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The Transient "Ideals" of the "Odissi Body" and the Changing Place and Role of Odissi Dancers in History

Odissi, being one of the Indian classical dance forms, involves stylised and codified movements, built upon a set of corporeal grammars and movement vocabularies, that are interconnected with the bodymind[1] philosophy and the aesthetic theory of *bhāva*[2] (mood, feeling, emotion) and *rasa* (essence, sentiment). Altogether, these elements enable the dance form to serve as both an internal experience and an external reflection of the world the dancer inhabits. This means that emotions, feelings, or thoughts can be experienced inside, within the bodymind of the individual dancer, a sphere that remains beyond the direct reach of the audience. At the same time, an outer reflection and experience of the same through the body and movement can be offered to the audience. Such an understanding suggests a considerable degree of agency[3] within the performer. However, my revision of the history of the dance formation and development brings the notion of the performer's agency into question. It appears that depending on who is "making" the "ideal body" and deciding about the

[1] The term "bodymind" refers to the dancer seen as a living being in whom the body and mind are equally important and function as a single interrelated system. This approach is in contrast to the dualistic view of body-mind or body and mind as separate entities with one having greater significance than the other.

[2] The International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST) system is followed in using diacritical marks for words of Sanskrit origin, except where the terms appear in citations. The words with diacritics are also italicised. Terms referring to place, region, language, and culture are kept in their Romanised spelling with no use of diacritics.

[3] The term "agency" in this article is understood as the dancer's capacity to individually act, think, feel, experience, and express in a performance.

prerequisites of the dance form, the agency of the individual dancer shifts with the change of their role and place in history, from an objectified to a subjective entity. Hence, in the present work,[4] I review the history of Odissi dance formation and development by considering two interrelated aspects: the changing "ideals" of "Odissi body" and the transformation of Odissi dancer's agency.

Historically always closely bound to the land, stories, and beliefs of the people of Orissa, Odissi dance has been continuously shaped by the changing socio-cultural and political context in India. According to Ranjabati Sircar, a modern Indian dancer, "the dancer's body reflects the relationship of the form to the society contemporaneous with the body. It also reveals, in its muscular patterning, the social eye in relation to the dancer."[5] I trace how this "social eye" has been shaping the shifting "ideals" of the Odissi dancer's body, the "Odissi body." Taking a socio-constructionist approach, I view dance as a social phenomenon, an "outcome of social forces and relations."[6] In this work, first, I provide a brief historical background of the form's earliest traces, before it was named "Odissi dance." The following three sections are discussions of the "social eye" and the dancer's place in historical periods, which are categorised here as revival, post-revival, and the recent transitions of traditional boundaries.

To analyse the transformations of the "ideals" of "Odissi body" and the dancer's agency in each section, I apply theories from chosen philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, dance phenomenologists, and somatic practitioners. In the first analytical section, I consider the revived "Odissi body" as invented following Eric Hobsbawm's theory of "invented tradition." In the second section, to discuss the mode of external control carried out on the dancing body in the post-revival period, I turn to Michel Foucault's idea of the "docile body" under disciplinary surveillance, Marcel Mauss' "body techniques," and Pierre Bourdieu's "habitus." Finally, I arrive at an analysis of the recent heightened body-mind awareness, which I analyse in line with Brenda Farnell's concept of "agentic embodied meaning-making"[7] and selected scholars within dance studies, somatic studies, and dance phenomenology. Ultimately, the discussion of these

[4] The article is based on my doctoral research and unpublished PhD thesis: "When our Senses Dance: Sensory-Somatic Awareness in Contemporary Approaches to Odissi Dance in India," (University of Exeter, UK, 2016).

[5] Ranjabati Sircar, "Contemporary Indian Dance: Question of Training." *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28, No. 39 (1993), p. 2068.

[6] Chris Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory* (London: Sage, 1993), p. 14.

[7] Brenda Farnell, "Kinesthetic Sense and Dynamically Embodied Action," *Journal of the Anthropological Study of Human Movement*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (2003), p. 135.

three respective periods in Odissi dance history points to the inconsistency of the dancer's agency, although guaranteed by its fundamental aesthetic theory and philosophy. Changing socio-political situations have kept shifting the dancer's role and place alongside the changing imaginations of the "ideal" Odissi body making it a highly transient form.

The earliest traces of the dance form

Numerous Orissan temples adorned with spellbinding sculptures have been taken as a basis to suggest the existence of a forgotten dance practice of the past age known as the *Odhra Magadha*, as mentioned by Bharata in the *Nātyaśāstra*.[8] In the revival period, scholars pointed to the Jain king Kharavela's inscription and rock art in Udayagiri caves, dating back to the 2nd century BCE, as bearing the earliest evidence of Odissi dance (Figure 1a and 1b).[9] The establishment of this direct connection between a dance form set in contemporary times and some archaeological evidence of an unknown dance practice in the past was part of the conscious remaking of the national identity. However, the scarcity of material about the ancient dance form makes it impossible to compare it with Odissi dance. The only possible assumption to be made on account of the inscription is its entertaining feature.

Figure 1a. Rock art in Ranigumpha showing dancers and musicians performing for an audience. Udayagiri caves, 2nd century BCE. (Photo: Sabina Sweta Sen-Podstawska)

[8] Sanskrit text on performance.

[9] Dhirendranath Patnaik, *Odissi Dance* (Bhubaneswar: Orissa Sangeet Natak Akademi, 1971); Kapila Vatsyayan, ed., *Indian Classical Dance* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1974).

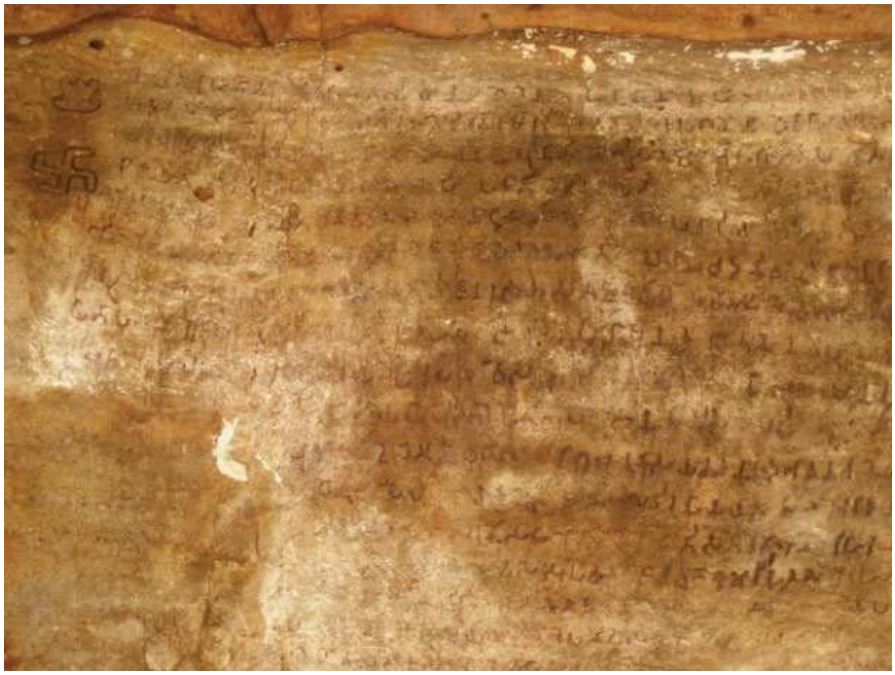

Figure 1b. Kharavela's inscription in Udayagiri caves, 2nd century BCE. (Photo: Sabina Sweta Sen-Podstawska)

Figure 2. The 13th-century Konark temple, considered one of the grandest examples of the Orissan temple architecture, has been an important source for the Odissi dancers and scholars in the process of reconstructing the dance. (Photo: Sabina Sweta Sen-Podstawska)

Following the archaeological and architectural traces in the exploration of Odissi dance development, Dhirendranath Patnaik stresses

the multiple religious influences, such as Buddhism, Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism, and Tantrism, visible in Orissan temple sculptures between the 6th and 13th centuries CE.[10] The unique feature of these sculptures within the precinct of the temples, identified by Mohan Khokar as "frozen fluidity,"[11] suggests that the dance practices from this period embraced both the spiritual and aesthetic significance of the body with its sensual modalities illustriously celebrated and praised.

The next significant development took place during the rule of the Imperial Gangas in Orissa between the 11th and 15th centuries CE. The Imperial Gangas converted from Śaivism to Vaiṣṇavisma and became devotees of lord Jagannath (incarnation of Viṣnu). Their devotion and spiritualism appear to have influenced the growth of temple dance practice. The temple dancer, *Devadasi*, is known in Orissa as Mahari. Jiwan Pani elucidates the meaning of Mahari as being derived from the word *maharaloka*, i.e. a female performer who aims to go beyond the highest aesthetic level of experience,[12] which gives her a distinguished status in society. Frederique Apffel Marglin[13] explores the rituals of Maharis in Puri whose performance was predominately based on *abhinaya* (narrative dance) with devotional character. Her analysis points to the sensory embodiment of *sringara rasa* (the erotic emotion), sexuality, auspiciousness, and sovereignty of female temple performers with reference to Odissi dance technique and the "emotional-cognitive spiritual transformations"[14] of the participants and the performer within the temple precincts. This suggests the presence of an embodied and subjective experience with a considerable degree of the performers' agency. Temple dancing developed as an aesthetic and spiritual art form closely related to temple rituals. Yet, as Anurima Banerji describes, the practice was an intersubjective encounter in which the Mahari's body was distributed between the temple, the deity, and the dancer.[15] Despite being held in high esteem and having some degree of agency, the body's confinement to the temple, the marriage to the deity,

[10] Patnaik, *Odissi Dance*, pp. 15–25.

[11] Khokar Mohan, quoted in: Vanita Sinha, "Odissi: Evolution of a dance form," *Frontline*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (1985), p. 115.

[12] Jiwan Pani, *Back to the Roots: Essays on Performing Arts of India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2004), p. 65.

[13] Frederique Apffel Marglin, *The Wives of the God-King: The Rituals of the Devadasis of Puri* (London: Oxford University Press, 1985); Frederique Apffel Marglin, "Refining the Body: Transformative Emotion in Ritual Dance," in: *Divine Passion: Social Construction of Emotion in India*, ed. Owen Lynch (Berkley: University of California Press, 1990).

[14] Marglin, "Refining the Body," p. 212.

[15] Anurima Banerji, "Dance and the Distributed Body: Odissi, Ritual Practice, and Mahari Performance," *About Performance*, No. 11 (2012), pp. 7–39.

and seclusion from society had set the mines of disagreement which later exploded, when this dance left the precincts of the temple and entered a secular space.

From the 16th century until the beginning of the 19th century CE, the Moghul invasion and later British colonialism brought severe degradation in social and religious organisation, which hindered all kinds of temple services. Due to lack of royal patronage of temples, Maharis became employed in the royal courts and associated with "concubinage" and prostitution.[16] Ananya Chatterjee notes that "all evidence about the Mahari dance style suggests that it was distinctly sensuous and graceful, and in fact highly erotic."[17] Trying to traverse the sacred and secular, these women acquired a double-edged identity and got caught in the perplexing tension between auspiciousness and impurity.[18] As a result they lost their high reputation and the tradition of temple dancing was endangered. According to anthropologist David Howes, cultural changes lead to sensory confusion, and social revolutions may also be equalled to sensory revolution and they "may stimulate new social and creative projects."[19] As it is shown below, the Mahari tradition's rapture incited the popularisation of Gotipua dancing, performed solely by young boys, as an expression of devotion.

The Gotipua dance "gained popularity in the subsequent Muslim period on account of the rigidity of the *purdha* system, which led to the seclusion of women and made their presence scarce on the festive occasions."[20] Yet the foremost stimulus for this new tradition's growth was the Vaiṣṇavas' urge to restrict and efface any apparent erotic connotations in the dance. So, disapproval of women's dancing in the temple led to the introduction of young boy dancers, who outside the temple, in the garb of female devotees, enacted *Rādhā*'s love for *Kṛṣṇa* inspired by "Gītagovinda."[21] Their performance dominated in *sakhi bhava,* which lies in the belief that "the Lord alone is male and all devotees are *gopis* (milkmaids). God

[16] Sinha, "Odissi: Evolution of a Dance Form," p. 116; Mohan Khokar, "The Odissi Dance: Myths, Legends, Historical Facts," *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, No. 20 (1969), p. 52; Ananya Chatterjee, "Contestations: Constructing a Historical Narrative for Odissi," in: *Rethinking Dance History: A Reader*, ed. Alexandra Carter (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 146.

[17] Chatterjee, "Contestations," p. 148.

[18] Marglin, *The Wives of the God-King*.

[19] David Howes, "Introduction: Empires of the Senses," in: *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, ed. David Howes (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005), p. 5.

[20] Patnaik, *Odissi Dance*, p. 60.

[21] Ibid., p. 61. "Gītagovinda" is a 12th century poem by Jayadeva with erotic, religious, and spiritual connotations, that explicates on the love between Krsna (incarnation of Visnu) and his favourite *gopi* (cowherd maiden), Radha.

could be approached only through ecstatic devotion. Since Krishna was male, the most effective way of showing devotion was as a female, similar to the *gopis* who dance their love for Krishna."[22] Technically it was a replacement of the subjective body of the women with a prepubescent male body; however, the ultimate image produced remained unchanged. The Gotipuas' intricate make-up and costume, as well as facial, eye, and hip movements, formed an iconic enactment of femininity. Gotipua dancers were also taught the *Bandha nrutya* (the formation of acrobatic figures and movements)[23] (Figure 3a and 3b), which enriched the form and gave it a distinctive quality. This acrobatic and physically strenuous body usage initially disqualified women from this practice as it was believed to be unhealthy for them.

Figure 3a Gotipua performers from Orissa Dance Academy. (Photo: Pravat Kumar Swain)

[22] Judith Lynne Hanna, "India's Dance Kaleidoscope: Divine Sexuality, Sex Roles, Erotic Fantasy, Profanity, and Emancipation," in: *Dance, Sex and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance and Desire*, ed. Judith Lynne Hanna (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 106.

[23] Patnaik, *Odissi Dance*, p. 62.

Figure 3b Gotipuas performing *Bandhya nrutya*. (Photo: Sabina Sweta Sen-Podstawska)

From the 1850s to the 1920s, under the British Raj, the dance practices of the Mahari and Gotipua traditions suffered further impediments with the flow of Western philosophies of body-mind dualism, Puritanism, and Victorian ideals of female chastity. Besides the Mahari and Gotipua practices, the Jatra theatres, the Kalicharan Patnaik's Orissa theatre founded in 1939, and the Annapoorna theatres established after the war, provided platforms for the dance to stay alive.[24] Many popular items of today's Odissi recital started being formed at the Orissa theatres in joint cooperation of *gurus*, the traditional teachers, and through the amalgamation of their different Odissi styles.

Revival: The invented and objectified "Odissi body"

At the turn of the 20th century, Indian nationalists sweeping through the fields of Indian arts, cultures, crafts, and literatures fanned the nationalist sentiment, which led to the revival of Indian art. Initiated by such cultural leaders and scholars as E. Krishna Eyer, Rukmini Devi and V. Raghavan, the revival began in South India in the 1930s, when at the height of the

[24] Leela Venkataraman, Avinash Pasricha, "Odissi," in: *Indian Classical Dance: Tradition in Transition*, eds. Leela Venkataraman, Avinash Pasricha (New Delhi: Roli Books Pvt. Ltd., 2002), p. 70.

anti-nautch campaign[25] the art of the *Devadasis* was being lost.[26] In the era of Post-Independence, new cultural institutions were established in India through state sponsorship. In Orissa, *gurus* were already teaching dance in new cultural centres such as the *Kala Vikas Kendra* (from 1952) and *Orissa Sangeet Natak Akademi* (from 1954), and performances were also taking place.[27] The Jayantika group, including male scholars and *gurus* trained in Gotipua, reconstituted Odissi through the combination of *Abhinaya Darpanam, Nātyaśāstra, Abhinaya Caṅdrikā*,[28] as well as Śilpa *Prākaśa*,[29] with the existing dance practices in the theatre, Gotipua tradition, temple sculptures, and the Mahari tradition. The result was a "female" form based on the techniques of a "male" form and taught to female dancers by male teachers. This, eventually, established a clear gender dichotomy within the dance tradition.

Figure 4 Sculptures of *alasākanyās* from Orissan temples. (Photo: Sabina Sweta Sen Podstawska)

The sources of this reconstruction, i.e. sculptures and ancient scriptures, provide the answer to how the "ideal" Odissi body of the revived form was imagined. A line in Śilpa *Prākaśa* states: "as a house without a wife, as a playful enjoyment without a woman, so without (the figure of) women art will be deficient and bear no fruit."[30] The association of women with the house, entertainment, and fertility signifies a stereotypical male gaze. Moreover, the model of female body handed down from generation to generation of sculptors was the *damaru* (drum), which is "held at the

[25] *Anti-nautch* was a movement under the British rule, which banned temple dance practices.

[26] Avanthi Meduri, "Nation, Woman, Representation: The Sutured History of the Devadasi and her Dance" (Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 1996).

[27] Madhumita Raut, *Odissi: What, Why & How... Evolution, Revival & Technique* (New Delh: B.R. Rhythms, 2007), p. 49.

[28] These are Sanskrit texts on performance.

[29] It is a Medieval Orissan Sanskrit Text on Temple Architecture.

[30] Rāmacandra Kaula Bhaṭṭāraka Mahapatra, Śilpa–*Prakaśa: Medieval Orissan Sanskrit Text on Temple Architecture*, trans. Alice Boner and Sadasiva Nath Sarma (New Delhi: IGNCA & Motilal Banarasidass, 2005), p. 149.

waist and flares out above and below."[31] This model was used in sculpting the *alasākanyās* (graceful maidens) (Figure 4), in which one can note the sensuous curves, slender waists, full breasts, and heavy hips. From the sculptures this male "ideal" of feminine beauty was inscribed onto the (initially primarily female) Odissi dancing body, establishing a voluptuous "ideal." The curvaceous body and voluptuousness are achieved through the deflections of *tribhangi* (a stance formed with three bends: in the neck, torso, and knee). It is additionally accentuated by the body-fitting costume and the tightly tied silver waist belt (Figure 5), which divides the upper part from the lower part and visually makes the appearance of the torso slender, the waist narrower, and the hips more rounded, and evokes the *damaru* model.

Figure 5 Author in Odissi costume. (Photo: Dagmara Sen)

This revived "ideal" of Odissi can be perceived as an "invented tradition," which according to Eric Hobsbawm is "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic

[31] Vidya Dehejia, *The Body Adorned: Dissolving Boundaries between Sacred and Profane in India's Art* (Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 2009), p. 30.

nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition," and which emerges "when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which 'old' traditions had been designed, producing new ones to which they were not applicable."[32] The older ritual tradition of Maharis' inadaptability led to the popularity of Gotipua tradition, and then the revived Odissi was set up out of the need to re-define the new nation state and establish status and respect. The body movement was codified into a modern ritual framed as a primarily feminine stage performance but presented as an age-old tradition. The glorious past of the Mahari tradition was imagined to rebuild the sense of nationhood by establishing its rich heritage and continuity with antiquity. This re-invention of the Odissi body was designed to support the mentioned nationalism project to set values proper for the nation, enrich its heritage, and uplift its status.[33] In the process, the dance was labelled classical, a term that reflects "a divorce from traditional milieu of the dance and [its] replace[ment] with new secular, institutions on a Western model."[34] So, as a classical form, Odissi entered the sphere of world dances but it also became colonised by the trends and definitions of the West.

To fit the new philosophy, the revivalists redefined the Odissi dancer's body. It was an "ideal" body:

> Idealised by the dancer's body, which enunciated all that was religious and spiritual, yet performed in the new secular space of the proscenium theatre, Odissi represented the ideologies of the new nation state. The 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 a civilized nation.[35]

This invention of an idealised feminine dancing body to boost the national consciousness and lift the country's status led to a visible objectification of the female bodies. The performers' role was downgraded to mere objects representing the nation state. Their "ideal" curvaceous and voluptuous bodies resembling the temple sculptures and performing a dance rooted in the religious tradition served as markers of the nation's antiquity

[32] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in: *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1–5.

[33] Pallabi Chakravorty, "Hegemony, Dance and Nation: The Construction of the Classical Dance in India," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 21 (1998), pp. 107–120.

[34] Marglin, *The Wives of the God-King*, p. 2.

[35] Aastha Gandhi, "Who Frames the Dance? Writing and Performing the Trinity of Odissi" in: *Dance Dialogues: Conversations across cultures, artforms and practices*, 2008, July 18, p. 5. Accessed April 2, 2018, https://ausdance.org.au/articles/details/who-frames-the-dance-writing-and-performing-the-trinity-of-odissi.

and culture. But it was not the embodied and subjective performance of the Maharis. Instead, to suit the modern urban westernised elite's taste, and the borrowed idea of chastity and puritanism, eroticism in Odissi had to be subdued. Chatterjee notes that the early reformers "cleansed" the Bharatanatyam dance of its association with prostitution by "shifting the foundational emotion from *sringara,* the erotic, to *bhakti*, the devotional mood."[36] The same process took place in Odissi dance. Nonetheless, the erotic, aesthetic, and spiritual coexist in the Odissi repertoire in the form of the songs from "Gītagovinda." Archana Verma[37] suggests that the direct erotic connotations are hidden behind the elaborate aesthetic stylization in Odissi dance. Yet, during the revival, the feeling and sensing body of the dancer was erased, simultaneously reducing the performer's agency and freedom of expression. Susan Manning states that the dancer is in search of a performance in its kinesthetic and theatrical terms, whereas a scholar aims towards providing a descriptive account.[38] Apparently, at the moment of Odissi dance revival the latter took the lead.

Thus, the revival cannot be seen as a quest for truth nor for the past somatic and sensual experience of the dancer because the revivalists were more concerned to situate the dance for a respectable modern proscenium under the nationalist project. The new Odissi was invented as an "ideal" form which led to the objectification of the performer's bodymind as a reflection of ideologies of the civilised nation state.

Post-revival: The "silent" and "docile bodies" of the *paramparā*

By post-revival I refer to the period after the classicisation of Odissi, which could roughly be assigned as between the 1970s and the 1990s. Only after gaining the classical status, Odissi dancers and *gurus* took a heightened interest to re-discover Orissa's religious, tribal, and folk traditions and started enriching the form by drawing in these elements and understandings which had not been applied to the dance before. Alongside the national and global popularisation of the classical form, *gurus* left Jayantika and followed separate paths to develop the specific styles of their *gharānās*[39] from where their personalised styles and practices emerged.

[36] Chatterjee, "Contestations," p. 146.

[37] Archana Verma, "Eroticism in Indian Classical Dance: Odissi," in: *Performance and Culture: Narrative, Image and Enactment in India*, ed. Archana Verma (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), pp. 43–60.

[38] Susan Manning, quoted in: Helen Thomas, *The Body, Dance, and Cultural Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 141.

[39] *gharānā* comes from the Hindi word *ghar* meaning the house of the *guru.*

Amongst these early *gurus* who established their own styles were Kelucharan Mohapatra, Pankaj Charan Das, and Debaprasad Das. Kelucharan Mohapatra is the most renowned creator and teacher whose style seems to have remained closest to the Jayantika project of classicisation. This fact, along with his minute observation skills and intensive work on a large number of choreographies, subsequently made his style the dominant Odissi style.[40] Pankaj Charan Das, who, in spite of being one of the senior *gurus*, had been ignored previously, eventually developed the dance according to his memory and interpretation of temple dancers' practice, which came to be known as the Mahari style. His style was popularised as the "feminine" version of Odissi contrary to that of the male *guru's* patriarchal Gotipua style. Chatterjee explains the difference between these two forms: "the typical markers of the *Mahari* style, the rounded lines, the over sensuality, the displaced hips marked by the *bengapatti,* the heavy belt tied around the hip, are here overshadowed by the *gotipua* insistence on a much more acrobatic and linear style, characterized by jumps and extensions."[41] A younger *guru,* Debaprasad Das, who left Jayantika, accepted "inspiration from the tribal and non-classical stream of Orissan art."[42] His work is seen to be grounded in the *Sabda swarapatha* tradition also known as *Sabda Nritya*, which is a folk dance form originating from the village Kumbhari in Orissa. Dancers from Deba Prasad Das' *gharānā* have applied its physically strenuous quality to bring male attributes to the predominately feminine sensibility of Odissi.

As the dance was being developed by these respective *gurus*, it also came under their authoritarian control, and a pedagogical pattern of unconditional submission of the disciple was established. Each of these schools aimed at moulding its students' bodymind into the epitome of their respective style. The dancers were to be produced as silent and obedient bodies that could ultimately become living monuments of the dance style, as was the case with Sanjukta Panigrahi, referred to as the perfect incarnation of Kelucharan Mohapatra's style. Ideally under the teacher-disciple tradition, known as *guru-śi ya paramparā*, the student grows into a professional by means of a strict, long-term apprenticeship beginning during her childhood at the *gurukula* (the *guru's* house). I discuss the practice of Odissi dance during the post-revival period in relation to power and shaping of the "docile body."

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[40] Ileana Citaristi, *The Making of a Guru: Kelucharan Mohapatra, His Life and Times* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001).

[41] Chatterjee, "Contestations," p. 148.

[42] Venkataraman, "Odissi," p. 75.

Unconditional surrender, discipline, respect, and devotion to the teacher and the dance form are the very core of this tradition. In the process of learning, the student is meant to be quiet since there is no place for questioning. Her role is to observe, mimic, absorb, and internalise. The student undergoes a holistic training consisting of not only the dance-related somatic knowledge, but also the rules of appropriate conduct, as touching the teacher's feet, lowering of eyes when the *guru* scolds her to show respect, and leaving her shoes outside the dance space as a mark of its divine nature. The disciple is taught techniques of the body, or a set of bodily habits, to use Marcell Mauss' theory of body techniques and habitus.[43] All these practices gradually become "a part of a learned behaviour system"[44] and as unconsciously performed practices they are, to borrow from Pierre Bourdieu, "internalised as second nature and so forgotten."[45] The idea is, following Michel Foucault's thought, to produce "a docile body that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved."[46] Foucault's theory on prison articulated in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* finds a reflection of execution of power and discipline in other institutions and in the society itself. He presents the individual as being under a constant but subtle surveillance and discipline which is absent in the individual's consciousness. This and the promised goal of achievement facilitate the normalization and acceptance of the rigorous system offered to the disciple. In light of this theory, the Odissi dancing body can be seen as an object of symbolic representation of a disciplinary practice. Trained under particular teachers, the memory about the *guru*, his style, knowledge, philosophy, and stories are inscribed into the body through imitation and repetition, with no space for the dancer's individual feeling, thought, or expression. The behaviours or gestures inscribed as the perfect "durable" body *hexis* turn the body into a repository of culture but also that of the past. This notion, again, is in line with Bourdieu, who states the following: "the habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history."[47]

These techniques of control and discipline have been utilised towards retaining the purity and authenticity of the different styles and the "essence"

[43] Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," *Economy and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1973), pp. 70–88.

[44] Ananya Chatterjea, "Training in Indian Classical Dance: A Case Study," *Asian Theatre Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 13 (1996), p. 71.

[45] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Oxford: Cambridge Press, 1990), p. 56.

[46] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 136.

[47] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 82.

of Odissi. It is a noticeable move from the nation state's significance to the *guru*'s authority, with the dancer's role shifting only from being the objects representing the nation state to becoming the living monuments of the *guru's* style. Traditional *guru*s strictly object to performances that are outside the set repertoire, costume, or any other systems of Odissi. Bourdieu's denial of agency to subjects is reflected in these traditional *gurus*' approach, which restricted the individual dancer's capacity to think, feel, experience, and express. This, however, is problematic as, although the *guru*-śiṣya *paramparā* might hold its own values and ideals, the process of making sense of the training and practice requires the student's individual reflection and agency.

Transiting the boundaries: The agentic sensory-somatic bodymind

There have been dancers who despite their traditional training have ultimately come out of it and have taken the dance form beyond the confines of the invented version. With their new approaches they have led to another shift in the "ideals" of "Odissi body" and the dancer's agency, from the voluptuous to the athletic body as well as from the objectified to a subjective, sensory-somatic bodymind. These changes have been taking place in correlation with the socio-cultural changes in India.

The 1990s liberalization of Indian politics and economy, and the opening of India to the global market have seen the emergence of the new middle class with its cosmopolitan identity.[48] Since 1996, men and women have become highly up-to-date with the newest trends and ideals of physical fitness and wellness. This is no longer the rounded and voluptuous body but the slim and sculpted perfect body, which, as Brosius notes, has become the new signifier of wealth and wellbeing.[49] Shoma Munshi indicates its arrival in India in the 1990s, mirroring the Western ideals of the perfect body,[50] and Sangita Shreshtova points to the Bollywood movies as the primary medium of its popularisation.[51] Additionally, the Western contemporary dance practitioners' heightened awareness of safety and

[48] Leela Fernandes, *India's New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Christiane Brosius, *India's Middle Class: New Forms of Urban Leisure, Consumption and Prosperity* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010).

[49] Brosius, *India's Middle Class*, p. 308.

[50] Shoma Munshi, "Marvellous Me: The Beauty Industry and the Construction of the 'Modern' Indian Woman," in: *Images of the 'Modern Woman' in Asia: Global Media, Local Meanings*, ed. Shoma Munshi (Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), p. 87.

[51] Sangita Shreshtova, *Is It All About Hips? Around the World with Bollywood Dance* (New Delhi & London: SAGE Publications, 2011).

body fitness has been another influential factor. Dancers travelling abroad, undergoing Western dance or fitness trainings or collaborations, have brought inspiration which they have started utilising in their Odissi training and performance.

Sanjukta Panigrahi is one of the first Odissi dancers travelling to Europe to teach the dance. In her seminars for International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA), she actively participated and collaborated with Eugenio Barba and other performers from 1980 till 1996. She admitted that teaching outside India is a challenge as "[participants] don't know India or its traditions."[52] New places, people, and contexts require adopting new ways of addressing, and there are multiple layers which co-influence the way knowledge is passed on to them. The value of the cognisance and sense of motion in Odissi was realised by Panigrahi during her sessions with ISTA. She observed as follows: "I reflected on exactly what my body was doing during the dance. I found I could feel each part of my body. I could define the role each part played in the formation of the dance."[53] In this new experience, which had been absent in her traditional Odissi training based on mirroring and repetition, Panigrahi recognised the kinesthetic sense, through which one can seek a "deeper understanding of movement itself as a way of knowing, a medium that carries meaning in an immediately felt, somatic mode."[54] Such experiences led to a growth of anatomical awareness amongst Odissi dancers.

Bijayani Satpathy from Nrityagram, an Odissi dance institution in Bangalore, reflecting on her own training, was able to identify wrong postures, established by pushing the chest front and hip back—to find a bigger curve, which she had been asked to create by her teachers. For health and safety concerns, these postures are problematic because of the severe anatomical injuries that may arise (e.g. lower back strain). Hence, Satpathy, although following the ideals of sculpturesque body, does not adhere to the ideal of its exaggeration. She seems to follow Parviainen's phenomenological understanding that dancing is not only about learning body skills but employing body knowledge, that is "the ability to find proper movements through bodily negotiation."[55] Body conditioning

[52] Sanjukta Panigrahi, quoted in: Ron Jenkins and Ian Watson, "Odissi and ISTA Dance: An Interview with Sanjukta Panigrahi," in: *Negotiating Cultures: Eugenio Barba and the Intercultural Debate*, ed. Ian Watson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 73.

[53] Ibid., p. 69.

[54] Deidre Sklar, "Reprise: On Dance Ethnography," *Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 32 (2000), p. 70.

[55] Jaana Parviainen, "Bodily Knowledge: Epistemological Reflections on Dance," *Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 34 (2002), p. 20.

in Nrityagram has been treated as an important factor directly effecting the dancer and the dance. However, it is undertaken separately outside of the core dancing session. Besides Hatha Yoga and Kalaripayattu, Pilates, and ballet exercises, Ranjabati Sircar's contemporary dance exercises, guided through a vocabulary and approach based on Feldenkrais method, are amongst Nrityagram's daily practice and training methodology. In this approach, we see a shift of the "ideals" of the "Odissi body" from voluptuous bodies of the sculptures to slim, fit, and athletic bodies.

How has this shift of "Odissi body" "ideals" impacted the dancers' embodiment of Odissi dance? My PhD research has shown that it is shaping dancers who aim towards achieving a healthy, conditioned, strong, fully aware bodymind, free from any constraints, because this enables active exploration of multiple paradigms.[56] With the thinking-feeling sensory-somatic bodymind the dancer initiates and experiences what dance anthropologist Brenda Farnell calls "a process of agentic embodied meaning-making."[57] Thus, the previously objectified bodies of the dancers now become subjective bodyminds fully engaged in the process. What has primarily led to this situation is the socio-cultural shift from the teacher's absolute authority towards a greater agency of the performer. There is a change from the third person (*guru*-disciple) to first person (disciple-disciple) teaching/transmission. Instead of mimicking the teacher's movement, the dancer-student learns through personal exploration and analysis under the teacher's guidance. According to the somatic practitioner Thomas Hanna, this is the first-person perception of body from inside (the dancer).[58] Finally, there is a shift from silence, total surrender, and habituation toward teachers' encouraging students to ask-think-do and learn from feeling, sensing, thinking, experimenting, and exploring from within their bodymind, and toward envisioning the dance form and movement through anatomical awareness, for instance by paying attention to principles of weight distribution, alignment, touch, imagery, or metaphors.[59] This demonstrates the transition of the dancer's role and place from the objectified to the subjective and agentic.

The "Odissi body" has been dynamically changing its purpose, identity, corporeality, movement, space, and sensory frameworks. The socio-political, historical, and economic circumstances as well as global influences

[56] Sen-Podstawska, "When Our Senses Dance."

[57] Brenda Farnell, "Kinesthetic Sense and Dynamically Embodied Action," p. 135.

[58] Thomas Hanna, "What is Somatics," in: *Bone, Breath & Gesture: Practices of Embodiment*, ed. Don Hanlon Johnson (San Francisco: North Atlantic Books, 1995).

[59] Sen-Podstawska, "When Our Senses Dance."

have inevitably been key factors in the continuous re-modelling of the Odissi dance. As anthropologist Adrienne Kaeppler notes, "dancing and its history are not just 'out there' in some positivistic sense; it is the framing and interpretation of dancing that makes history for the present."[60] Due to the inscription of manifold narratives Odissi has remained an extremely unstable, contested, and malleable form, a project still in formation. It became an invention of a new Indian nation highly influenced by Western philosophies because the older orders did not comply with the modern any longer. As soon the classical label was attained, Odissi departed from the fixed frameworks of Jayantika, and the disciples' bodymind and its movement came under scrutiny of their specific *gurus* and schools. These shifts went hand in hand with the enrichment of somatic and aesthetic meanings through regional practices. Eventually, the recent transitions from the set structure in contemporary practices are stretching the parameters of Odissi dance bodymind.

The exploration of the shifting "ideals" of the Odissi dancer's body marked by the changing socio-cultural influences, the "social eye," shows that the Odissi dancer's body has served as an object, a canvas for painting national narratives, symbols of the state, antiquity, tradition, or gurus' styles. The Mahari dancer's subjectivity, the thinking, feeling, and sensing bodymind, was erased throughout the revival and post-revival period. The "ideals" kept moving from voluptuous to athletic bodies, and from objectified silent "docile" bodies of the post-revival period to sensory-somatic bodies (thinking-feeling, open to explorations) in the period of transitions. The recent changes with the turn to the subjective sensory-somatic approach to the "Odissi body" have opened a new space to contemporary dancers, offering them a new role and place. They can engage with the dance form with an agentic thinking-feeling bodymind. This has enabled dancers to go beyond the portrayal of mythologies and generate dialogues with the current socio-cultural issues. In the light of these transformations, the contemporary Odissi dancers can be seen as agents who "write" and make history instead of just being the objects or vessels onto which history and identity are projected. This transient nature of Odissi dance proves what Janet O' Shea notes: "culture is not a single identity that dance reflects or contributes to. Rather, culture is a set of politicized 'belongings' that shift in relationship to concerns that are

[60] Adrienne L. Kaeppler, "Dances and Dancing in Tonga. Anthropological and Historical Discourses," in: *Dancing from Past to Present: Nation, Culture, Identities*, ed. Theresa J. Buckland (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), p. 27.

local and contemporaneous."[61] The contestation over definitions of ideal, traditional, classical, contemporary, time, place, people, power, and money continues. It seems that the unavoidable processes that govern the global world keep bringing back and forth issues of usurpation of power. What remains at the very heart of these dynamics is that "the body, like the self, becomes a site of interaction, appropriation and reappropriation."[62]

Sabina Sweta Sen-Podstawska

The Transient "Ideals" of the "Odissi Body" and the Changing Place and Role of Odissi Dancers in History

This article revisits the history of the Odissi dance's formation and development in order to explore the changing "ideals" of the "Odissi body" and the transformation of the Odissi dancer's agency, and their place and role in history. I review the trajectory of the Odissi dance's history originating from an ancient form carved in stone, through the regional traditions of Maharis and Gotipuas, its revival as a cultural, aesthetic, and classical entity under the direct influence of early 20th-century Indian nationalism, its further development into specific styles and schools, and to the more recent understanding of the Odissi dance as a sensory-somatic form. Throughout the work, I question the subject/object role of the dancers which shifts depending on who "makes" the "ideal body" and decides about the prerequisites of the dance form. I analyse how the changing "ideals" of the body transform the role and place of the dancer from being an object to becoming an agent (the shift form objectified to subjective). I discuss the lack or presence of the subjective and agentic (feeling-thinking-sensing) bodymind throughout three periods: revival, post-revival, and transition. In the analysis, I apply theories from chosen philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, dance phenomenologists, and somatic practitioners. This interdisciplinary perspective enables a study of the history of a dance which has always been influenced by the socio-cultural circumstances, and has remained a highly malleable and transient form.

Keywords: Odissi dance history, transient ideals, "docile body", objectified body, subjective body, agency.

Słowa klucze: Historia tańca Odissi, ideały przelotne, potulne ciała, uprzedmiotowione ciało, podmiotowe ciało, zdolność działania.

[61] Janet O'Shea, "Dancing Through History and Ethnography: Indian Classical Dance and the Performance of Past," in: *Dancing from the Past to Present: Nation, Culture, Identities*, ed. Theresa J. Buckland (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), p. 145.

[62] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (California: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 218.