to use the technique as the base to develop individual work, pertaining to the style or growing from it. In Pratibha's words, "since the students have learnt this vocabulary, it is but natural for them to create something out of it. What I insist on is not to use direct compositions of Guruji, for some other piece, or to change his items in any way, but rather to use his very different technique in one's own individual ventures"⁹.

Chittaranjan Acharya- The Legacy of Art; Organization for Multi- Dimensional Cultural Upliftment:

An engineer by profession, he was initiated into the form during his college days and obtained training in all the three major styles of Odissi and later on trained directly under Guru Pankaj Charan Das. He evolved a different method to teach dance, despising the conventional structure of demonstration and emulation, to his first student, who was deaf. She was the prime subject for which he evolved his own method to teach Odissi, where visualization of rhythm became the basis for introducing rhythm to her body. Acharya emphasises on construction of body through developing knowledge of the basics- pose,

⁹ As told during the class sessions, and innumerable interactions afterwards.

foot- steps, *charis*, body structure, a sense of rhythm. Singing, while dancing, is a very crucial part of training. He has had a very limited following, because he “does not arrange programs for the students”, his *raison d’etre*, for training his very few students, namely, his daughter, Asmita Kar Mahapatra, Shakti, Falguni Sengupta and Mithilesh.

The whole procedure of the teaching method devised is just the reverse as compared to that for “normal” children, more appropriately, a non- conventional experiment to imbibe interest in a disinterested and a void brain. Thus the first criterion is to develop an interest into the dance form and the Guru. Acharya stands by his belief that “a deserving Guru is automatically respected if the student shows an increasing interest and the teacher reciprocates this very reciprocating phenomenon” and is an indication of devotion of the disciple towards the Guru.

The initial stages of training involve the ground- work, to first understand and be accepted by the student. On the other hand, to make the student psychologically fit to accept the teacher and his/ her teaching. The teaching method should correspond with the natural life routine of the student. Two things need to be developed foremost, while teaching:

1) Development of appreciation of the subject

2) Technical teaching method

This would ensure “**reception, retention and reproduction of the subject matter**”. He uses the approach to break down the elements, deconstruct the form into movement structure, expressions, *taal* and music, and then initiate the student into the form. The learning process starts with developing an appreciation for dance in the student and goes on further to build a sense of rhythm along with the movement structure. The student was initiated into *bhangis* through the method of ‘walking to dance’; while walking in *tala*, body gestures were included in the walk, without involving any complicated footwork.

He goes on to facial expressions (independent of the theme), moving from irregular form to symbolic geometrical patterns. The problem which the student often faced was that of missing basic *laya* and its synchronisation with lyrics. The device formulated by him to rectify this setback in the student was to train him/ her to enact all *bhavas* and *sancharis*, in free style, with background music and no vocal support. This according to him does not result in mechanical dancing; importance is rather given to '*natya abhinaya*' instead of '*nrityaabhinaya*' (Pl.9, p. 88).

4.3 Current Nemesis of the Teaching System

There is often a debate between which is more productive- *Guru- shishya parampara* or the university system of training in dance. As Chatterjee has pointed out, "Indian dance training, which implies the learning not only of the dance but also of a different cognitive mode and a whole way of life, an aesthetic, a demeanour, a religiosity" the question oft raised is that can it be conducted through the university, recognizing the fact that "it is not accidental that all of the great dance artists of recent years, both teachers and performers, have evolved from the *guru- shishya* system and not from the university" (Chatterjee, 1996; 85- 86). Also the heads of such institutes claim that it is only with a personal, individual guidance from the Guru that an enthusiastic learner can be moulded into a dancer. This certainly requires a more serious and rigorous training which the university system often lacks.¹⁰

One needs to view the changing configuration of the relationship between the Guru and the *shishya*; the Guru's interaction within the given structure, and with- out, under the

¹⁰Shyamhari Chakra, a dance critic, based in Bhubaneswar, states, " the worst thing happening to Odissi Research Centre is that it is a state- run centre and they don't have faculty members. Gurus teach privately. Now Durga Charan Ranbir is teaching there as a guest lecturer. It was long back when Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra left the centre. He was not happy with the way things were happening there and so far Odissi Research Centre has not produced a single Odissi dancer, whom you identify as a product of the centre. Many people were trained there but you can't identify them as its product. I am not thorough with their teaching module, but their primary work is not to teach but to engage with research work, documentation, archival work, and they have gone far away from that. Its been 17- 18 years since it was established, but it has not progressed much. D.N. Pattnaik is a senior scholar living here, but he is not associated with the centre, Ratikant Mohapatra does not go there to teach, to talk, at least once in a while, to hold a seminar, an appreciation course, nothing of the sort is organized by the centre" (in a personal conversation with the research student, October, 2007).

present circumstances, the understanding and reception of Odissi body as shaped by these undercurrents and imbibed by the young dancers, the latter's interaction within their aesthetic space, performance space, the class- room space and the social space.

Pathy confirms that the *parampara* becomes constricted, teaching technique in a form rigidly circumscribed by the individual Guru's personal style of embodiment. (Pathy, 2007; 129) The second generation dancers tend to follow the same method by hardly adding anything new to the *parampara*; very few digress and evolve their own methodology of teaching dance¹¹. They stick to performing a "market- tested", 'certified' product and prescribe the same codes to their students, resulting in a "similar sustained suppression of creativity in the body of students they have groomed". Gurus don't imbibe any innovation or techniques to enhance "independence of vision" in the *shishyas* (ibid. 130), because they never felt the need to do so and the teaching system also did not give a provision to accommodate such creativity. It is assumed that the creativity is enhanced through the 'taught' method, which need not have some 'specialized' techniques to teach 'choreography', the student engrains that simultaneously with the normal learning process.

Although it was the Gurus themselves, who initially brought innovations in the traditional practices of Odissi, and shaped it according to the demands of modern

¹¹ Pratibha Jena on innovating and bringing new elements to teaching and performance: "**I have not thought about it because we follow what we were taught, the same pattern as taught by the Guru, creating more within that technique. Yes, but according to the changing trends, when group dance is appreciated and is more in demand, I am trying to add to Guruji's style on that front, which he never used to do, this is where I can incorporate more into Guruji's repertoire**" (in a personal conversation with the research student, May 2008). xxx

Sujata Mohapatra on the teaching method followed by her; "teaching of Guruji (Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra) was so clear that's its very obvious that you don't need to ask him further how to teach (guidelines on teaching). You follow the same. If in between any intricate work is required then Guruji demarcates that, the "filigree" work in between the steps. Mobility between different positions is very intricate which only a maestro can do. Guruji used to make us follow it in such a way, that after learning from him, it became easier for us to teach these things. **I never especially add to the way Guruji teaches, to Guruji's purity. I don't want to spoil anything. If a maestro has done something there is nothing left to add, either you have to make a new choreography or think of a new dimension and I am not for that because what Guruji has done is so large, first we should do that, I have not yet finished (doing) that, you need to have enough knowledge to do many things (to explore). I never thought of doing anything extra to what he has done.**" Sujata Mohapatra, after five years of training under Guruji, started teaching other students in his presence, mainly the junior group, and then later moved on to teaching senior students (emphasis added) (Sujata Mohapatra in an interview with the researcher, October 2007).

performance and public sphere, they later idealized these structures and bottled them up in a sacrosanct space, devoid of any kind of leeway for experimentation. Exemplified by Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra's method of teaching and his Odissi practice¹², primarily because his teaching tenure was the longest (1926 - 2004) and the most influential,¹³ it was as a result of his market- oriented teaching, that most of the established names in dance got attracted to his style and sooner or later accomplished their training in Odissi under him. A kind of vicious circle was formed, where the name of the dancer establishes and popularises the name of the Guru, which leads to more dancers, already obtaining training under other Gurus, shifting to the more popular one¹⁴.

Also another discrepancy occurs in within the style of Odissi owing to what the Guru teaches and what continues in the name of his legacy. This is more visible in Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra's style of Odissi, which evolved with time; following the structure of Odissi, he brought in major changes in *chauka* position and the movement of the torso, which is amiss in the earlier generation of his students such as that of Sonal Mansingh, Madhavi Mudgal, Jhelum Paranjpe and others. Over the time, the *chauka* position, as he practised and taught, became more similar to Bharatanatyam's *araimandi*, with ankles coming in closer, rendering more restriction to the movement of the torso, according to the propagators of the later version of his style. This fact is accepted and glorified by his son (and manager of his institute) Ratikant Mohapatra¹⁵; it is much visible in the body of

¹² "If Kelu gave it a more dynamic form, to cater to the world market, in the initial stages, it was he only to confine it to a bounded form, for the later generations and made it into a sacrosanct art which could not change with the new demands of the dance market". (Pathy, 2007; 151)

¹³ Guru Mayadhar Raut is an exception, who was a part of *Jayantika* in 1958 and continues to teach at his residence- in New Delhi, under the auspices of his centre, named *Jayantika*. "Even though his students are not that popular, they have been hard- working students and are still performing, Guruji had a huge following".

¹⁴ The phenomenon of changing Gurus, in Odissi training, is very common, where the purpose is not so much to train and challenge the body, by undergoing different techniques and styles, but more to encash on the name of the Guru. So much so that most of the times the not- so- known a Guru, is hardly ever acknowledged, under whom the dancer was initiated into the form. (Ranjana Gauhar, Yamini Krishnamurty, Rekha Tandon initially obtained training in Odissi under Guru Surendranath Jena, hardly acknowledge him as their Guru). Also those who attend only a few workshops under a renowned Guru, and never actually followed a *parampara* under him, use his/ her name to further their ambitions. (as told by Sujata Mohapatra in an interview with the research student, October, 2007).

¹⁵ Interview with Ratikant Mohapatra; A: How in totality, choreographies in Odissi have evolved? In your style as well as the other styles?

R: It has evolved tremendously. Earlier, when we used to dance it, feet in *chauka* position used to be one foot apart, it used to be very wide, consequently the body weight used to get divided between the two sides. This caused an imbalance in the body, an imperfection in its aesthetic beauty, it becomes linear and hence

the Guru's daughter-in-law Sujata Mohapatra, who is acknowledged to possess the best suited body for his later enunciation of the form. The evolution of the dance style becomes problematic when the earlier pioneering dancers, who disseminate it further to their students, as they initially imbibed it, do not accept the later changes and the later generation of dancers insist on the changes made by the Guru in the later stage, to be the "correct" form of Odissi. The conflict between the two generations is more or less the result of propagation of *parampara* as a closed system, initiated by the Guru, curtailing the present students from exploring ways of "embodying movement that accesses personal creativity". Instead of basing it on one's own creative structure by personalizing the language of style and using it in an individual way making experiments and explorations more acceptable and boundaries of Odissi more flexible, many of the Odissi schools stick to what was made acceptable in the market by the Guru and by strictly following the codes set by him that "the original structure and method of embodiment of the composition should be regarded as the 'correct' version, everything else being incorrect (Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra; as told to Tandon, 2005, 131). The process of teaching furthers a restraint in the student in accepting any kind of change, relying totally and absolutely on the Guru and his/ her word, being a part of all that the Guru is producing¹⁶, and ultimately standing up to the image of an "ideal" student as defined by the Guru. Here is an excerpt of a chat conversation with an Odissi student Ranjana Dave, training under Jhelum Paranjpe, at Smitalaya in Mumbai, who follows Guru Kelucharan

the body tends to swing a lot. Guruji reduced the distance between the feet in *chauka* position, he brought it down to *dui mukha pad*, keeping the structure intact as in *chauka*, but it is now rendered as *adh chauka*, as visible in *dui mukh pada*. The body weight was shifted to the central axis. This increases the body control and is less strenuous for the dancer and then the torso movements, of shifting it from the central axis towards the side, front and back, circular becomes less harder for the dancer. This has been a major contribution of Guruji.

A: How has the teaching of Odissi evolved?

R: Naturally, as the technique was evolving it was simultaneously transmitted into the students' body. The technique seen in the students of 1980s is very different from what you see in the students of 1990s who received a more revised training. Now post 2000, what the students are doing today is a result of Guruji's work, through my accomplice with him spanning 35 years. What we do today is a highly refined, polished work, keeping the same concept devised by Guruji 50 years ago".

¹⁶ If a student initiates his/ her own ideas into one's own choreographic works, they are often forsaken by the Guru and claimed to be non-traditional, and not accepting the changing demands of the modern lifestyle and likewise changing demands of the dance market. It is only when the student comes on his/ her own (often by breaking away from the Guru causing a distaste in the relationship) that he/ she can further his/ her own perception of the dance form.

Mohapatra style of Odissi. Ranjana regularly attends summer workshops held over a period of 2- 4 weeks, annually, in June at Srjan (Bhubaneswar) (May, 2008)¹⁷:

"Ranjana; in fact there are some differences between *Srjan's* style and *Jhelum Tai's* (*Jhelum Parnjpe*) style too.

Srjan has brought its *chauka* to *dvimukhapada*.., their torso movement is minimal whereas *tai's* is more prominent and its a moderately wide *chauka*

aastha: So how do u manage to find your way into it/ out of the style?

do you compromise with your vocabulary?

Ranjana: last time when I went my torso movement was still a little crude...shoulders and all. They kept telling me not to sway so much and at times I ended up not doing torso movements at all. I had this slight stiffness in my torso language since I returned.

but now I m working it out...

Actually for a while working with the *Srjan* style helped me out because I had this major hip deflection problem

It would jut out to one side, with less emphasis on body I was able to bring that to the correct way and now since I know what to expect in terms of style, I am more careful about unconsciously absorbing influences

and it is not only a question of my root style, but also preferences - in Odissi I think a medium *chauka* looks best, making it too narrow seems a little strange

aastha: do you think that *kelu babu* (Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra) changed it over the time because your guru would have been much more senior to *Sujata ji* (*Sujata Mohapatra*) and what *Kelu babu* was practising later on?

Ranjana: yeah

Ranjana: and now it is like *araimandalam*

aastha: Did *shibu da* (*Ratikant Mohapatra*) give you any explanation?

Ranjana: Yeah, he said it was an attempt to make Odissi more refined

but somehow *jhelum tai's* explanation, though not completely satisfying appealed more; she says it may have been because he found people who weren't able to bend their knees enough to maintain the proper appearance of the *chauka*.. the wider it is the more one needs to bend... she was like, its probably because you guys are so stressed out

which is true

aastha: that' s strange because *Madhavi ji* still maintains the wider *chauka* position...

Ranjana: yeah, not everyone is reducing the size of *chauka* and it looks good

and her students keep it good

aastha: so when you come back for your class under *Jhelum ji* does she object to anything which your body has inculcated but does not approve with her?

Ranjana: I do not know why...in fact even I feel that I had a better *chauka* when I started off :)

Ranjana: and oh yes she does object :)

aastha: and then you have to recondition your body back to the "unrefined" way?

Ranjana: that is what *Guruji* taught her and *tai* does not believe in one size fits all.

She feels that the rigid torso style suits *Sujata apa* extremely well but does not look good on anyone else

aastha: rigid as in?

How does her torso movement differ from yours or from the rest?

Ranjana: *Sujata apa's* torso movement is minimal compared to what *tai* teaches us

¹⁷ The chat conversation has been altered minimally to make it understandable, however the font and the abbreviations have been deliberately kept intact.

in fact Shibu da himself pointed it out

when older students like Madhavi Mudgal learnt their *chauka* was very wide
look at the Priyambada Mohanty's *chauka* in D N Patnaik's book....that is super wide
but he narrowed it down with passing batches

aastha: **Why would your guru want you to go and attend the workshop when she has to work on your body again when you are back?**

Ranjana: because all she cares about is that we learn Odissi

even if I have to switch styles to do it someday she wont mind

and when I went last time I was yet to understand the way I moved

now that I know what my flaws are, its easier to stay away from what I don' t want"

(Ranjana is a journalist with a major daily, in Mumbai, and aspires to do her masters in Arts and Aesthetics from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi).

The Guru's fixation with 'purity', to protect his/ her original compositions, apart from setting standards of technical excellence, has however proved futile in terms of artistic freedom, which is curtailed to a large extent (Tandon, 2005; 135). During the teaching process, a few principles are continually imbibed within the students, which they are bound to follow to remain in the cocoon provided by the Guru, which is regarded to be the safest and the one yielding the best fruits.

Criteria for being an "ideal" student

The definition of an ideal student as Sonal Man Singh describes it;

*"Kaakasnaanam Baka- dhyaanam Shwaana- nidra tathaiva cha,
Alpaahaari, Griha- tyagi ityaeva Vidyaarathi pancha- Lakshanam"*

"A crow' s bath is a quick dip in a puddle of water. Likewise, an ideal knowledge-seeker (disciple) does not spend an unduly long time in bathing and beautifying himself. His concentration is total, just like an egret looking for a catch, while standing on one leg in the water. A dog, even while seemingly asleep, is nevertheless, alert and quick to respond to the slightest signal. Such should be the quick- silver state of consciousness of the student who is alert to every inflection in voice and every gesture of the Guru. He should avoid over- eating or untimely snacks and concentrate on nourishing meals only.

He should approach the Guru, with whole- hearted attention to the teachings”.
(Mansingh, 2007; 3)

Whereas on one hand such eulogizing of *Guru- shishya* relationship, tracing highly revered examples from mythology, touching of Guru’s feet and taking his/ her blessings, usually before and after the class¹⁸, touching one’s ears while uttering the name of the Guru¹⁹ or recitation of *Guru mantra*²⁰ become the norm, on the other hand one also sees the relationship becoming more open and flexible, where the guru and the shishya come from a similar background (usually urban) .interact at a friendly level, without undermining the level of respect for the guru, which a *shishya* must maintain.

Madhavi Mudgal²¹ and Sharmila Mukherjee both agree that the relationship now has become more informal and friendly, as compared to what they shared with their Guru; however, it is necessary to draw a line “lest it becomes disastrous for their training”²².

Pratibha Jena stresses on three basic requirements for being an ideal student, namely, discipline, practice and patience and believes that an ideal teacher must sieve the shishya off his/ her bad elements and show him/ her the good ones, (“*andar ki burayi dikhani chahiye aur gunon ko nikharna chahiye*”) and subsequently show them the right path. She “enjoys teaching the most because it brings a different kind of satisfaction, to extract the best from a *shishya*”; however, she points out that the teacher should not be taken over by commercialisation of art, which completely ruins the art and the relationship with the student. Likewise, Sujata Mohapatra stresses on devotion, determination and

¹⁸ Madavi Mudgal on *shishyas* touching her feet: “I cannot tell my students that touch my feet, that would be *nakli shraddha* (pretentious reverence), if they feel like doing it on their own, then its fine. I tell them the same because unless they are self- driven its meaningless. Its fine, you don’t have to do it just because ten other students are doing it, its ok in that case if you don’t do it (touch the feet)”.

¹⁹ Mitali, an Odissi student at Srjan, on touching her ears while uttering her Guru’s name: “Shibu sir (Ratikant Mohapatra) has told us that one should not utter the name of the Guru, but still if you need to then you must hold your ears while doing so. Also I heard in a *Pravachan*, that there are five important beings in your life and you are forbidden to take their name: *ma, baba, guru, husband aur bhagvan* (mother, father, Guru, husband and Lord)”.

²⁰ *Gurur Brahma Gurur Vishnu Gurur Devo Maheshwarah, Guruh Sakshat Parabrahma Tasmay Shri Guruve Namah*: Guru is Brahma, Guru is Vishnu, Guru is also Maheshvar, Guru is above the trinity; He is even beyond Brahma, to that Guru I Bow.

²¹ “In today’s context, it’s a different kind of relationship, they respect me but we can have fun, we can go out, eat *golgappas*,.. its this kind of relationship.” Madhavi Mudgal, in an interview with the research student (February 2008).

²² Sharmila Mukherjee in an interview conducted through email, May 2008.

discipline as the basic requirements to be a good student, whereas for Sharmila Mukherjee it is the hard work and the desire to aim for perfection, to devote one's time and energy completely to dance that creates an accomplished dancer. Also, she suggests that one should not be greedy because "financially, the dance field can be a strain in the beginning when one is young and starting out"²³. It is a mutual thought, which is equally articulated by the dancers and the students²⁴ where "complete surrender" to the Guru is emphasized as the only way to imbibe the art form.

Most of the current dance teachers in Odissi claim that the current generation of students, in their urgency to perform, lack the kind of "*saadhna*" which the form demands²⁵. Also, it is the parents who wish to see their children perform on the stage as quickly as possible it is very few who realize the requirements of a classical form and have the requisite patience.

"Everybody cannot be a soloist"

Most of the teachers stress on the fact that it is only a few who are "God-gifted" that can become solo dancers. Devotion towards the form and one's own practise are seen as major factors in contributing to one's growth as a solo dancer. Ratikant Mohapatra states that stamina and understanding are two most important prerequisites to be a solo dancer, which every one does not have, ten girls would fit well in a group, out of which perhaps only one can turn into a soloist. He further states that, slowly solo dancing is deteriorating, with the "*manch pravesh*"²⁶ rarely taking place for a dancer to mark the beginning of his/ her career in dance. Officially the students are supposed to perform after six years of basic learning, but because of transfer of parents to another station or

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ "The most important thing is surrender to the teacher. That kind of reverence has to be there for the guru, where the student accepts his/ her guidance in its full, with no doubts and questions. Stamina is very important along with regularity and a natural talent. The base fact is willingness, stamina, regularity and time"; Reela Hota in a telephonic interview; May 2008.

²⁵ "There are good students at our centre. Compared to other institutes, students trained at our centre are quite capable because we don't bring them on the stage that quickly. That is the reason why they have to wait (to perform on the stage)." Sujata Mohapatra

²⁶ The formal, ritual entrance of a dancer on the stage as a soloist for the first time. An offshoot of the concept of "*arengatram*" in Bharatanatyam.

because of higher education, many of them are unable to complete the requisite training period. The basic training period however varies in the institutes.

Madhavi Mudgal holds the belief that it is only by God's grace that one out of a thousand dancers can be moulded into a solo performer, but the rest gain an appreciation towards the art which makes the Guru's work fruitful. Contradicting herself, she states that she, however, trains all her students to become independent dancers, to be on their own, to be able to handle lights, their costume, make- up, and manage stage- presence; one cannot deny the fact that often there is just one protégée eulogized by the Guru as his/ her successor.

This reflects the urgent need for creating a greater number of varied spaces for dance, where the void left by the pioneers is filled up by their immediate successors; it is the "nine hundred ninety nine" of the rest, who either give up the practice immediately after passing out from the institute, because of other priorities, few who continue to perform under the Guru's "repertory company" and very few who, unable to find a space in the league, attempt to create a niche outside, by searching for their own language in dance.

Matrimony is another reason for most of the senior students to discontinue dance, which is more apparent in Bhubaneswar and not as much in Delhi, where Madhavi Mudgal and Madhumita Raut both claim that their students still continue to dance after taking hold of their family life. So is the case with the disciples of Pratibha Jena, whose students usually opt for a 'maternity leave' but return to dance, once they get acclimatized to the changes in their life.

The question that arises here is: are these students given substantial platforms to establish themselves as soloists? After all, only a limited number can be accommodated in I.C.C.R. (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) and S.N.A' s (Sangeet Natak Akademi) annual festivals, thronged by the ones who are constantly networking and outsourcing, under their Guru's name.

Only a few Odissi teachers vocalize the opinion of seeing classical dance as a solo art, however, the teaching system and the performance space provided to the students does not guide them towards becoming soloists²⁷ (Pl.10, p.89).

Pratibha Jena conducts individual training classes for her students, preparing each one of them to be a solo dancer (Pl.11, p.90). Most of the performances done by her students are solo, as the style retains the identity of being a solo- based dance form, defying the clichéd Odissi form. She carries on with Guru Surendranath Jena's belief that a dance is a form of *bhakti*, which is a one- to- one interaction between the devotee and the deity. Hence the whole purpose of *bhakti* through dance is lost in a group, while teaching and while performing. It should be noted that 'group' dance as often presented in Indian classical dances is much different from what is understood as 'choreography'. The former, in this context, is often a solo dance composition turned into group, working on different permutation and combination of space and the geometry. Since in a group dance the coordination between dancers, visual effects, space equations become the decisive factors for perfection, the dancers tend to clone each other, where the main objective of the body is to be the mirror image of the others. Hence, in a group dance the idea of realizing one's individuality through dance is somewhat sidelined. It is, undoubtedly solo performances which not only make the dancer realize his/ her own potential, but also establish him/ her as a dancer for the audiences. This can be seen as one of the reasons for deterioration of good, professional solo dancers. However, with the changing times and trends, one does succumb to the market demands, and opt for group presentations; for it is very recently that Pratibha Jena began to experiment with duets and group compositions, restricted to one or two items, in a recital.

²⁷ Madhumita Raut; "The entire concept of classical dancing is to explore the *rasa* theory and that can only happen if it's a solo repertoire. xxx

Mayadhar; Untill and unless you become a solo dancer you cannot be a professional. Hence, the dance won't develop further. It constitutes of *Bhakti bhavana, adi rasa hai*, one cannot become a dancer that easily, and it is necessary to find a good Guru to become a good dancer.

(In an interview with the research student, May, 2008)

The Guru's name and legacy

These two are of foremost importance to the teaching system²⁸. Each Guru moulds the system depending on his or her own personality, background and convictions (Iyengar, 2006; 35), such that the two tend to reflect each other's identity. Consequently, the by-product of this relationship, i.e. the *shishya*, carries within himself/ herself, the essence of the Guru's teachings, through the system prescribed by the latter. However, in the long term it is the Guru who takes over the name of the institute. For the Guru as well, the students become an extension of his/ her name or style. During the course of learning the dance form, it is eventually imbibed into the student's mind that the Guru is not a mere mediator between the form and the learner, but also the ultimate authority, and becomes the ideal audience for the *shishya*²⁹.

Most of these dance institutes, however, are an extension of the founder Guru's image himself, his style of dance, his goals, objectives, and work ethics are premiered and promoted under his name such that even after his demise, the institute, the teachers and the students are bound to uphold his legacy. This further defines the functioning of the institute, its course work, morals and values as imbibed in young minds along with the dance structure and ultimately creating and moulding the Odissi body.

²⁸ On the definition of an "ideal Guru"; Sujata Mohapatra states, "the main thing is how the student respects you, how do they carry your name. Teachers also want to train the students such that they can take their (Guru's) name a little higher."

²⁹ Diya Sen (Odissi dancer/ student/ teacher, learning dance under Madhavi Mudgal, also practices Thangta, a martial art form from Manipur) : "I don't call my friends, not that I perform that often, in groups of course, but not solos, but I just called them for my first performance. I had rather have a group of 20, but those who are good critics; my family and family friends, who understand and love me and my love for art and understand the struggle that I have been through and the people who know me a little bit, and know how much dedication I have put into it and they are eager to see what I am doing, if I have improved on it. A part of it definitely has to comprise of Madhavi, Leela Venkataraman, Madhavi's husband, he is somebody I would always want to be there, he is the best critic, he is straight, he is right, he is cut-throat. Madhavi ji, of course has to be there, although it would be very humiliating for her to be in the audience and see me perform. She is sitting there watching me, I know I am not doing justice to it, I know the way she is teaching I am not giving back to her in full.

A: Why do you think so?

Diya: I know so. I always have this pressure on me that if I ever perform badly, its insulting, people will say that she has performed well, but it will also come against her, by people who don't know how she teaches, of course all the people who understand dance won't blame her because they know her, but I still would not want any kind of misunderstanding, misconception on it".

4.4 The Imminent Voices of Odissi

Most of the current generation students of Odissi dance³⁰ aspire for an integrated learning, where dance should not be seen in isolation; training should be supplemented with either other styles of dance, both Indian and western, or other art forms, emphasizing on more practical and interactive ways of learning and imbibing knowledge rather than promoting 'arm- chair' thinking. The current generation vocalizes the need for more platforms to interact with other dance forms at an inter- cultural and multi- cultural level, by promoting exchange programmes with dance students across the nation and abroad. Following are some excerpts of interviews of a few senior students, from Delhi and Bhubaneswar that throw some light on their perception of the technique, the form, the teaching system and their aspirations.

In a personal conversation with around 5- 7 students at Odissi Research Centre, Bhubaneswar, most preferred to stay silent, only three of them were vocal about their opinions:

A: Do you compose items in Odissi?

Student 1(Shikha): No, not yet.

A: Why not? In folk dance you have, why not in classical?

Student 1: Yes I have composed items for folk, but not in classical because I don't have that much talent.

Student 2 (Pallavi, Guru Pankaj Charan Das' s granddaughter): chance...

Student 1: No it is not about chance... well actually that is also there, I won't get a chance to do it (to compose my own items).

A: Why do you think so?

Student 1: Is it necessary to talk about that?

³⁰ The group of students, interviewed, in the present case primarily comprised of those at the senior most level of training, who have been performing regularly i.e. constitute the repertory group of their teachers and have also been teaching the form, either under their guru, at the same institute or on their own.

A: Yes, tell me...

Student 1: There are a lot of big artists around whereas we all are very junior. We won't get a chance to do so, therefore I haven't thought of it.

A: What do you need to do to become a 'big' (established) artist?

Student 3 (Sasmita): The first and foremost criteria is to be a good human being, to become a renowned artist, you need to be a good- hearted person to grow as an artist.

A: So what do you think about those who get awards, attain name and fame, and make it big, is it enough to be good- hearted?

Student 1: No, you also need to work hard for it and you need to have money.

Student 2: People don't care for talent these days.

Student 3: To make it big, firstly you need money and then power.

A personal conversation with Ravi Ratan Sahoo, originally a folk dancer, who hails from Sambalpur district of Orissa, currently training in Odissi at Odissi Research Centre:

A: How did you decide to join Odissi Research Centre?

Ravi: There are no good Gurus of Odissi in the interiors. More female students are there, so it feels awkward being the only male student. Also, you don't even get to see many Odissi performances in those regions, its only available on television.

I decided to come here, because they asked for a dance experience of five years, and not specifically in Odissi, so I came to give the examination for scholarship. During the interview, they said, "you don't have any prior training in Odissi". I retorted, "I spent a thousand rupees and travelled all the way, you should have rejected me earlier, why did you accept my application if that was the criteria". Out of 50- 100 students, who appeared for the exam, only ten were finally selected.

A: So what is the difference between folk and classical, in the way you have learnt them? What do you enjoy more?

Ravi: Folk dance is totally immersed in my body now. When I imbibe classical form wholly, then I will start enjoying that as well.

A: What do you plan to do after you graduate from this institute?

Ravi: I don't wish to perform much, I had rather teach Odissi in my region and teach folk dance here, in the city, because the audience would like to see different performance genres. In my village, people don't know much about Odissi, because of lack of information and knowledge of the form, because seminars on Odissi are not organized in that region. I want to grow further, I don't want to stay limited in my dance, that's why I wanted to learn Odissi, I would like to learn Bharatanatyam also, but there is not much scope of it in Orissa.

A: What is the difference between training in classical dance and training in folk dance?

Ravi: There is no systematically formulated training routine for folk; I would like to make it more systematized, compose more solo items based on folk techniques. They say, "What you learn in a class room is classical but what you learn outside is folk", I would like to bring folk to the class room so that it achieves the same status as classical or semi-classical, which is necessary for the growth of folk dance. People in the city who have the sources are able to avail a platform, which is not so for the artists based in the countryside. If I could, I would establish a Folk Dance Academy for them, where 200-300 casual artists would be employed.

In a conversation with Diya Sen, previously trained by Sharmila Mukherjee, in Kolkata, she later joined Madhavi Mudgal and has been learning Odissi under her for last 9 years. She is also trained *Thang-ta*, a martial art from Manipur, and is currently 'educating children through dance' at a school in Noida (Pl. 12, p. 91):

A: If you could bring in any changes in the teaching style, perhaps to the method in which you were learning Odissi previously, under Sharmila Mukherjee, and then later under Madhavi Mudgal, what would those changes be?

Diya: I don't know at that time what changes I could have brought because most of the time you start thinking because your teacher teaches you to think. I don't know how Madhavi di started thinking about dance so technically, may be some people are born with it. But, I wonder how I started thinking about the technique so much, because you are just not trained into thinking about dance in a particular way, and half of us are not taught to think usually. Madhavi is the only teacher who lets you be, lets you think, lets you question the dance form, allows you to question yourself, question her. As her student, you have the freedom to do so.

A: Does she have answers for your questions?

Diya: Yes. At times she gets annoyed and sometimes she gets irritated. Sometimes when we ask her similar questions or too serious questions and she is probably occupied with other thoughts, she gets a little hassled, "don't question me that much that I only get baffled." I think I have this terrible habit of thinking too much but she is to be credited for that, entirely. Why the angle is 45 degrees and not 90 degrees, if you grasp the logic, it is beautiful. I love thinking the way she does, it just makes you understand yourself, your body, and your movement so much that half of the major task is achieved.

A: Would you like to bring in any changes if you had a chance, to the compositions you learn, or in the form?

Diya: Technically no, I don't want to change anything, not at my stage, when I reach her (Madhavi's) stage, perhaps then I would. Even if I don't like it I don't want to change it. I might add what I feel is a part of my personality, what you are, reflects in your dance a lot, the degree of nayika would change. Of course what Madhavi does, I could never do it that way. If I ever reach that stage when I have a right to change... more than change, I would give more of myself to the form, but right now, even if I would think of it, I won't.

A: Is that because you are working under her right now?

Diya: No, because I completely respect what she does, and I have no right to change, because there must be a reason why this was done for so long. Knowing Madhavi,

knowing Guruji, they are the people who have thought of things and made them in a certain way and there must be a reason why they are doing it in that specific way.

A: Agreed, but how do you see the form evolving then?

Diya: True. What you are saying is true. It is essential for me to give my own inputs but at a certain level, I don't think I have reached that level yet. I take a lot of time, I think about it a lot. Because I am not that fast a learner, I take time to figure out how things are happening.

A: What kind of relevance or connection do you feel with the characters you portray through dance?

Diya: The characters of Radha and Krishna are very modern, there is nothing old about them; in the way they are romancing that might be, but it is more beautiful than what we do nowadays. Even modern life has a lot of elements. It's just that we don't look at it that way because it is Radha and Krishna. But if you do, they are just so real, they are the characters, yes, philosophically he is not a man, he is God, but the way it builds around the story, all of them, the Oriya songs are all stories. In our world these days we forget about these little beauties in life.

A: Who comprises your audience?

Diya: I had rather have a group of 20, but those who are good critics: my family and family friends, who understand and love me and my love for art and understand the struggle that I have been through, the people who know me a little bit, and know how much dedication I have put into it and they are eager to see what I am doing, to see if I have improved or not. A part of it definitely has to comprise of Madhavi, Leela Venkataraman, Madhavi's husband, he is somebody I would always want to be there, he is the best critic, he is straight, he is right, he is cut-throat. Madhavi ji of course, its very humiliating for her and watch me perform when she is sitting in the audience, I know I am not doing justice to it, I know the way she is teaching I am not giving back to her in full.

A: Why do you think so?

Diya: I know so.

I always have this pressure on me that if I ever perform badly, its insulting, although, people will say that she has performed well, but it will also come against her, of course people don't know how she teaches, of course people who understand dance won't blame her because they know her, but I still don't want any kind of misunderstanding, misconception about her because I am not able to give my 100% to the performance.

A distinct problem, which resurfaces again and again, while dealing with Indian classical dance, is its repercussions on folk dances. Absence of a viable policy structure, essential patronage by the state and private agencies, and a lack of a functional pedagogy for folk dance has lead to its aspiring practitioners, even though very limited in number, to seek 'classical' as the ideal for systematizing the form's training and restructuring its performance to gain the much desperately needed patronage for the form and its artists, for its bare minimum survival. The issue needs to be dealt with separately. It, however, points to the ominous problem of revival and exaltation of a few dance forms and disparagement of several others.

There is a dichotomy visible between the students, for those hailing from Orissa, learning Odissi is usually a way to be acquainted and stay connected with their culture³¹, whereas during the course of field work, it was found that most of the dancers who started learning the form, a little later in life, made a more informed decision of intentionally choosing Odissi over others because of the structure of the dance form³². Learning a classical dance form comes with "material" advantages in addition to "realizing oneself

³¹ "Odissi is the classical dance of Orissa so as an Oriya I chose Odissi dance" Rutambhara Panda (disciple of Gajendra Panda, Bhubaneswar).

"Odissi is the tradition of Orissa and it is created out of the *Jagannatha parampara* and I stay in Orissa and I love Odissi" Sasmita Prusty (student at Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Odissi Research Centre, Bhubaneswar).

³² "I chose Odissi over other dance forms because Odissi has all what I love; the circular movements and the poses of sculptures mixed with the percussion, in the feet and the torso movement, in addition to the spiritual background", Maria Laura Valdey, (a native of Peru, is trained in salsa, Latin music and Korean martial art, learning Odissi at Srjan, Bhubaneswar, since May 2006).

and yearn for a communion with God”³³, in the present context, which is often accepted yet understated³⁴.

There is a realization, very seldom articulated explicitly, that everybody cannot be “Sanjukta Panigrahi”, and there are only a limited number of dancers who can fill the space created by pioneers, those who are specifically trained to fill up the deliberately-created “ethno- cultural” and blindly- followed festival spaces and only those who possess the unbeatable quality of playing power games and have developed a strong network can be successful at occupying these handful of positions. The current generation of dancers call for an engagement with dance, beyond the fixed notions, of “discipline, devotion and determination”:

Engagement with the Movement Structure and Technique

The students express a need to learn to appreciate the movement structure of the form, the sheer physicality of it. That does not imply underrating the content as opposed to form, but to understand, evolve and experience the dance in its physical structure³⁵. The training process needs to involve imparting of more technique based knowledge, as opposed to a mere emulation of the Guru’s demonstrations. It should include the teaching of techniques, beyond the “basic steps”; the logic and explanation behind every movement, the shifts in balance, the movement structure in isolation of the “items”, which would call for observing and analysing each movement in a “deconstructed” form

³³ “My goal is to tap into my subconscious and reveal to myself through dance, deeper aspects of divinity and its connection with my life. Each dance unravels many layers of existence, many aspects of godhead and a transformational experience of that worldview. I aim to go as deep as I can into that process of understanding.” Jaya C. Mehta (a Delhi based Odissi student, learning the form under Pratibha Jena Singh, practitioner and also a teacher)

³⁴ “Odissi is a classical dance and so we can publicize ourselves by doing such type of dance from which we can get fame”, Suchi Smita Sahoo (Senior disciple and dancer, under Gajendra Panda, Bhubaneswar).
xxx

“I remembered the gorgeous Odissi costume from a classical dance competition in school. I wanted to wear all that and look pretty onstage. There was also some desire to ‘connect with my Indian heritage’, but that was mostly a way of proving myself superior and elite when my seventeen-year-old friends asked me, ‘you’re learning a classical dance? What’s wrong with you?’ ”, Swati Chattopadhyay (a Delhi based Odissi dancer, student of Pratibha Jena Singh, also writes for Delhi based art and culture magazine; The First City).

³⁵ Diya Sen: “ My goal as a dancer is to enjoy movements, moving in a way and learning and enjoying my physical self that can only be achieved when you learn dance”.

so as to render a knowledge of dance as a “tool”, along with the knowledge as prescribed in the canons³⁶. There is an ever-growing lacuna between the dance form and the dancing body; the relationship between the two is rather determined by the relation that *shishya* shares with his/ her Guru and not the way in which one would perceive the dance form individually, as an extension of the body itself, not undermining the Guru’s contribution in the growth of the individual into a dancer. It can be fulfilled if the method of teaching inculcates in the students the feeling of “owning” the technique, so as to feel comfortable in moulding it in any way and deriving their own language from it. It is believed that it takes arduous learning and long years of practise for one to gain a command over the form; which would mean “to imbibe each and every item, to chew it and to enjoy its *rasa*, to experience its various layers, after every performance, when it reveals a newer meaning to the dancer, to discover one’s own journey through dance and then become confident enough to try to give shape to one’s own ideas through dance”. However, the dancer often ends up redoing the same movement structure which was being engrained in the body over and over again, all this while, such that at most one can try to evolve it is by bringing in new texts to the movement structure or by placing them in different contexts, to be accepted by the Guru, the “ideal” audience. The result is the repetition of tried and tested formula in its different permutations and combinations. Even though the Gurus might accept the fact that they don’t want to build their own clones, but the teaching methodology towards Odissi, and other classical dances in India, is yet to evolve a method, which would accommodate technique- based and creativity- enhancing structure. Yokie Shiroma, an Okinawan³⁷ dancer, succinctly describes the problem of where does the dancer finds space to experience creative freedom and how does he/ she negotiate with the mental policing so intrinsic a part of the teaching system: **“how do I let go in order to find my own voice? What is my natural movement? If I allow my life experiences to guide my dancing, will my movements be different from my teacher’s and my teacher’s teacher? Is that ok?”** (Shiroma, 2005; 77).

³⁶ Sanskrit and regional texts like *Natyasastra*, *Abhinaya Darpana*, *Abhinaya Chandrika*, *Silpa Sastra* should be studied, if not completely, then at least relevant references can be drawn from these texts while explaining the technique or by promoting their use for further choreographic works.

³⁷ Okinawa is a classical dance form, from Japan.

Engagement with dance at a Multi-cultural level

The present generation of Odissi students enunciate a need for interaction with other forms and styles, from within Orissa and outside. There is a constant need to look back at the roots; more so, because urban-based performers are not acquainted with the root forms, which guided the Gurus in structuring Odissi. Learning about the forms, or further developing knowledge of their technical know-how, and having easy access to the tools would assist them in engaging more deeply with the dance form.

Moreover, with the advent of globalization and more inter-cultural transactions; politically, economically and socially, the art and cultural practices can no longer be caged up into their sacrosanct spaces. The newer generation voices a need to promote interaction and inter-activity with dancers across the nation and across the globe, to gain an in-depth understanding of their own form and formulation of a movement technique vis-a-vis that of the others', by realizing how techniques are formulated and shaped in different body structures giving the dance form a distinct identity. This however, does not imply imitation of western themes and to be categorized as "contemporary and universal", to become more saleable products in the world dance market, but to understand the method of training, technique and basis behind the modes, to further enhance one's own understanding of dance. Sarkar criticizes the superficial and imposed methods by which "Indian dance forms continue to be restructured and modified". She briefly outlines the distinct stages in the process of change in the mainstream urban effort in dance choreography, as follows:

- A stage of growing fascination of the western traditions, ballet, stage-craft, dresses and learning of the western dance techniques.
- The second stage of opting for the western idioms and movements, and also themes, almost to the point of copying, blindly.
- The third stage is that of a search for a universalization of dance language, so that the works become part of the universal dance genre followed the world over.

- The final stage of the growing realization and consciousness of the market within and outside one's own country, where the **movement genre born out of an interplay of contemporary techniques and the uniqueness of the traditional repertoire** only can ensure an audience and a special market in the world dance 'bazaar' (emphasis added) (Sarkar, 2005; 72).

The ideal trajectory to be followed by dance practitioners should be that of skipping the first three stages and exploring on the basis of the fourth one. Choreographic devices from other disciplines can be meted out as innovative tools for exploring the learnt form, to expand one's own technique and make newer texts from it, and to use Odissi technique in newer contexts relevant to the dancer and his/ her audiences, so as not to be confined to an 'exotic', 'oriental' image, but to be a part of 'contemporary global pluralistic culture'. This also calls for a holistic training, which would include imparting knowledge of varied form of arts, literature, rituals and culture practices and dismissal of the training- process, which focuses on dance as a practise based in isolation³⁸.

When one interacts with multicultural people at a common platform, one cannot remain confined to the rigid boundaries. That does not imply to leave one's tradition behind, but to use it to "provide training in creativity not only in the sense of making something new, but also thinking something new when reacting to changing, unusual or unexpected conditions and situations" (Dea, 2006; 14). Consequently, it would also not lead to homogenised products, but would develop different texts, with meaningful engagement at the primary level, as an outcome of changing equations and conversations in different contexts.

³⁸ Swati Chattopadhyaya: "An interdisciplinary, integrated approach to dance- learn your style of dance, but also learn about other dance forms/styles, literature, history, visual culture, cinema, theatre. You *cannot* learn dance in isolation. Also study these in an unbiased, not-so-dry way that does not encourage monolithic, definitive opinion/ theory (analytical response should be fuelled by feelings, emotion, personalised – not intricate theories that sorts everything in neat little piles and brushes the leftovers that don't fit in, under the carpet). Attending performances in dance or other disciplines should be mandatory – students should be marked for that. Dance video screenings, theatre productions, exhibitions, workshops and lecture- demonstrations should have greater prominence than classroom teaching. You can learn dance and/ or theorise about dance only by being an active participant inside the classroom as well as outside".

To use the form as a tool to create one's own language of/ through dance

Although the purists agree that Odissi is becoming mechanical with repetition of same permutations and combinations, that it lacks intellectual content and innovation, however, they still maintain the position that “by making slight change in its tradition you lose the authentic audience, global or regional” (Priyambada Mohanty in an interview with Pathy, 2007; 3). These are the very reasons, which become a deterrent to its growth. The main factors, which define the current state of Odissi, as pointed out by its prime exponents are:

- 1) Dancers start teaching and performing after a basic training of 2-3 years, to earn money, without becoming proficient enough, in the technique. Resultantly, they tend to adapt easier footwork and easier method to change from one pose to another because of lack of time, interest and lack of adept knowledge of the dance grammar.
- 2) Organizers mostly want female dancers to add to the “glamour” factor for without them there would not be enough glamour in the show.
- 3) One needs to create a lobby, build a strong network to get shows, which is an unspoken yet, an accepted truth³⁹.
- 4) Media plays a determining role in educating people on dance, constructive criticism is replaced by “cheque- book” criticism⁴⁰.

Jena reiterates, she feels that, “dance criticism, nowadays, is biased, as the established and famous names are always praised, for which you need to be constantly involved in building a network, whereas those who don't involve in such power games are left out, forget about getting any recognition from the critics”⁴¹. Financial stability for Acharya is a basic criterion to develop the dance form and to grow, genuinely, as a dancer. He regards that there are very few people, who delve deeply into the research of dance, given

³⁹ The three important factors determining Odissi's current state, according to Guru Chittarnjan Acharya, as told in a conversation to the research student (October, 2007).

⁴⁰ As stated by Ratikant Mohapatra, in conversation with the research student (October, 2007).

⁴¹ Pratibha Jena in a personal conversation with the research student, May, 2008.

their financial stability, which undoubtedly affects the *Guru- shishya* relationship. Chakra enunciates that it is the internal politics and conflicts within the Odissi world, which act a major restraint on Odissi's growth. As a result of which, it is the same performers performing over and over again; it is "high time we have a platform for the upcoming artists, who are doing new choreographic compositions". He further states that, "it is a divided house, people are telling ill about the other one. That way we won't grow really. We need a conducive market for Odissi dance to grow. It is a collective responsibility. The form cannot grow with one person working on it, in isolation". Expanding the form and living upto one's own convictions comes hard in the current times. Thus, people fall easy prey to aping the tested formula and selling it.

As Tandon states, "the hesitancy and lack of ability with new ideas and independent visions in Odissi, amongst the younger dancers, seemed to be directly proportional to the individual's identification with the *Guru- shishya parampara*" (Tandon, 2005; 128). Thus, both the *Guru- shishya parampara* and the market factors play a detrimental role in affecting the young performers aspiring to take up dance as a profession.

In the expansion of boundaries and liberation from the constant fight between "traditional" v/s "non- traditional", most of the young dancers express a need to create something "new", something that is "different", "unconventional", where they would not be blamed for negating tradition, or streamlined into categories of 'folk', 'modern', 'experimental' or 'contemporary', where their innovations within the tradition, are not confined by the benchmark set by their Gurus. This would require an engagement with the dance form at various levels: teaching, performance and practice. A universal need to give up "closed" systems of dissimulating art, to promote it through more creativity-oriented systems rather than a repeated learning process of rote exercises with a single aim of completing the course and performing, is required. This calls for balancing both the interpretative and analytical aspects of teaching dance.

Dhandavate, in a survey of Indian dance education, in changing times, has pointed out that till now "the focus of students is directed on emulating the Guru, as opposed to

training students to cultivate their own creativity”, whereas now there is a need for training in arts management for dancers. This requires the training system to inculcate in students “to pursue dance as a profession, to understand and learn about organizational planning, marketing strategies, funding opportunities, grant writing and audience development to maximize their opportunities in the field. This need can be fulfilled by dance educators; by developing resources, workshops, guest lectures or seminars, accessible to students at an individual level.” Also, training in multimedia, according to her, for dance presentation is equally important, given the changing trends of dance presentation. The curriculum should be expanded such that it takes into account global and intercultural audiences. (Dandavate, 2007; 102)

One way as Street suggests can be to “infuse classes with choice and experimentation, produce research findings that clearly articulate the benefits of dance participation beyond the standard clichés of it being a healthy form of exercise that improves the learners grace and deportment” (Street, 2006; 107), intend to build beautiful minds than mere beautiful bodies. Globally, as also within India, a need is articulated to not to restrict dance within its own sphere.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Recently, (May- June, 2008) Odissi dance- world saw a conglomeration of its various proponents, in varied forms, come together in a truly ‘multicultural’ and ‘global’ platform, at Sutra Dance Theatre, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, under the aegis of a festival aptly titled as “Stirring Odissi”. The Festival was held in conjunction with Sutra Dance Theatre’s 25th anniversary in collaboration with private and state sponsors¹ from Malaysia and India respectively. The festival included photography and painting exhibitions, seminars, solo and group performances, lectures and dance demonstrations, with many well- known exponents of Odissi attending and participating from India, Malaysia, America and Europe. The festival, apart from showcasing the ‘best of Odissi’ to Malaysia, provided the dancers a perfect platform to intermingle and interact with their contemporaries. It also aimed to project Kuala Lumpur as an ‘alternative’ Odissi centre for the region. The idea of ‘transcending boundaries’- of region, state, caste and creed- and the want of survival in the midst of ‘globalisation’ and ‘modernisation’ became the core reasons for organizing such a magnificent event. As stated in the introduction to the festival:

“ ‘Stirring Odissi’- the theme of the 4th Odissi Festival in Kuala Lumpur- alludes to two elements of the present evolution of Odissi – the creative act of churning which is the essence of this dynamic classical form, and secondly, Odissi’ s ability to touch and stir the imagination of people across nations regardless of race and creed.”²

Speeches and discussions on art management, innovation in art and relevance of art in the current period of globalization, became the core areas of attention during the festival. The escalating range of Odissi within India and abroad indicates that in no way can one claim it to be a ‘dying tradition’. Odissi is thriving with full vigour to broaden the space

¹ I.C.C.R., S.N.A. and state government of Orissa sponsored the Indian participants.

² (source: www.stirringodissi.com)

amongst the classical dances, in the domestic sphere, and simultaneously creating and expanding its horizons, outside, where there are other dance forms *in situ*. It has been adapted from being a small temple ritual to a full- fledged repertoire, extending to a night- long performance, defining and re- defining the routine occurrences of classical dance. Simultaneously, its practitioners try to bring in ‘innovative elements’ to satisfy the ever- rising demand of the audience, and the urge within the dance to produce ‘something new’. Such undercurrents within a form, its patrons and its audiences play a determining role in defining the survival of classical arts. This may be attained by either sticking to the tradition, or by venturing beyond into different traditions and cultural milieus. Presently, exploring ‘something new’, ‘experimentation’ and ‘innovation’ have become the buzzwords in the dance market of India, struggling to create a space and mark its boundaries; such works exist in the realm of the ‘unknown’, the ‘grey’ areas, reserved for the ‘other’, yet to be consolidated in the mainstream. This can perhaps be seen as the obvious successive level in the trajectory of Odissi dance, which has come into existence due to the very disturbances, tensions and conflicts within the form and its practise, teaching and performance, as observed during the course of the research work. The performers might contend themselves being restricted to certain categories or being excluded out of a few, which can become a huge area of discussion in itself, therefore won’t be delved into right now. However, it is these certain terms, which are often quoted, referred to and incorporated in projects by the performers without realizing their various academic and social connotations, which are of relevance in defining the current state of Odissi, and in structuring its future course. The terms are often used callously, without considering the depth of meanings attached to them, in locating one’s position *vis- a- vis* the current trends in the dance market, as briefly discussed below:

Globalization: Pathak defines globalization as “a process that seeks to overcome all borders and boundaries, and brings the world closer economically and culturally, a space in which social relations are constructed across infinite spans of time- space” (Pathak, 2006; 67). Along with modernity emerged the notion of nation- state, which acted as a propellant for shaping the cultural practices in a specifically desired mould. With globalization, information, ideas and knowledge were exchanged more freely, so that one

could now see one's own cultural milieu in a different light and, also, adapt the practices to the changing conditions, with 'nation- state' no longer being its sole determinant. By inviting more inter- cultural conversations the national and regional boundaries are minimalized. A creative interplay between global and local by using the traditional elements, can provide new tools to make art more alive, clearly omitting the notion of it being a mere 'hybrid'.

Bharucha, on the other hand, suggests that one should be aware of the economic realities of globalization along with the cultural discourse. He also brings to notice how the meanings of these terms change when used in different regions and different contexts. 'Intercultural' and 'global' are used as synonyms of each other in the first world nations and are also actively promoted for the ever- expanding capitalist/ consumerist market, whereas in India, he sees a great resistance against its 'hegemonizing, commoditizing and anti- democratic tendencies.' Thus it is the response of the people, which shapes a particular phenomenon across regions, which need not project universal connotations (Bharucha, 2005).

Where Odissi dance stands currently, when situated in such contexts, is an area of contention. The 'purists' and 'traditionalists' might take a different stand, as opposed to that of the 'innovators' or 'experimentalists'- the 'avante- garde'. Do the avante- garde actually exist in the case of Odissi? Have they actually confronted the codes and revolutionized the performance genre or are they merely falling into the trap of using these much attractive terms to make their art 'saleable' in the 'global' dance market?

Universalization: Modernity also brought with it a certain standardization of international culture, such that cultures from different regions, nationalities and religions were measured against the same yardstick; a uniform code of space and time is used to draw the defining line for performances. A universal scale for judging performances is identifiable, according to which performances are clubbed into the categories of 'classical', 'ethnic', 'tribal', 'folk', 'contemporary', 'modern', etc. and relegated to the varied spaces of education, entertainment, festival, tourism, and others, directed to

achieve different purposes altogether. Also, to meet the universal rules of performance, the performance is restructured and consequently decontextualized. It is against such notions that a performance is viewed, on the world stage as well as in a domestic cosmopolitan space.

How does the universal scale for performance measure Odissi? Does it always confine Odissi to the 'ethnic' space? How is this new space in post- colonial era, different from the erstwhile space specified to the 'oriental'? Does it recognize and accept the imminent, inevitable, contemporary voice resonating in Odissi, as it is in other Indian classical dances?

Modern/ Modernity: Its implications in the context of dances, in India, are highly varied, referring to anything from Western dance (not what one would know as 'modern' dance as it originated and understood in the West, but any dance originating from the West), 'Bollywood' dance or, anything which is not traditional can be referred to as 'modern' in the local jargon. Modernity, as Pathak suggests, has its specificity in the way we experience it, something which is different from mere Westernization, is rooted in our own cultural history and "is experienced as an *emancipatory* quest which, it is argued, is qualitatively different from the taboos of traditionalism" (Pathak, 2006; 14). If by modernity we understand a sense of freedom to grow, to innovate, to express, and not to stay in the bounds of tradition, then that does not implicate abandoning traditions altogether, rather growing from and re- inventing the traditions anew. Do 'modern' and 'contemporary' in the Indian context imply the same meaning? Can these concepts be situated in a specific time- space context, in India? More importantly, it is necessary to realize the meaning of these terms within the Indian context, and more specifically locate its usage in dance.

Innovation: is seen to be a never- ending process, where everybody is trying to think and create something 'out- of- the box'. There are also those who simply believe in "being at it and not trying anything drastically different"³. Every artist is searching for a niche that

³ Madhavi Mudgal in "Orissi Stirred Shaken and Served!" June, 2008 (source: www.narthaki.com).

would place her/ him in the correct context of time and space. Locating oneself in social occurrences, political activism or mythological preaching, each one associates with the form at different levels bringing innovation to it in one's own interest and capacity. What started as an innovative process in the development of Odissi grammar has now been termed as a strongly-bound, unchanging *parampara* by the innovator himself - Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra - making the form restrictive in its very essence⁴. The major conflict is about who stands 'correct' or 'authentic' when it comes to innovating Odissi and which are the elements that can be accepted and assimilated within the form while retaining its original vocabulary.

Each of these terms calls for a research situating them in the context of Indian dance, more specifically of Odissi. Therefore, their definition, meanings or problematic areas surrounding them are not touched upon in the current research. Only the contentions which revolve around them in Indian dance are hinted at. Even though these terms and concepts were propelled by certain socio- political conditions in the west, more specifically America, they are equally vocalized and opinionated in the east, where the terms acquire a meaning not so much based on their standard notion, but what is understood of them locally. Sarkar notes that, "notwithstanding their western connotation, the use of these terms continues in terms of themes and the use of specific techniques, it is very important to realize in this context that the use of such terms **provides a certain sense of freedom to the dancer- for their very lack of specificity and element of indefiniteness allows immense space for the performer to be creative.** By denying ourselves the freedom to use these terms we are actually restricting the possibility of being creative, which is so vital for the growth of dance and is, therefore the lifeblood of any present- day dancer" (Sarkar, 2008; 93) (emphasis added).

⁴ Pratibha Jena: "One cannot claim that few innovations are 'right' whereas others stand to be 'wrong'. One does not have the right to judge, because each person has a different idea of beauty, which emerges from within, all innovations and expansion of tradition are beautiful in their own self. Even the *sastras* don't curb you from innovating. Earlier, the Gurus innovated according to their own choice, to create Odissi, to build its structure; no one can claim their innovations were 'correct' or 'authentic'. We take sculptures to be the elements of authenticity; therefore we use them as the base, a word like 'wrong' should be omitted. (*galat jaisa shabd aana hi nahi chahiye*)" (in a personal conversation).

The question which arises often is: are the concurrent changes in the practise of a traditional form in response to the changing trends of the dance market, or are they compulsorily caused externally, or is it because of tension areas within the form, the internal factors that lead to its 'natural' growth? It is essential to inculcate the idea of 'freedom' within the students through the teaching system. The system, as formulated and propagated by the Gurus, still exists in its entirety, without any substantial change neither in its practice, performance or teaching initiated by the later generation of dancers. The latter in a way failed to realize that it is a system, with creativity at its base, which needs to be engaged with and evoked continually at all levels. For progress at the level of performance, one would also need to experiment with the method of teaching to avoid any stagnation within the form. At any point of time, to keep the art of Odissi alive, the vital pulse is the learner/teacher/performer, whose conviction about his/her art, along with the dedication makes the form continue to live or regenerate. It is of utmost importance therefore to provide the performers adequate space for thinking and interacting with their art.

With the changing times, market oriented artistic activities are promulgating; new ideas of culture as a knowledge domain are burgeoning globally. To create friendly spaces in the domestic sphere, for these developments, it is essential to stimulate interest in the young generation. They primarily come with a very different aesthetic of the body, and mind, sculpted and situated in a 'global' milieu. They have started thinking about the body, the dance form and the philosophies embedded within, question it or sometimes clearly express discontent, about the thematic content, relevance of texts, and also restrictive practice, in the absence of a satisfactory explanation by their teachers. At this juncture, Odissi dance, like other classical dances, needs to justify its structure at every step of its evolution, the responsibility of which ultimately rests with the teachers as they negotiate between the existing form and the new students aspiring to enter the world of Odissi on their own contemporary terms.

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