

THE DEBAPRASAD DAS TRADITION: RECONSIDERING THE
NARRATIVE OF CLASSICAL INDIAN ODISSI DANCE HISTORY

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Abstract

This dissertation is dedicated to theorizing the Debaprasad Das stylistic lineage of Indian classical Odissi dance. Odissi is one of the seven classical Indian dance forms recognized by the Indian government. Each of these dance forms underwent a twentieth century “revival” whereby it was codified and recontextualized from pre-existing ritualistic and popular movement practices to a performance art form suitable for the proscenium stage. The 1950s revival of Odissi dance in India ultimately led to four stylistic lineage branches of Odissi, each named after the corresponding founding pioneer of the tradition.

I argue that the theorization of a dance lineage should be inclusive of the history of the lineage, its stylistic vestiges and philosophies as embodied through its aesthetic characteristics, as well as its interpretation, and transmission by present-day practitioners. In my theorization of the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi, I draw upon Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the habitus, and argue that Guru Debaprasad Das's vision of Odissi dance was informed by the socio-political backdrop of Oriya nationalism, in the context of which he choreographed, but also resisted the heavy emphasis on coastal Oriya culture of the Oriya nationalist movement.

My methodology for the project has been ethnographic, supported by original archival research. In the second chapter, I examine the twentieth century history of this stylistic lineage in the context of the Odissi revival of the 1950s, and in the third chapter, I examine the life and artistic work of its founder, the late Guru Debaprasad Das. The

fourth chapter is dedicated to analyzing the stylistic characteristics distinct to this style of Odissi, and examining some of the underlying politics of representation, classicism, and regional affiliations which have informed the repertoire and movement lexicon of this lineage. I point to how this lineage has been historically marginalized in scholarship, discourse, and the international stage, and analyze some of the reasons for this marginalization. The fifth and sixth chapter are dedicated to the current practice of the lineage, including pedagogical practices by current teachers, as well as examination of the creation and performance of new repertoire pieces within this lineage, and the various contexts in which this style of Odissi is performed globally. Ultimately, I examine the divergent artistic voices from within the Debaprasad Das lineage itself and argue that the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi is itself marked by heterogeneity via multiple and often divergent understandings of the philosophies of the late Guru Debaprasad Das.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On a slightly chilly January evening in Odisha, India, the magnificent Mukteswar Temple of Bhubaneswar is lit by bright outdoor stage lights. The sound of conch shells being blown heralds the beginning of a performance, and the traditional Odissi orchestra slowly begins the soundscore. Eleven dancers of the Bhubaneswar-based Nrutyayan Odissi troupe, directed by Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, slowly enter for their performance of “Saptamatrika” onto the large outdoor stage constructed for the large-scale Mukteswar Festival. The ensemble consists of both male and female performers, all of whom are students of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir. The performance is marked by precision and uniformity. The female performers all wear the prestitched Odissi costume, featuring a red and blue colour combination, and the male performers wear yellow fabric draped as dhotis. The performance lasts around forty minutes, after which the ensemble, as well as the musicians, and Guru Durgacharan Ranbir are felicitated onstage by a local politician and a few dignitaries. The Nrutyayan ensemble’s performance is one of the five performances programmed at the venue on this evening, as part of the second day of the Bhubaneswar-based Mukteswar Dance Festival, an annual festival of Odissi dance, which is telecast live on Doordarshan Television, India’s national broadcasting channel.

On a September afternoon, at the open-air Incredible India tourism stage at the 92nd Y Street Festival at Lexington Avenue and 92nd Street in New York City, the Trinayan Dance Collective (now Trinayan Dance Theatre), led by Bani Ray, perform a suite of

traditional dances of Odisha, dressed in bright pastel-shade saris. It is a hot afternoon, and the dancers perform barefoot on the open-air stage. The twenty-minute suite consists of two dances from classical Odissi repertoire, and a folk dance choreographed by Guru Durgacharan Ranbir. Their costume consists of the draped sari, so as to accommodate both the classical and the folk dance, and the dancers are each wearing a different coloured sari. The all-female troupe performs to taped music, ending with the festive folk dance number, to which the audience claps. The stage the troupe performs on is sponsored by Incredible India, promoting India tourism, and is one of the many stages along the stretch of the street blocked for the festival. The festival stretch also features numerous stalls selling handicrafts and cuisines from different parts of the world.

Young students from Guru Srinath Raut Institute of Classical Dance perform a feature-length programme in front of a community audience at a makeshift stage constructed during annual ritualistic Durga Puja Festival in October in New Delhi, India. The event marks the first public dance performance for many of these young dancers, whose ages range from nine to fifteen. The audience consists of the local community of Durga Puja celebration attendees, and the parents of the young performers. The dancers perform to a cassette tape, wearing costume sets rented from their teacher's family.

Each of these vignettes depicts a performance of Indian classical Odissi dance, of the lineage of the late Guru Debaprasad Das. They also represent the wide variety of contexts in which this lineage of Odissi is performed. Odissi dance, from the eastern

coastal state of Odisha, formerly known as Orissa, is one of the seven classical Indian dance forms recognized by the Indian government. This dissertation is a study of the multiplicity of stylistic voices within the classical Indian dance form of Odissi, with an emphasis on theorizing the Debaprasad Das stylistic branch of Odissi, named after the founder, the late Guru Debaprasad Das.

As a student of Odissi dance in India in the late 1990s, I had encountered photographs of Guru Debaprasad Das, and had been aware that I belonged to the fourth generation of dancers of his stylistic lineage. However, my first encounter with rhetoric claiming this form of Odissi as the “other” to a more mainstream understanding of Odissi was in the year 2000, at a dance teacher’s studio in the United States. I was asked if what I had learned previously was “classical Odissi,” as the aesthetic of the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi was strikingly distinct from the aesthetic of Odissi taught at the studio. I was asked “What is the Debaprasad Das Odissi style? Is it different from Odissi?” In another incident, I had been told that the Debaprasad Das style was “less classical,” in comparison to the Odissi style of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra. This enquiry into the stylistic peculiarities of the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi was initiated through such rhetorical encounters. I became interested in finding articulations for describing the distinctive aesthetics and philosophy of this style of Odissi. This project is therefore invested in theorizing the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi. The major questions which inform my project include: how might the identity of an artist be articulated with respect to a particular lineage branch within a certain classical dance style; and how can a lineage itself be articulated as an entity under the larger umbrella of the style of which it is a

branch?

Ten years ago, I found the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi to be marginalized, both in terms of its visibility in the Indian and international dance performance scene, as well as in the scholarly discourse by practitioners, journalists and scholars. Over the last decade, this style of Odissi has become somewhat more visible with the rise of more soloists, ensembles and teachers practicing this style of Odissi. However, it continues to remain largely marginalized in both scholarly discourse and the international stage.

In this dissertation, I examine how distinct cultures of a heterogeneous society belonging to the same territory are represented in a dance form seen as emblematic of the region. Susan Reed, in *Dance and the Nation: Performance, Ritual and Politics in Sri Lanka*, posits that the ubiquitousness of Kandyan dance, the dance of the Sinhala majority in Sri Lanka, coupled with its portability as a cultural symbol, highlights its significance as a symbol of ethnic and national identity (4). The Odissi dance form, named after the state of Odisha, was revived in the 1950s, and strategically drew upon older movement practices as well as popular regional theatre practices of twentieth-century coastal Odisha. As I argue in the historical section of this dissertation, the revival of Odissi dance was greatly informed by Oriya nationalism, which had gained prominence since the late nineteenth century in coastal Odisha.

The revival of classical Indian dance styles began in the 1930s, with the rise of the nationalist movement in India, as reaction against the ruling colonial British power. A number of individuals spearheaded this revival of the classical Indian dances; notable among them are Rabindranath Tagore and Rukmini Devi Arundale. Tagore's innovations

and developments in the medium of the *dance drama* increased the visibility of traditional Indian dance in the public sphere, and his establishment of an institution at Shantiniketan in West Bengal led to the propagation of these dance forms, especially those of Manipuri from eastern India. Rukmini Devi, from the Brahmin caste in Tamil Nadu in the southern region of India is credited with being a leading figure of this revival, and her efforts culminated in the codification of the movement practice which became recognized as the Bharata Natyam dance form. The revival resulted in a number of changes. Firstly, dance performance as “high art” became open for public consumption in India, whereas it was relegated to largely the temple and the royal and aristocratic courts earlier, with the public having more access to “popular” dance forms such as folk dance, ritualistic dances, and social dances. Secondly, the Bharata Natyam revival period, with its emphasis on establishing institutions, where the codified classical dance forms were taught, also enabled more ready access to learning the classical dance forms, whereas many of the movement practices from which they drew heritage, were accessible only to castes of hereditary performers. Thirdly, the revival led to the structuring and creation of the set repertoire of Bharata Natyam, termed as the *margam*.

Matthew Harp Allen, in his study of the 1930s Bharata Natyam revival, focusing on the creative choices of Rukmini Devi during this revival process, maintains that the revival of South Indian dance in the 1930s was part of a larger pattern of “revivals” in art, including visual art and other performing arts in the northern part of the South Asian subcontinent during the same period (Allen 205). Alessandra y Royo, in "Classicism, Post-Classicism and Ranjabati Sircar's Work: Re-defining the Terms of Indian

Contemporary Dance Discourses," returns to the definition of "classicism" as a concept referring to the antiquity of Greece and Rome, and their art and culture and subsequent historical periods that looked back to Greece and Rome for their prototype of "art" (Royo 2004, 6). She states that the aesthetic use of these principles suggest the classical characteristics of clarity, order, symmetry, and dignity, and that the notion of classicism is essentially European, and implies a model of perfection based on an imagined past (Royo 2004, 6). Royo points out that the notion of extracting "principles" from antiquity, and then aligning existing living traditions, and further building upon those principles, is, historically, a European tradition. She proposes that there is more than one notion of "classicism" in the discourse of Indian dance by practitioners. She argues that "other" classicisms have emerged as a result of the colonial encounter. Quoting Mitter, she states that the essentially European notion of classicism, as an artistic mode, has essentially been transplanted and localized in non-western contexts (Royo 2004, 7). In Royo's view, Rukmini Devi's classicism matched that of the west, but its terms of reference were Indian (Royo 2004, 17).

Eric Hobsbawm's theory of the "invention of tradition" has been highly influential in scholarship which interrogates this notion of dance traditions as timeless and unchanging. In his theoretical introduction to the volume *The Invention of Tradition*, Hobsbawm posits that traditions which appear or claim to be old are "often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented" (Hobsbawm 1). He implies that the "invention" of tradition often involves adopting a set of practices which automatically imply a continuity with the past (Hobsbawm 1), and that the historic past, to which this tradition is inserted,

need not be a lengthy and distant past (Hobsbawm 2). He defines these "invented traditions" as "novel institutions which take the form of reference to old situations" (Hobsbawm 2).

The twentieth century ultimately saw the revival and flourishing of seven different Indian classical dance genres¹, each with its own complex and distinct revival history and politics. The Bharata Natyam revival became the blueprint for the revival of a number of these classical dances. As in the case of Bharata Natyam, Odissi, from the eastern state of Odisha, was revived in the twentieth century. During this revival period, practitioners and scholars drew upon pre-existing dance tradition. Odissi gained recognition as an Indian classical dance in 1958. Three main stylistic schools of Odissi emerged in the few years shortly following the accorded status as classical dance. Each of these stylistic schools is named after a founding pioneer of the tradition; namely the Guru Pankaj Charan Das style, the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra style, and the Guru Debaprasad Das style. A fourth style, Guru Mayadhar Raut style, was also recognized shortly thereafter, and a fifth distinctive style, the Guru Surendranath Jena style emerged in the early 1970s.

My dissertation investigates the stylistic features and embodied philosophies of the Debaprasad Das branch of Odissi dance, named after the late Guru Debaprasad Das. Through this research, I propose to examine the ideological framework in which this style invests itself, as well as some of the reasons why this lineage of Odissi remains marginalized in discourse and scholarship on Odissi. I aim to reassert the history of the

¹ In addition, Sattriya from Assam and Yakshagana, a theatrical dance drama form, are also currently recognized as classical Indian dance styles.

Debaprasad Das lineage into Odissi scholarship, and hence interrupt the mono-discourse regarding the Odissi revival history. I will analyze how the politics of representation, travel, identity and "classicism" have influenced the Odissi revival during the 1950s and 1960s, and how these factors, in turn, continue to influence the visibility of the Debaprasad Das lineage and its position in scholarship and discourse.

Theorizing *Gharana* (Stylistic Lineage)

The term *gharana*, which I use often in this dissertation, is a term borrowed from North Indian classical music traditions, in the context of which, it is used to denote a stylistic school. Daniel Neuman, in his study on the social organization of the artistic traditions in North Indian classical music system, focuses on the *gharana* systems. According to him, heads of distinct stylistic traditions trace their descent from a common founding ancestor or sibling pair of ancestors, and this descent from father to son is known as the *khandan* (Neuman 96). The term *gharana* is used when the *khandan* is strongly associated with a certain place, or the ancestral locality of the *khandan* (Neuman 162). The name of the place, usually a city, becomes attached to the name and identity of the *gharana*, such as the Gwalior *gharana*, which has its origins in the city of Gwalior. A similar system of nomenclature prevails for the stylistic schools of the Indian classical dance of Kathak, with the different styles identified as the Lucknow *gharana*, Jaipur *gharana* and Banaras *gharana*, each named after the place of origin of their founders.

Neuman finds the term *gharana* more inclusive and general than the word *khandan*, which specifically refers to a blood lineage. He points out that the membership in a *gharana* hardly constitutes a collectivity, and that there is no political organization or central headquarters (Neuman 146). In this regard, he provides the metaphor of the European intellectual circles, such as the Prague school of linguists, or Vienna Circle of logical positivists as the closest Western model to the concept (Neuman 146). Rosemary Jeanes, in her thesis on the teaching practices in Odissi dance, states that the dance lineages of Odisha share many characteristics similar to these North Indian music family systems (Jeanes 11). The Odissi system, however, departs from the model of the North Indian music families in that the styles of Odissi are associated with the names of their founders, as opposed to the place of origin as in the North Indian classical music tradition. In addition, the lineage-branches of Odissi are passed down through a system of teacher-discipleship, as opposed to the notion of hereditary lineage. Of the founders of the four styles of Odissi which can be traced back to the Odissi revival of the 1950s, only one (Guru Pankaj Charan Das) could claim familial lineage with the practitioners of the pre-existing Oriya movement practice with which he associated his style.

There are a number of terms used to connote the idea of a certain stylistic branch of Odissi. Popular usages include the following: “Debaprasad Das *gharana* of Odissi,” “Debaprasad Das *bani* of Odissi,” “Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi,” “Debaprasad Das style of Odissi,” and “the Debaprasad Das *gurukul*”. As evident above, these terms are not limited to a singular language, and often, in discourse in a certain language might draw upon the usage from the other language; for instance, in a conversation in the Oriya

language, one may still hear the phrase “the Debaprasad style.”

Central to the study and concept of the lineage-schools of Odissi dance is the system of the *guru-shishya parampara*. Jeanes points out that this system was primarily an oral tradition, and in the absence of written texts, was imparted orally by a living representative – the guru – who “both embodied and transmitted the traditional knowledge” to the shishya or student (Jeanes 30). In this system, the guru constitutes the centre and source of all knowledge. The student, in turn, also embodies the knowledge, and yet, his or her position with reference to the knowledge is distinct from that of the guru. Whereas the guru is seen as the complete source of knowledge, the student’s relationship to the knowledge is in continual flux; he or she gains further knowledge by remaining in the presence of the guru and imitating the guru. Ananya Chatterjea, in her study of the training systems of classical Indian dance in urban regions in India, draws attention to the humility expected of the student in this system, manifest through activities such as the student leaving the shoes outside the door upon entering the dance space, and touching the guru’s feet as a sign of respect before and after the performance (“Training in Classical Indian Dance” 71). She further highlights the ideology of affect endemic to the guru-shishya parampara; that the shishya or disciple is able to learn by absorbing the atmosphere of the art through being in constant presence of the guru (“Training in Classical Indian Dance” 71). The guru-shishya parampara continues to inform the teacher-student relationship in the classical Indian dances today.

In the context of Odissi, it is significant to note that while the movement and artistic traditions informing these styles of Odissi are earlier traditions, the different gharanas are

themselves products of the twentieth century.

Dancing the Ethnography: Fluid Positionalities

My familiarity with Odissi has been through fourteen years of engagement with Odissi dance, both in India and in North America. I was initiated into Odissi dance in New Delhi, India in the Debaprasad Das tradition of Odissi. Through my subsequent relocation to the United States and subsequently to Canada, I encountered the other two lineages of Odissi by taking dance classes with teachers of the other traditions. My encounters with discourse propagating one style of Odissi as “more classical” over the other two styles, spurred me to question the labels of “classical” and “authentic.”

My positionality in the field of research on the late Guru Debaprasad Das is complex. Firstly, I am marked as an “outsider” by virtue of not having encountered Guru Debaprasad Das himself, but of being a third generation dancer of his lineage. I am a student of the second and third generation of Odissi dance masters trained by Guru Debaprasad Das himself. Secondly, I am also marked as an “outsider” by virtue of being non-Oriya-speaking. As my ethnography is multi-sited, situated in the cities of New Delhi, Bhubaneswar, Kolkata, and a few locations in the United States, my outsider-ness became a factor especially in Odisha. Thirdly, my position as a diasporic Indian from Canada additionally marks me as an “outsider” during my field research in India.

My position is made more complex by the fact that I stayed and trained in the house of my teacher, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, in Bhubaneswar, Odisha for extended

periods, in a system which may be considered a hybrid between the gurukul tradition and a residential dance intensive. The gurukul tradition is a traditional Hindu pedagogical model whereby the student or a number of students live in the teacher's home, perform daily household chores and activities in exchange for learning under the teacher.

Etymologically, the word refers to “teacher’s family,” as the word *guru* in Sanskrit refers to “teacher” or “enlightener,” and *kul* refers to “family.” The student is therefore considered an extension of the household and family of the guru. Chatterjea, in her study of different pedagogical systems in Calcutta in the 1990s, notes that the gurukul system declined with the entry of increasing numbers of middle class women into the classical dances, and in its place, shorter periods of training, such as three hours a week, became popular ("Training in Classical Indian Dance" 72). She also observes that students based in Calcutta in the state of West Bengal, which has no classical dance of its own, periodically invited the guru to visit and teach intensives in their cities, and also visited and learned from their teachers in major classical dance centres for short durations ("Training in Classical Indian Dance" 80). The length of my stay extended beyond usual residential dance intensives, which generally last for a few weeks. During my extended stay of four months, I partook in daily household duties such as helping in the kitchen, teaching, performing and touring with the ensemble, in addition to my daily classes. My participation in the household of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir thus rendered me a liminal position as a partial “insider” during my stay in Bhubaneswar.

The body plays an important role in my positionality in the field. Ruth Behar, in *The Vulnerable Observer: Ethnography that Breaks Your Heart*, points out that the body

is a repository of memories and sensations (Behar 134). I had first learnt this style of Odissi fourteen years ago, under the tutelage of Guru Sushant Raut in New Delhi, India. Upon my move to North America, and due to the lack of teachers available teaching this style of Odissi outside India, I took classes in the styles of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra and Guru Pankaj Charan Das. The body became both the marker of my insider-outsiderness, as well as the point of reference for a large part of my fieldwork. In this manner, the Odissi style of Guru Debaprasad Das becomes my point of kinaesthetic and visual reference when examining Odissi dance.

I re-encountered this style of Odissi through my fieldwork, which took me to a number of individuals practicing the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi, many of whom I also studied under. These included Sukanya Rahman in Maine, United States, Vani Madhav and Aniruddha Das in New Delhi, and finally, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir in Bhubaneswar, Odisha in India. My first extended trip to the field was in 2011, when I stayed with the family of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, trained under him, interviewed him and observed his rehearsals and classes. I returned to India in 2012, this time for a period of four months for research and training on an Arts Fellowship from the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute. During this time, I lived with the family of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir for three months, trained under him, participated in classes in both group settings as well as private lessons, and performed for him as both a soloist as well as a touring troupe member of his performing ensemble Nrutyayan.

Through the course of this ethnography, my positionality has been a constantly fluid one, often shifting between that of the dancer-trainee-performer and the

ethnographer. As the ethnographer, I interviewed dancers, choreographers and teachers of this style of Odissi, and observed classes and rehearsals, thereby marking myself as the “outsider”. As performer, especially within the Nrutyayan ensemble, I became the “insider”, inhabiting the everyday experiences and challenges of a troupe-member of a prominent dance ensemble performing the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi. At times, I was considered the “authentic representative” of this classical dance form from Odisha, such as in during my performance staged especially for Italian tourists at a tourist lodge in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. Occasionally, I was given comments such as “she looks Oriya”. At other times, I was recognized as non-Oriya, and an “outsider” to Oriya culture, such as an incident at a festival during which I was singled out by mediapersons for an interview at a festival, and asked about my experience in Odisha as an outsider.

Methodology

As this project is invested in both the history and living practice of the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi, I engage in both ethnographic and archival research methodologies. Alexandra Carter, in her first chapter of the edited volume *Rethinking Dance History* (2004), notes that traditionally, historiography privileges certain groups and activities, which become regarded as the canon while others become marginalized (Carter 16). She outlines how the different contributors to the book “disturb the privilege of key periods in extant historiography” (Carter 3), and thus introduce a critical engagement with the known historical narratives. She argues that the discipline of history is challenged by

scholars informed by post-structuralism, feminist theories, and postmodern theories (Carter 10). In particular, she points out how Ramsay Burt and Julie Kavanagh write about homosexuality in dance, Lynn Garafola writes about the audiences of the Romantic ballet, and Deborah Jowitt focuses on the financial life of the Romantic ballerina.

While these interventions in history focus on a rereading of the past through the lens of new issues and perspectives, or of reasserting different issues into historiography, in my dissertation I argue that in the case of classical Indian dance, the study of a dance lineage remains incomplete if the living tradition is disregarded. The past and the present of a dance lineage continually dialogue with one another. The living generations of dancers of this tradition draw their identity from the past of this tradition. The current generation of this lineage's dancers also themselves represent the identity of this tradition today, and are invested in training successive generations in this dance style. This dissertation is thus invested in both the past as well as the present of this tradition. The past is accessed largely through memory, both a cerebral memory which stores the philosophies learnt orally, as well as a corporeal memory, which physically embodies the lineage's distinctive characteristics and philosophies.

Oral history is a significant part of my methodology, especially in my second chapter, in which I undertake to write about the life of Guru Debaprasad Das and the history of this stylistic branch of Odissi. In this manner, this dissertation also follows the methodological approach of journalist-historian William Dalrymple in his *City of Djinnns*, in which he strives to paint a picture of New Delhi under the British colonial rule by interviewing Delhi's expatriates in Lahore, Pakistan, as well as his own grandmother in

Britain. Dalrymple, in his project, writes about searching and interviewing British and South Asian residents of colonial Delhi. Part of my own fieldwork process involved tracking down practitioners and dancers who had danced with Guru Debaprasad Das in India and North America.

In a manner similar to Dalrymple, Davesh Soneji, in his study of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century South Indian *devadasi* dance performance in salons, examines memory and oral narrative as sites for uncovering history which may remain undisclosed in archival records. He locates his research work in a “disciplinary borderland” between history and anthropology, and argues that the mnemonic accounts of the living devadasis, related through oral narrative, pointed to “significant lacunae in the historicization of the devadasis in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (*Unfinished Gestures* 13). My own research for this project occupies a similar transient disciplinary territory between ethnography and archival research. I use archival research and photographs to help construct a history of the work of Guru Debaprasad Das during the early decades of his career. I also use ethnographic methodology, such as interviews and movement classes with a number of early students of Guru Debaprasad Das, in order to better realize the physicality of the early work of the late guru.

Arguing for the significance of oral narrative in studies of dance history, Soneji maintains that mnemonic narratives aid in revealing the undocumented sides of history (*Unfinished Gestures* 18). He draws upon the work of the subaltern studies scholars, including Partha Chatterjee and Ranajit Guha, in his attention to the “agency of the colonized” (*Unfinished Gestures* 18). Soneji’s research on the devadasi repertoire thus

highlights the narrative of the devadasis themselves. In this dissertation, I construct a narrative for the history of the Debaprasad Das branch of Odissi through mnemonic narratives of numerous colleagues, students and associates of the late Guru Debaprasad Das, as there exist very few written records of his life and work.

This project is a multi-sited ethnography. Between 2010 and 2012, I conducted ethnographic research in the city of Bhubaneswar (in the state of Odisha) and the capital city of New Delhi in India, as well as Orr's Island (Maine) in the United States, visiting Debaprasad Das lineage dancers, interviewing them, observing their methods of transmission of the tradition, and taking classes with them. As a methodological model for anthropology, multi-sited or multilocal fieldwork has become an increasingly popular mode of research since the 1980s. George E. Marcus points out that while in the mid 1980s, the single-site mode of ethnography was the dominant mode of ethnographic research, multi-sited ethnography has emerged as an increasingly popular mode (Marcus 95). He defines multi-sited ethnography as a mobile ethnography which is invested in "tracing a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activity" (96). He attributes this new approach in anthropological fieldwork to anthropology's participation in a number of interdisciplinary areas such as media studies, feminist studies, science and technology studies and cultural studies (97).

Ulf Hannerz takes up, as the counterpoint example, the classic anthropological model of Evans-Pritchard, with the emphasis on single-site fieldwork, which required long lengths of stay and observation in the field, in order to gain a thorough understanding of the field ("Being there..." 202). Hannerz attributes this shift towards

mobile ethnographies to the nature of the changing field itself, pointing to the force of “globalization” in the commercial, economic and media spheres. He also points out that the nature of certain ethnographic “fields” require for the fieldwork to be multilocal as the fields themselves are multilocal (“Being there” 205). As his central illustrative example, he discusses his methodology in his study of the lifestyle of foreign news correspondents who travel internationally on a daily basis, in order to report news for television channels. He discusses how he interviews journalists in different cities, such as New York City, Tokyo, Jerusalem, and Johannesburg.

In the context of my research on the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi, due to the unprecedented extent to which Indian classical dance has circulated over the last two decades and due to the growing South Asian diaspora, a report on the current workings and sustenance of the gharana would remain incomplete if the diasporic scene were left unexamined. Helena Wulff, in her multi-sited ethnography on the profession of ballet dancers, asserts that in the ballet world, there is constant transnational presence and movement of dancers through guest performances, touring, competitions, galas and festivals (18). Accordingly, her ethnography focuses on four ballet companies; the Royal Swedish Ballet in Stockholm, the Royal Ballet in London, the American Ballet Theatre in New York City, and Ballett Frankfurt in Frankfurt. In the context of circulation of the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi, individuals identified with artistic seniority and as the guardians of the authenticity of this style of Odissi are, themselves, continually on tour for many months of the year. This includes the generation of gurus who trained under Guru Debaprasad Das, and who currently are considered the authority on the authenticity

of this style. Of them, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir and Guru Gajendra Panda are perhaps the most visible gurus who tour nationally as well as internationally to teach and perform with their professional touring ensembles. In addition, over the last decade, a number of soloists of this style have performed as invited guest artists for other Odissi dance companies in different parts of the world. Wulff points out that in the ballet world, transnational experience is regarded as desirable for a dancer's career development and reputation (40). The career of an Odissi dancer is similarly bolstered through international performance and workshop tours, which bring them exposure, visibility, reputation as well as financial capital. A number of Odissi practitioners, both within and outside of the Debaprasad Das gharana, are on the roster of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), which is an Indian central government organization which deals with the promotion of traditional Indian arts internationally. The Odissi ensembles of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir and Guru Gajendra Panda are also included within the ICCR roster. Perhaps the most transnationally visible Odissi ensemble of the Debaprasad Das style is the Sutra Dance Theatre of Malaysia, under the Artistic Directorship of Ramli Ibrahim. Sutra Dance Theatre travels widely, and performs in India, as well as across Europe, Asia, and North America. This transnational circulation of the practice and performance of the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi was a factor in my choice of multi-sited mode of ethnography for this project.

As centres of propagation and promotion of this style of Odissi extend to large, cosmopolitan cities such as New Delhi and New York City, I have included New Delhi as one of the sites in my fieldwork. Hannerz asserts that any multi-sited ethnography

almost always entails a selection of sites from among a number of potential sites which could have been included ("Being there" 207). My choices of the cities of Bhubaneswar and New Delhi in India were informed by their status (historical and current) as active centers where this style of Odissi is propagated. Bhubaneswar in Odisha was the city where Guru Debaprasad Das resided during the greater part of his career as an Odissi teacher, and it continues to be the city in which this style of Odissi is promoted on the largest and most visible scale. New Delhi had an early exposure to the work of Guru Debaprasad Das as it was the location where the first Odissi performance was staged, at the Inter-University Youth Festival in 1954, where the young dancer Priyambada Mohanty performed a ten-minute choreography of Guru Debaprasad Das . New Delhi continued to be a significant centre for the visibility of his style through the performances of Indrani Rehman, the most visible performer of the Debaprasad Das style through the 1950s to the 1970s, and later, through the work and teachings of the late Guru Srinath Raut, who taught in the city and trained a large number of dancers from 1975 to his death in 1987. Dancers trained by Guru Debaprasad Das and Guru Srinath Raut in New Delhi continued to work in the city and establish institutions, some of which have become prominent centres of teaching for this style, and a study of some of these institutions are included in this study. New Delhi is also the home of the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi archives, where I conducted some of my archival research in the Photo and Audio-video archival wings.

Soneji draws attention to the marked difference in the public life of the devadasis of South India from their years as highly esteemed and active performers during the

1930s and 1940s and their reticent, often taboo presence in the public sphere during the late 1990s and the first decade of the twenty first century. Soneji employs the metaphor of the “borderland” to describe his methodological approach of drawing upon both archival research work and ethnography, which enables him to address the liminal spaces between the embodied presence and historicized past, and to “oscillate between the two” (*Unfinished Gestures* 6). In the case of my own research subject, I find that my use of both archival research and ethnographic fieldwork is perhaps the only means to address both the historical and continuing work in the Debaprasad Das gharana, as a gharana is understood to be the living tradition, and thus both continually in dialogue with history as well as functioning actively as a continuing tradition.

As I point out in my review of literature, the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi has traditionally been largely marginalized in scholarly literature on Odissi, especially with regards to the twentieth-century development of Odissi as a classical Indian dance form. In addition to bolstering a theorization for the identity of this lineage, my inquiry into the lineage’s history within the context of the Odissi revival in the 1950s also helps construct a written history for this lineage of Odissi.

Thus my methodology for this project consists largely of ethnography and archival research, and through the use of multilocal ethnography, I chart the practice of Debaprasad Das style Odissi dance artists in the homeland of Odissi dance, as well as in the diaspora.

Orientations and Disorientations: An Ethnography of Corporeal Affect

The notion of affect intersects my ethnography at a number of levels. Introducing their comprehensive anthology of critical essays on affect, in “An Inventory of Shimmers,” Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth assert that affect is found “in those intensities which pass body to body (human, non-human, part-body, and otherwise)” (Seigworth and Gregg 1). They assert that affect is the body’s capacity to affect and be affected (2).

When I first expressed interest in further training in Odissi to Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, he had said “Come to Odisha. Eat rice with us, and eat with your hands. Only then will you be able to dance Odissi the way it should be danced.” Guru Durgacharan Ranbir’s rhetoric of how the nuances of the dance form are “absorbed” organically through the dancer’s immersion into the Oriya lifestyle reflect this idea of affect, especially, the notion of corporeal affect.

To a large extent, my encounters in the field were corporeal encounters, often characterized by a newness of a corporeal experience. In the home of my guru, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, I walked barefoot all day. Guru Durgacharan Ranbir’s household consisted of himself, his wife (Guruma), and Debu Bhai, a student of Guruji who also works in the Ranbir house. A large number of field “notes” I took were actually notes taken through the corporeal experience. My mornings in my guru’s home in Bhubaneswar were spent in the company of Guruma, drinking ginger-milk tea, as Guruma discussed upcoming programmes or past programmes. In the evenings, after our classes and rehearsals, Debu Bhai would go up to the kitchen to prepare dinner. I would

join him there on most evenings, sitting on a small jute floor mat, and listening while he told me about his life, dance experiences and dreams. He had studied up to Grade 10 in the village of Sakhigopal in the Puri district, and had then come to Bhubaneswar to concentrate on a career in dance. He was a keen learner, and, in addition to being employed in Guruji's household, he had also been inducted into Guruji's performing company, which performed widely in India, and also internationally. Bhai often sang and danced while he cooked and cut vegetables. He cut his vegetables with a floor-knife. He believed that while they had a regular knife in the kitchen, the floor-knife enabled him to cut vegetables quickly while daydreaming, and that one cannot daydream while cutting with the other knives. A large part of my fieldnotes were taken during these times.

In "Desiring Recognition, Accumulating Affect," Megan Watkins studies the student-teacher dynamic in the pedagogical process in elementary schools, focusing on how the self is formed through engagement with others and the world (270). While Watkins examines primary education, her model of affect as it relates to the pedagogical system may be applied to the case of pedagogical models within the gharana system. Within the system of training in the classical Indian arts, the student becomes more proficient as he or she spends more time with the teacher, in essence "absorbing" his skills through emulating. Rosemary Jeanes, in her thesis, uses the term "transmission" to denote the continuity of tradition between generations of practitioners of the art form. It is also indicated that by living at the teacher's home, or close to the teacher, the student dialogues with the art form to a greater extent, through the virtue of having access to the art form in conversation, viewing performances, observing and participating in class and

rehearsals.

In addition to the nature of absorbing nuances of an Odissi dance form in the gharana system, the nature of participation-based ethnography itself is affect-based, as the ethnographer arrives in the field with an openness to being attuned to the field, in order to soak the experiences of the field. Kathleen Stewart asserts that “everything depends on the dense entanglement of affect, attention, the senses, and matter” (Stewart 340).

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation is invested in creating a framework which has the ability to address a stylistic branch under the larger umbrella of a dance style or genre. I posit that a dance style can be examined through a framework comprising three factors: the history of the dance style as pertaining to the major historical figures associated with the developments shaping the dance’s form, the philosophies and socio-political aspects embodied in the movements characteristic of the dance style, and lastly, the current work and interpretations of these philosophies and movements as followed by its current practitioners.

Previous models for analyzing choreography have been offered by scholars such as Susan Foster. Foster, in her Preface to *Choreographing History*, gives the name “reading dancing” to her method of “active and interactive interpretation of dance as a system of meaning” (xviii). Her model is based on reading a set of choreographic

conventions which communicate what the dance is about (xviii). Her proposed blueprint for understanding choreographic meaning includes analyzing the “framing” of the dance event, through the performance setting, programme brochures, costumes of the dancers and the nature of the audience interaction; how the choreography represents a certain subject; and the stylistic choices and movement vocabularies employed by the choreographer. In her book, Foster primarily analyzes the works of twentieth-century North American choreographers working in the area of neo-classical ballet, modern dance, and postmodern dance.

While Foster’s model of interpreting choreography is useful for understanding a dance in the context of a specific performance, it cannot be applied to a dance tradition. Foster’s model focuses on the creative product of these stylistic voices in dance, as opposed to the stylistic tradition itself. Much of my research in this dissertation focuses on creating a narrative for the history of this lineage in the twentieth-century development of Odissi as a classical Indian dance form, and also the movement traditions and embodied philosophies which mark this branch of Odissi as distinct from the other existing styles of Odissi. I locate areas in which this identity is expressed or observed. These, include firstly, the narrative of twentieth-century Odissi revival history, in which three styles of Odissi – that of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, Guru Pankaj Charan Das, and Guru Debaprasad Das – were traditionally identified. Secondly, the identity of these dance lineages as distinct styles within Odissi is also observed in the visual presentation of the dance, in the movements of the dance as well as aspects such as costuming.

Benedict Anderson, in his attempt to define nation and nationhood in *Imagined*

Communities, proposes that the nation is an “imagined political community,” arguing that it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know all their fellow nationals, and yet “an image of communion” exists in each of their minds (Anderson 6). For the purpose of this dissertation, I argue that the gharana ideology within the classical Indian arts embodies a number of characteristics of Anderson’s theoretical formulation of the “imagined community.” While differences in philosophies, artistic and pedagogical practices may exist within the same gharana, the gharana itself exists by virtue of shared validation by its members.

Anderson asserts that for an understanding of the concepts of nation, nationhood and nationality, we “need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy” (Anderson 4). I draw upon Anderson’s three abovementioned aspects with respect to understanding an “imagined community” to create a framework for theorizing a gharana or lineage system in the performing arts.

My theorization of the semantic properties of a gharana draws upon three factors I see as significant in its development; including the history, the stylistic vestiges, and the living practice of the tradition. Anderson attributes the rise of the nation as an imagined community to print capitalism in Europe (36). He states that in the search for new ways of “linking fraternity” after the Reformation, the strongest factor was print capitalism, which “made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways (Anderson 36). I find that in the case of the stylistic lineages of Odissi, the unified sense of community,

though complex, is created largely through the oral tradition: a student is told, upon beginning dance classes, the name of his or her teacher, and the name of the teacher's teacher, and of the lineage of preceding teachers before him. However, this sense of belonging to a particular community is also consolidated through the practitioner's encounter with practitioners of other styles of Odissi, both as visual-kinaesthetic encounters, as well as encounters with rhetoric.

Much of the visual encounters with the various styles of Odissi today occur online through social media forums such as Facebook groups, listserves and electronic discussion groups. As I have pointed out earlier, Anderson attributes the rise of the nation as an "imagined community" was catalyzed by the growth of print media. It can be argued that the growth of electronic social media forums and the wide dissemination of information online has led to a growth of awareness of different styles of Odissi through increased exposure to the different styles of Odissi. While a detailed examination of the role of electronic media lies outside the scope of this project, websites, Facebook groups and discussion groups remains a significant source of secondary source material in my research. A brief discussion of the role of electronic media in supporting Odissi dance network and the Debaprasad Das lineage within the Odissi world as an "imagined community," is included in the Chapter 7 of this dissertation.

Multiple Voices: Rhetoric and Scholarship

As the topic of this dissertation was initiated by an encounter with rhetoric, "rhetorical

traffic” becomes a significant source of points of reference, as well as points of departure in the research on the history and identity of this gharana of Odissi. Rhetorical traffic is the site of creation, assigning, and understanding of identities within much of the Odissi community. In poststructuralist theory, language is seen as the site where identity, power, social meaning, and individual subjectivity are negotiated (Weedon 173). Alessandra Lopez y Royo, in her project on the Surendranath Jena style of Odissi describes encounters with rhetoric which enabled her to locate the position of the style within the community of Odissi practitioners and scholars. Of particular interest is her description of comments by Odissi practitioners and aficionados, including statements such as “that man should be jailed for what he has done to Odissi” (Royo, "Performing Konark"), and “you are wasting time, these forms are not classical, I will put you in touch with the real exponents of Odissi” (Royo, "Performing Konark"). Such statements led Royo to her theorization of the Jena style of Odissi as being a “transgressive style of Odissi,” not only in its stylistic and philosophical departures from the Jayantika style of Odissi, but also in the Odissi community’s shared acknowledgement of Jena’s voice of Odissi as being transgressive. Such rhetoric is also reflective of a distinctly Foucauldian “surveillance” over the Odissi form. Michel Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, states that with the emergence of the modern institution of the prison, as opposed to public executions of the medieval and post-medieval era, the individual is subject to a field of visibility, and essentially scrutiny. The individual then becomes aware of this scrutinizing gaze, inscribes it, and ultimately becomes the “principle of his own subjection” (Foucault 203). The scrutinizer, and the individual’s awareness of the gaze of

surveillance play an essential role in what Foucault sees as the individual's self-subjugation under this gaze.

Dinanath Pathy, in *Rethinking Odissi*, points out that during the revival of Odissi dance during the 1950s, the individuals associated with the revival movement did not have a written manifesto regarding the codifying rules of Odissi dance. He argues that unlike some European artistic movements of the early twentieth century, such as Dadaism and Surrealism, which had written manifestos for theorizing and articulating their specific goals and visions as an artistic voice, during the revival of different classical Indian dance forms there were no written manifestos (Pathy 39). A distinctive "centre" is not clearly outlined; yet there remains a general understanding of the aesthetics and philosophies of this "centre," and its association with the style of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra within the Odissi community. This understanding is revealed through statements such as those described by Royo. The rhetorical traffic within the Odissi community thus serves as the marker of the scrutinizing gaze theorized by Foucault. It often defines, in the absence of the written manifesto, the boundaries of the Odissi form.

The dance styles of Guru Pankaj Charan Das and Guru Debaprasad Das, though recognized as legitimate, are still seen as peripheral and distant from this "centre" unlike the style of Guru Surendranath Jena, which is viewed as a transgression "against" Odissi. In the absence of a clear definition of the "centre," the identities and departures from this "centre," of distinctive Odissi styles, become complex.

In addition to rhetorical traffic, Foucault's theory of surveillance also applies to

the discourse of scholars of Indian classical dance, with a focus on how surveillance generates mono-discourse in a dance tradition, leading to the propagation of a monolithic notion of the dance without addressing specificities. While Foucault wrote about the relationship between discursive practices and power in the context of institutions, this argument of the discourse being a site of negotiation of identities and power is a theme that is manifest in the scholarly writings on Indian dance since the 1980s. Uttara Asha Coorlawala, in her influential 1994 dissertation titled “Classical and Contemporary Indian Dance: Overview, Criteria and a Choreographic Analysis,” cites the example of Bharata Natyam, codified by Rukmini Devi, with the result that the physicality of the dance was henceforth observed through a regulatory gaze similar to the hierarchical observation theorized by Foucault (Coorlawala 74). In Odissi, a similar process occurs whereby lineage-branches of Odissi which link their aesthetic to the aesthetics established in Sanskrit texts become recognized and labelled as legitimately “classical,” while the other lineage-branches become marginalized due to their links to local traditions. An exploration of power relations involved in the decisions behind staged representations in Odissi will form an integral part of my research.

Scholars such as Franscesca Castaldi and Janet O’Shea have focused on the complexities within movement practices which are often perceived as homogeneous. In *Choreographies of African Identities: Negritude, Dance and the National Ballet of Senegal*, Castaldi problematizes the scholarship and discourse surrounding the monolithic image of “African dance” (2006). She focuses specifically on Senegalese dance, and uses the metaphor of “polyrhythms” to articulate the simultaneous existence

of the multiple contexts of Senegalese dance. She writes to challenge the “fictional singular” (Castaldi 2) of Senegalese dance that she believes is created by the National Ballet of Senegal. As part of her fieldwork, she observes the company’s performances in the United States and Dakar in Senegal, undertakes an ethnographic study of the *sabar* dance practice of the women in urban Senegal, and examines the work of different local ballets in Dakar. Through the assertion of these different “rhythms” as part of the larger rhythmic ensemble, Castaldi interrupts the rhetoric of singularity and homogeneity of Senegalese dance.

In an articulation similar to Castaldi’s “polyrhythms,” Janet O’Shea, in *At Home in the World: Bharata Natyam on the Global Stage*, focuses on the multiplicity of perspectives within an Indian classical dance tradition.² In her preface, O’Shea states that she is interested in offering a genealogy of multiple meanings and contexts of Bharata Natyam, as opposed to a singular, linear narrative (O’Shea 2007, x). O’Shea is interested in providing multivocality to the different choreographic voices within the Bharata Natyam canon through reading choreography as creative decision-making, informed by social, political and religious factors. In an earlier article, titled “‘Traditional’ Indian Dance and the Making of Interpretive Communities” (1998), O’Shea borrows Stanley Fish’s term “interpretive communities” to discuss the development of the stylistic lineages within the Bharata Natyam form. She focuses on the Bharata Natyam revivalist

² The recognized dance classical dance forms of India are Bharata Natyam, Kathak, Manipuri, Odissi, Kuchipudi, Mohiniattam, and Kathakali. The multiplicity of dance genres and dance contexts in India is endorsed by both dance artists and dance scholars, this acknowledgement of multiplicity seems be relegated to the level of acknowledging the distinctiveness of the seven different classical Indian dance forms. The complexity of perspectives within these dance styles, especially in the case of Odissi, often remains overlooked in scholarship.

figures Rukmini Devi and Balasaraswati, who positioned themselves in opposition in terms of the philosophies embodied in their respective styles of Bharata Natyam. She asserts that the distinct interpretive communities which developed around these two figures differ in their interpretations of concepts such as authority, authenticity and history (O'Shea 1998, 51). In the article she outlines some of the distinctions in the aesthetics of these two Bharata Natyam styles, as well as their differing representations of history. In O'Shea's work I find for the first time the articulation of the characteristic attributes of the different dance lineages within Indian classical dance genres.

In the case of Odissi, I argue that the discursive context shifts due to the fact that the Odissi revival took place after the Bharata Natyam revival, at a time when other Indian classical dance forms were also vying for recognition as distinct "classical dance forms." The Odissi revivalists faced the challenge of not only legitimizing Odissi as "classical" through its connections with antiquity, but also of defining its characteristic features as distinct from Bharata Natyam, which also claimed origins in temple dance practices. Romila Thapar, in her article "The Tyranny of Labels" (1996), asserts that "labels, where they may include a variety of activity and experience, tend to force interpretations into a single category so that the infinite shades of difference between them disappear" (Thapar 3). I argue that much of the scholarship on Odissi, which was initially undertaken by the revivalists, reflects this attempt to create a recognizable "label" distinct from Bharata Natyam, and that the creation of the monolithic notion of Odissi is an effect of the creation of this label in discourse on Odissi. In the dissertation, I further investigate the causes for the marginalization of the Debaprasad lineage-

tradition in scholarship on the history of Odissi.

Over the last decade, a number of scholars have written on Indian classical and contemporary dance, examining issues which had previously been unexplored in the context of Indian dance forms. Priya Srinivasan, in *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor* (2012), examines Indian dance through the lens of labour and United States immigration policy. Her inquiry extends from the living and working conditions of dancers who accompanied early modern American dancer Ruth St. Denis, to Indian dancers to the dance teachers based in the United States today. Srinivasan describes herself as the “unruly spectator,” as her observations extend beyond the dancers' attempts towards projecting effortless grace to the visceral traces of their labour, evident through their secretion of bodily fluids, such as sweat and tears. Davesh Soneji, in his study of the lived experience of the devadasi community of southern India examines the topic of devadasi over the past two hundred years in *Unfinished Gestures: Devadasis, Memory and Modernity in South India* (2012). He characterizes the history of the devadasi community as being replete with “slippages, fissures and movements,” which he identifies as characteristic Foucauldian theorizations of discontinuities in historical narrative (*Unfinished Gestures* 3). Ketu Katrak's *Contemporary Indian Dance: New Creative Choreography in India and the Diaspora* (2011) examines the choreographic work of Indian dance artists, both within India and in the Indian diaspora, who self-identify their work as contemporary. The volume *Bharatanatyam: A Reader* (2010), edited by Soneji, features articles ranging from historical writing of colonial observers of temple-dance performances in South India to scholarship analyzing the

Bharata Natyam revival of the 1930s to writings on contemporary choreographic directions and areas of inquiry by practitioners of Bharata Natyam. The volume *Traversing Tradition: Celebrating Dance in India* (2011), edited by Stephanie Burridge, also features articles examining contemporary directions in Indian dance, including the often overlooked area of 'Bollywood dance.' In *Butting Out: Reading Resistive Choreographies Through Works by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Chandralekha*, Ananya Chatterjea undertakes a reading of selected works from the repertoire of choreographers Zollar and Chandralekha, in which she maps the socio-political implications and issues of choreographic agency in their works. She examines how the work of these choreographers is post-modern, resistive, and draws upon the metaphor of the deeply flexed hip, often characteristic of several movement and life practices of Indian and African diasporic people (*Butting Out* 19).

Bourdieu, in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, posits that the structures constitutive of a particular environment produce *habitus* (72). He asserts that the habitus is the internalization of the objective structures of one's society (81). Drawing upon Bourdieu's habitus theory, dance scholars such as Yvonne Daniel, Cynthia Novack, and Barbara Browning have previously pointed out how the social structures and conditions become embodied in the dance. In *Rumba: Dance and Social Change in Contemporary Cuba* (1995), Yvonne Daniel examines the social, political, economic and religious conditions which inform the meaning and physical movement in the rumba. For instance, she reads the gender experience of the rumba in the movement. She argues that with the social changes in contemporary Cuba, including the entry of more women into the public

workforce, the Cuban rumba offers a place where machismo is still socially tolerated (Daniel 121) since in the rumba, the female dancer defensively attempts to deflect the male attempts at domination (Daniel 122). Daniel contends that in these embodied ideas, the rumba reflects the Cuban woman's reality as it displays a slice of a private sphere of Cuban society (Daniel 121). Barbara Browning, in her book *Samba: Resistance in Motion* (1995), examines the musical and rhythmic structure of the samba, and then analyses how the dancing body interacts with this rhythmic structure. She argues that the samba involves the suppression of the dominant beat and the location of the bodily movement between rhythms, thus reading into the movement of samba and its interaction with music, the metaphor of resistance (Browning 12). Cynthia Novack argues that Contact Improvisation began as a dance of young, middle class Americans for whom egalitarian interaction was embodied within the practice of Contact ideology, and ultimately was "the perfect vehicle for social life" (Novack 206).

In this dissertation, I argue that Guru Debaprasad Das's vision of Odissi was greatly informed by his habitus, situated in firstly, a fertile creative theatre landscape in the 1940s where innovation built on traditional modes of performance was encouraged, and secondly, in an urban postcolonial historical moment when the intelligentsia and artists were seeking to create a visible cultural voice which was distinctly and recognizably Oriya. In Chapter 2, I examine the creative and political landscape of Odisha in the 1950s, and analyze how the work of Guru Debaprasad Das dialogued with this habitus.

Bourdieu addresses the implied homogeneity intrinsic to his notion of the habitus.

He argues that the habitus imparts "regularity, unity and systematicity to the practices of a group or class" (*Outline of a Theory* 80). One of the challenges in bringing a study of gharanas or stylistic lineages into dialogue with Bourdieu's habitus theory is that the notion of gharanas is largely shaped by the individual visions of each of the three gurus who spearheaded the 1950s Odissi revival. Each of the three gurus of the 1950s Odissi revival developed their careers in the same cultural setting, each in the city of Cuttack, and were all associated with the same theatre. However, as this dissertation points out, their visions and philosophy of Odissi dance, as manifest in their repertoire and pedagogy, developed in distinct directions. This counters the deterministic understanding of Bourdieu's habitus theory, where the environment shapes the individual.

My reading of Bourdieu's habitus aligns itself with a reading based on the flexibility of the habitus to accommodate individual voices. A number of scholars have argued that while appearing seemingly deterministic, Bourdieu's theory of the habitus accommodates individual behaviours falling outside of those constituted by the habitus. Mathieu Hilgers defends the idea that Bourdieu's framework of the habitus allows for individual agency. He describes the principles by which Bourdieu's habitus accomplishes this, arguing firstly that Bourdieu implies that a limited number of principles, as manifest in a habitus, can produce an infinite number of behaviours (Hilgers 730). He also observes that in Bourdieu's theory, habitus determines individual practice but is also determined by it, giving rise to a "permanent mutation" by which new behaviors constantly continue to reshape the habitus (731). Bourdieu himself argues that even while it is understood as a system of lasting dispositions (*Outline of a Theory* 82), the habitus is

essentially also a matrix of perceptions and actions, and thus allows for the possibility of infinitely diversified tasks (1977: 83).

In this dissertation, I contend that Guru Debaparasad Das's vision of Odissi dance, as manifest in his repertoire and practice, both upheld and resisted traditional Oriya regionalism. On one hand, his vision centered heavily on an Oriya regionalism in terms of his resistance to the Sanskritization of codified Odissi dance vocabulary, while on the other hand, it fostered an inclusivity towards western Odishan culture, which otherwise remains largely excluded in the traditional discussion of Oriya culture.

Review of Literature on Odissi

Much of the scholarship on Indian dance over the last decade has focused on the dance form of Bharata Natyam, or the contemporary creative directions within the Indian dance context. In the following section, I analyze key scholarly works focusing on Odissi, and examine how the different lineages of Odissi are represented in these key texts.

The earliest source that I have found focusing entirely on Odissi in English language is Dhirendranath Patnaik's *Odissi Dance* (1960). Patnaik was one of the first practitioners of Odissi, and a scholar whose work was instrumental in the Odissi revival movement. He was the Assistant Secretary of the Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi at the time the book was written.³ While Patnaik's book renders a helpful contextual

³ The Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi is the regional branch of the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi, which is the national-level performing arts academy established by the Government of India. The Central Sangeet Natak Akademi is based in the capital city of New Delhi, and is

background, with his careful construction of the historical narrative of Odissi, it does not discuss the contributions of any particular individual in the revival of Odissi, perhaps in support of his larger argument of Odissi as an unchanged classical dance form handed down since antiquity.

The thirteenth issue of *Marg*, a journal on Indian arts, is dedicated to scholarship on Odissi. The issue was published in 1960, at a time when scholars and artists were engaged in further legitimizing the dance form as a “classical” dance form. Odissi was then a newly recognized classical dance form, having been accorded classical status by the Sangeet Natak Akademi in 1958. The issue comprises articles which highlight the links between the twentieth-century urban practice of the reconstructed Odissi, the Orissan temple sculptures, and older dance traditions. In the issue, Dhirendranath Patnaik’s article “A Note on Hastas” features poses of the basic stances of Odissi demonstrated by Guru Debaprasad Das. The inclusion of photographs of Guru Debaprasad Das in Odissi poses suggests that Guru Debaprasad Das himself was recognized as a practitioner of the traditional classical form. In his acknowledgements at the end of the article, Patnaik acknowledges both Guru Debaprasad Das and Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra.

Frédérique Apffel-Marglin's book *Wives of the God King: The Rituals of the Devadasis of Puri*, published in 1985, comprises a study of the *mahari*⁴ in the Jagannath

responsible for according the classical dance status to the various regional dance forms if they meet the institutionalized criteria for recognition as a “classical dance.” The Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi was instrumental in working towards the “legitimizing” of Odissi as a classical dance form, through research on the ancient origins of Odissi.

⁴ Mahari was the local term for devadasi, or temple-dancer. These women were inducted into the

Temple in the city of Puri in Odisha. The book provides important contextual information regarding the lives of the maharis and the socio-religious traditions surrounding the ritual practice of dance within the Jagannath Temple. Another source from this genre is the previously mentioned Masters thesis “Tradition and Learning in Odissi Dance of India: Guru-Sisya Parampara,” by Rosemary Jeanes, completed at York University in 1982. In her research, Jeanes explores the master-disciple relationship through which knowledge has been passed down orally for generations in Indian classical dance forms. Her thesis is a valuable source due to her firsthand accounts of her interactions with Guru Debaprasad Das during her fieldwork visits to Odisha. Through her written accounts of these encounters with the Guru, one is able to glean information into the worldview of Guru Debaprasad Das. Both Apffel-Marglin and Jeanes adopt an ethnographic approach, and in their work, I found, for the first time in Odissi scholarship, a conscious effort towards making the observer’s perspective transparent. While Jeanes’ interactions with Guru Debaprasad Das provide valuable insight into his pedagogical approach, her work remains a reading of the transmission of the tradition, as opposed to identifying the distinctive features and philosophies of his dance style.

Sunil Kothari, in his book *Odissi: Indian Classical Dance Art* (1990), legitimizes Odissi as a timeless dance form through connecting the aesthetics of the dance form to temple sculptures and the practice of the temple dancers. In the book, Kothari describes going for fieldwork visits to the Sambalpur district of western Odisha with Guru

temple service in their childhood, and were “married” to the temple deity through ceremonial rituals. There were often multiple maharis married to the same temple deity. Dance and music formed an important part of the role of these temple-dancers in the socio-religious sphere, and until 1947, they received royal patronage from the local kings for carrying out their temple duties.

Debaprasad Das to research the *sabdaswarapata*, a traditional ritualistic dance form from the district. However, his experiences and interactions with the Guru appear in the footnotes, rather than in the body of the text. While Kothari's book provides a brief insight into the style of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, one of the three pioneering gurus who spearheaded Odissi's revival, the book does not provide a similar discussion regarding the Odissi style of Guru Debaprasad Das, who was instrumental in the revival as well.

Priyambada Mohanty's article "The Trinity of Odissi," which appeared in the 1990 edition of the Sangeet Natak Akademi journal, describes the contribution of each of the three pioneering revivalists, Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, Guru Pankaj Charan Das, and Guru Debaprasad Das. While Mohanty, who studied under each of these revivalist-practitioners, outlines the contributions of each of these three Odissi revivalists, her article remains largely biographical as she attempts to locate the approaches of these artists in their lived experience. Her article ultimately focuses more on the biographical details of the life of Guru Debaprasad Das, and a detailed theorization of his style is missing, perhaps in keeping with her larger project of expounding upon the contributions of each of the three revivalists, as opposed to theorizing their stylistic approaches in detail.

Sitakant Mahapatra's *Gestures of Intimacy* (1979) is devoted to a study of dances of Odisha. In the chapter on Odissi dance, titled "Orissi: Revival of a Lost Classical Dance," he writes that the roots of Odissi go back at least six hundred years, and that the form was preserved in temple architecture and sculpture of Odisha, and was forgotten and almost

unknown until it was revived in the 1950s (Mahapatra 49). It is interesting to note that while his discourse regarding the antiquity of Odissi echoes the rhetoric of the revivalists, Mahapatra later addresses the issue of divergence within the Odissi tradition. He states that

In a classical dance-form each Guru cannot be a law unto himself and interpret the gestures and grammar as he pleases. There can no doubt be schools within a classical system, gharanas if you please, but firstly, the variations are to be properly understood and explained and secondly, their aesthetic distance from the original model, the unique authentic and primordial structure ought to be spelt out (Mahapatra 56).

While Mahapatra acknowledges and allows for different stylistic branches of Odissi to co-exist, his notion of an original and “authentic” model hints that he presumes an ideal. Mahapatra does not indicate what characterizes the authentic “original” model, and does not specify which, if any, of the styles of Odissi is aligned most closely to the “original.”

Sharon Lowen, in her book *Odissi* (2004), published as part of the “Dances of India” series, dedicates a chapter to the twentieth-century revival of Odissi, as well as a chapter to the “repertoire” of Odissi. A brief section within this chapter is dedicated to the life and work of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, detailing the history of his work with the Jatra theatres of Cuttack, as well as with Guru Pankaj Charan Das. Little is mentioned regarding the work of Guru Debaprasad Das himself, and his contributions to the Odissi revival. He is mentioned only in reference to the work of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, his most visible disciple. The work of other Odissi gurus, both of the first generation revivalist gurus, such as Guru Mayadhar Raut, as well as the second generation of Odissi gurus and choreographers such as Guru Surendranath Jena are mentioned. Regarding the work of Guru Pankaj Charan Das, Lowen details that his background in movement is the

closest to the mahari, or temple dance tradition, as he had been the adopted son of a mahari (Lowen 33). In her chapter on “Repertoire,” however, she does mention the Sthayee dance of the dancers of the Debaprasad Das lineage (Lowen 47). Lowen’s discourse thus presents a striking visibility of the second generation of the Debaprasad Das lineage, while retaining a distinct erasure of the work of Guru Debaprasad Das himself.

Over the past decade, a number of scholars have questioned the monolithic image of Odissi dance. In the article “Contestations: Constructing a Historical Narrative for Odissi” Ananya Chatterjea questions the existing models of historiography for Odissi, and asserts that she is influenced by the discipline of subaltern studies, which stresses history as contested narrative (*Contestations* 142). In the article, there is transparency regarding the topic of the revival. Chatterjea, herself a student of the late Sanjukta Panigrahi, is a generation removed from the generation of dancers and scholars who had been engaged in the Odissi revival. Chatterjea mentions that the Jayantika project, inaugurated in 1957, was initially comprised of dance practitioners and scholars who were in consensus regarding issues of form and authenticity, and that within a space of a few years, questions of authenticity became debated within the Jayantika group, and most local names for feet positions and body movements had become replaced by Sanskrit nomenclature (*Contestations* 152). She specifically mentions that Guru Debaprasad Das dissented from the group due to his insistence on the Odissi form being inclusive of the regional traditions. He insisted on using songs in the regional Oriya language, as opposed to Sanskrit songs, for his *abhinaya* compositions. Chatterjea ends the section with stating

that “while Guru Kelucharan’s is acknowledgedly the most widely practiced style today, it is important to remember the multiplicity of styles that continue to comprise the body of Odissi dance even today” (*Contestations* 153). Chatterjea’s approach towards Odissi historiography, and her questioning of the mono-discourse of the Odissi form and philosophy becomes a valuable basis for interrupting the monolithic notion of the Odissi form. In addition, it marks the Jayantika-style Odissi as the mainstream.

Alessandra Lopez y Royo, in her multimedia research project titled *Performing Konark, Performing Hirapur*, studies the work of the Odissi guru Surendranath Jena. Her research, published in the form of a DVD with an accompanying published text, focuses on the work of a guru not traditionally considered part of the trinity of Odissi revivalist practitioners. Royo argues that “there are different forms of Odissi, some of which are regarded as ‘transgressive,’ by which I mean transgressive of its constituted canon and, to a great extent, seen as antagonistic to the very principles of classicism invoked by Odissi as a form, such as softness and femininity of the dance” (“Performing Konark”). She specifically references how Jena’s work engages with emotions such as “disgust,” which is not usually seen in the work of the other Odissi choreographers due to its deviance from the feminine charm of Odissi. Janet O’Shea, in her Introduction to *At Home in the World: Bharata Natyam on the Global Stage*, argues that “the parameters of a practice define it as much as its center does” (O’Shea 2007, 20). Royo, by focusing on the work of Jena in her research, and by calling his work “transgressive,” is thereby essentially also hinting towards a “centre” for the Odissi aesthetic. However, unlike Chatterjea, Royo does not articulate what this “centre” is.

Royo sees the work of Surendranath Jena as one of the transgressive branches of Odissi, and explores how his work evolved out of his engagement with the temple architecture of temples such as Konark and Hirapur. This essentially displaces Puri, the home of the Jagannath temple, famous for its temple-dancers, as the central site in Jena's narrative of Odissi. I find a similar phenomenon in the case of the work of Guru Debaprasad Das, who advocated for the inclusion of the sabdaswarapata repertoire within his style of Odissi. The sabdaswarapata tradition is rooted in interior regions of the western district of Sambalpur, geographically distant from coastal Puri. Thus the work of Guru Debaprasad Das also essentially displaces Puri as the centre of the narrative. Royo's work provides an example of research on lineages and styles within Odissi which exist as "others" to a hegemonic mainstream Odissi style. Royo's labelling of Surendranath Jena's style of Odissi as "transgressive" also raises the question of how the work of Guru Debaprasad Das, whose philosophies on Odissi remained outside of the Jayantika canon, may be labelled in terms of its position within Odissi. This is one of the questions I seek to address in my dissertation.

Dinanath Pathy, in *Rethinking Odissi*, published in 2007, questions the constructs such as "timelessness" and "authentic tradition" propagated by the revivalists. In his book, he describes the process and events of the Odissi revival. He outlines how the members of the Jayantika organization came together to codify the Odissi dance form, through conducting late evening meeting sessions, and how they made decisions regarding the dance form's aesthetics through mutual agreement (Pathy 45). Pathy defines the point of departure of the dissenters from the Jayantika organization, and also

outlines their respective positions on the contested subjects. For example, he mentions that one of the contested topics was the vocal accompaniment for one of the proposed repertoire pieces, the *Sthainata* (Pathy 47). He mentions that Guru Debaprasad Das, along with Guru Pankaj Charan Das, dissented from the Jayantika consensus regarding standard compositions for this repertoire piece. He thus reveals the revivalist process, and also shows the vexed relationship between the mainstream Jayantika Odissi style and the work of “dissenting” revivalist-practitioners. I find Pathy’s book valuable in terms of how it addresses the specificity of the different perspectives of the Jayantika dissidents. In the dissertation, I provide a detailed theorization of the embodied philosophies of one of these Jayantika dissenters, and how the position of practitioners of this branch of Odissi is defined in the dance milieu today, both in India and North America.

Nandini Sikand’s doctoral dissertation, titled “Dancing with Tradition: A Global Community of Odissi Dancers,” completed at the City University of New York in 2010, is an ethnographic project based on multi-sited research between 2005 and 2009. In the dissertation, she argues that the thriving global Odissi community is marked by heterogeneity in practice, pointing largely to the difference in how dancers engage with Odissi dance in both practice and philosophy in different contexts and locations, ranging from Odissi dancers performing in Odisha to dancers performing in New Delhi, as well as dancers performing in the United States, in cities such as New York City and Minneapolis. In particular, she analyzes their views on concepts central to the practice of Indian classical dance, such as *riyaz* or daily practice, and engagement with tradition, nationalism and identity. She also examines the emergence of a “global Odissi

community,” and how this community is created and fostered through international Odissi festivals held in North America and India. Paralleling O’Shea’s approach toward viewing Bharata Natyam as a genealogy, Sikand argues, essentially, a case for heterogeneity in the understanding of Odissi as a global practice.

Sikand’s project is significant in the context of its relationship to the Debaprasad Das gharana. Firstly, Sikand herself is a dancer and student of the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi. She was a dancer with the Trinayan Collective, a New York City-based Odissi ensemble which specializes in the performance and practice of the repertoire of Guru Debaprasad Das style. She was a co-founder of the collective, and currently performs with Sakshi Productions, which she also co-founded, and performs dances from the Debaprasad Das repertoire. Her fieldwork includes her ethnographic experience of staying at the house of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir in Odisha. Secondly, Sikand includes examples from dancers and dance groups of the Debaprasad Das style in her analysis of the different contexts in which artists perform Odissi. For instance, she examines, in detail, the performance of the Sutra Dance Theatre from Malaysia, especially in the context of the “*odhni* controversy,” during their performance in Bhubaneswar, Odisha in their India tour in 2005. However, the heterogeneity which she points out is more in the context of the challenges of audience building and funding in different contexts. Her project does not involve examining the heterogeneity due to stylistic differences between the different schools of Odissi, or the heterogeneity present within the Debaprasad Das style itself.

The work of scholars such as Chatterjea, Royo, Sikand and Pathy, has begun to

acknowledge the multiplicity of voices in Odissi. In this aspect, I find that their scholarship aligns itself with the work of postcolonial theorists such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Spivak, in her seminal article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" argues for the case of heterogeneity when considering the subaltern voice. Her article focuses largely on the historical Hindu woman, whom, she argues, becomes doubly subaltern as she is deprived of a voice in the historical representation of the widow-suicide or *sati* practice by both the British colonizers as well as Hindu upholders of the tradition. Partha Chatterjee, in his reflections upon Spivak's article, claims that Spivak's essay, through its emphasis on the shift from essentialism to a rhetoric of multiplicity, heralded the "poststructuralist moment in subaltern studies" (Chatterjee 84). Even while the scholarly interventions of the four of Chatterjee, Pathy, Royo and Sikand are informed by this post-structuralist emphasis on difference and particularity, the singular image of Odissi continues to pervade much of Odissi scholarship, and the questioning of the monolithic image of Odissi remains marginal. In their scholarly work, Chatterjee, Royo, Sikand and Pathy question the construct of Odissi as represented entirely by the Jayantika-style aesthetics. One also finds that in the works of these scholars, the activities of the Jayantika organization are mentioned, marking a contrast from the earlier scholarship in which the revivalist process was rendered an opacity. These scholars complicate the discourse on Odissi and problematize the structuralist mode of scholarship of the revivalist project. In this dissertation, I expand this interruption of the mono-discourse on Odissi aesthetics and philosophy, by providing a theorization of the work of Guru Debaprasad Das as it is practiced today through an ethnographic methodology.

A signal moment in research on Guru Debaprasad Das was marked by the publication and release of the book *Guru Debaprasad Das: An Icon of Odissi* (2012) by Gayatri Chand. Chand, herself a student of the late Guru Debaprasad Das, wrote the book as a tribute to her late guru. The different chapters of the book contain information regarding the life of Guru Debaprasad Das, as well as his stylistic emphases within Odissi. The book provides insight into the vision and philosophy of Guru Debaprasad Das; her sources are both textual and interview-based. Her book reads as a thorough appendix on resources on Guru Debaprasad Das, and includes letters (both the original Oriya texts and translations) of letters mentioning Guru Debaprasad Das, and a detailed list of his choreographed repertoire, complete with the scripts of Sanskrit verses used in his compositions.

Chand also indexes the names of students of Guru Debaprasad Das, both in India and abroad, and this becomes a useful reference and also resource for future researchers. In different chapters, she lists the generic repertoire of Odissi dance, as well as Guru Debaprasad Das's special departures or emphases, and includes reminiscences of the late Guru by prominent dancers who learned under his tutelage. The book also contains photographs of the Guru Debaprasad Das, largely from the personal collection of his family, and Chand also includes his artwork throughout the book. The book marks a signal moment by virtue of being the first published book on the life and work of Guru Debaprasad Das. The book is also important in that it is written in English, and hence accessible to a wider readership. However, the book does not provide a theorization of the style in the context of other styles of Odissi. While Chand's book focuses largely on

the life and work of Guru Debaprasad Das himself, in this dissertation, I also trace the work of subsequent artists of the gharana. In this manner, my dissertation may be considered a project centered on the Debaprasad Das gurukul, or “family,” as opposed to the work of Guru Debaprasad Das alone. My project locates the history of this gurukul, as well as the present day practice of this style by a transnational community of dancers.

Alternative Modes of Scholarship on Odissi

I would like to draw attention to a few alternative modes of scholarship which become instrumental in the context of looking at research on Guru Debaprasad Das. First among these is the medium of the symposium. A number of symposia have been held on Odissi dance, since its mid-twentieth century revival, and these have been significant in both the historical development of the dance in the twentieth century, as well as in research on Odissi. The first few symposia were held in the late 1950s, and it was at these symposia that the aesthetics of Odissi were codified. Guru Debaprasad Das himself was a participant and contributor at these symposia. While the ideas discussed and compiled during these symposia are often extremely useful for archival research, there exist no minutes of many of these symposia. The Sangeet Natak Akademi archives house some videos of later symposia and seminars on Odissi, such as the “*Purush Ang in Odissi Dance*” (2000).

I would also like to draw attention to articles published in programme brochures distributed at dance performances throughout India. These articles, appearing in the

brochure along with the information on the specific evening's programme, often reach a limited readership due to the nature of the distribution of their medium; they are almost never archived in libraries or accessible to a larger public. With the exception of a few well-distributed programme brochures, such as the brochure for the Angahaar Festival 1985, which is found in libraries of academic institutions both within and outside of India, the readership of these programme brochures is often limited to those who were physically present at the event where the brochure was distributed, and individuals who are personally known to the event's organizer or participants, who are able to access the brochure material through them after the event. During the course of research, I was able to look at programme brochures, including brochures from performances and productions choreographed by the late Guru Srinath Raut, who was one of the most eminent teachers and choreographers of the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi during the 1970s and 1980s. A few of the other brochures carry articles regarding the style of Guru Debaprasad Das, as well as memories of him by some of his students.

A third and more recent mode of scholarship I would like to point out is online forums, especially three forums: the Yahoo Odissi e-group, the Facebook group on Odissi, as well as the Guru Debaprasad Das Facebook group. While these online forums are not media for academic publications, they become significant sources of information as members often post information regarding historical events that they had been a participant in, or write of their memories of Guru Debaprasad Das and thereby contribute to the narrative of the history of the Debaprasad Das lineage. The creation of these online forums helps foster the "global Odissi community," as in the case of the international

Odissi festivals pointed out by Sikand.

Dissertation: Thesis, Outline of Chapters, and Approach

I attempt a theorization of this lineage by examining its history, stylistic characteristics, and its practice in the present day. Susan Reed, in her study of Sri Lankan Kandyan dance, explores how a local dance of ritual origin transforms into a national symbol. She traces the history of Kandyan dance in relation to a number of different social groups, such as officials, tourists, dancers, and also situates Kandyan dance in its performance in the global arena. My study situates the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi historically as well as currently.

I dedicate this dissertation to the argument that Guru Debaprasad Das, in his vision of Odissi dance on which his stylistic lineage of Odissi is based, both subscribed to and resisted the discourse of Oriya nationalism which birthed the Odissi revival in the 1950s. I contend that his inclusion of the movement practices of western Odisha into his repertoire of Odissi resisted the near-exclusive tendency of the Odissi revival to focus on the culturally dominant coastal Odisha. My chapters address the multiple facets of this thesis, including how this dance lineage historically engaged with his vision, as well as how the present practicing generations of his lineage dialogue with his vision transnationally.

I dedicate Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 to the history of the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi in the context of the Odissi revival. Chapter 2 focuses on the socio-cultural and

political contexts which shaped the Odissi revival in the mid-twentieth century. In Chapter 3, I look at the life of Guru Debaprasad Das, and the twentieth-century history of this lineage of Odissi. The information available on the life of Guru Debaprasad Das is fragmented, due to the existence of very few written materials on him during his lifetime. This chapter is based largely on my archival research, and personal interviews with students, colleagues and associates of Guru Debaprasad Das. I also look at how his repertoire and teaching methods evolved from the 1950s through the 1980s.

The fourth chapter is centered on the stylistic characteristics of this lineage of Odissi. bell hooks, in her theorization of difference as resistance, discusses how the “otherness” of the marginalized position is marked by specific social “markers,” drawing upon daily life examples of the black population, whose social position at the margins, she argues, was marked by the railroad (hooks 341). hooks sees the physical barrier of the railroad tracks as this definitive marker between the centre and the peripheral sections of society. Chapter 4 examines some of the characteristic features and embodied philosophies which set this style of Odissi as distinct from the more “central” and mainstream Jayantika Odissi of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra. Here I draw upon sociologist Dick Hebdige’s theory of “objects of association” as a critical component in establishing identity through association. The Odissi repertoire of Guru Debaprasad Das draws from specific regional movement traditions, such as the *gotipua* dance tradition in which pre-pubescent boys performed acrobatic dance pieces in coastal Odisha, and the ritualistic *sabdaswarapata* tradition from western Odisha. Through the quotation of these movement traditions, the Debaprasad Das style develops an identity that is closely

grounded in regional movement traditions of Odisha. In addition, I examine aspects such as movement quality, theatricality and gender as pertaining to the repertoire and pedagogy in this lineage of Odissi. I also look at how issues such as Oriya nationalism pertain to his personal vision of Odissi. Through this chapter, I extend the reading of Hebdige's "objects of association" to aspects of choreography such as "quotations" in movement, costuming and philosophy in order to articulate and theorize the identity of this style within the larger canon of Odissi.

In Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, I look into the work of the subsequent generations of dancers and choreographers of the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi, especially in terms of teaching this style of Odissi to subsequent generations, as well as their interpretations of the vision of Guru Debaprasad Das. The fifth chapter, titled "Negotiating the Gharana," is based on my multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork and participant-observation. I am invested in the word "negotiation," and in the chapter I examine how, through their work, the second generation artists of the Guru Debaprasad Das lineage, including teacher-choreographers such as Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, Guru Gajendra Panda, and the late Guru Srinath Raut, negotiate between their identity as Debaprasad Das style choreographers, and their own creative agency. I examine how they maintain their identity as dancers of this lineage in both their choreographic work, as well as their pedagogy. Among other aspects, I also look at their creative process, and how they strive to maintain and further the style through creation of new works. Since a number of the second generation teachers are now also global teachers and performers of Odissi, and often have students living outside of India, whom they visit frequently for workshops and

performances, this chapter also examines, through ethnographic fieldwork, how the gharana is negotiated in these contexts of travel and work in India and abroad.

Sikand, in her dissertation, points out that over the last twenty years, the global Odissi community has emerged within a “transnational” presence (“Dancing with Tradition” 5). It is my intention to locate, within this global Odissi community, the practice of the Debaprasad Das gharana by dancers, dance teachers and choreographers, in both their touring as well as teaching practices. I focus on the work of the third generation of dancers of this style working both inside and outside India, in their teaching and the creation of new works. Chapter 6 focuses on the creative work of Odissi dance artists who are based outside of India. In particular, I examine the works of Sutra Dance Theatre of Malaysia and the Trinayan Dance Creations in New York City in the United States. I look at how their productions dialogue with the visions of Debaprasad Das style gurus based in India, and also analyze the reception of their work in India.

Ulf Hannerz, in his examination of the issues that arise in multi-sited ethnography, favours the word “translocal” as opposed to “multilocal”, as he notes that the prefix “trans” indicates a relationality between the various fieldwork sites, as opposed to their being a collection of local units (“Being there” 206). In Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, I examine the work of artists, organizations and institutions not only independently in their various locations, but also their relationship to the “centre,” which I located in Bhubaneswar in Odisha. In the guru-shishya dynamic in the traditional pedagogical system of Indian classical dance, a student’s identity is continually linked to that of his or her teacher. Thus there is an implied relationality between the “centre,” symbolized by

where the guru resides and practices (Bhubaneswar, India) and the “periphery” (such as New Delhi, India). I examine the relationality between these sites and the circulation of creative capital between these sites.

Scholars such as Ann Daly and Janet O'Shea, in their scholarships on Isadora Duncan and Bharata Natyam choreographers respectively, structure their chapters around how the dancing body negotiates through issues such as gender, political affiliations and identity. While such analyses are embedded within the body of this work, the primary project of this dissertation is to investigate a previously unwritten history of a stylistic lineage. I draw upon primary archival sources in order to address gaps in previous models of Odissi historiography, and draw upon ethnographic observation and corporeal experiences to articulate the stylistic vestiges of this lineage of Odissi. Ann Daly begins the preface to *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America* with the words "Practically everybody knows at least *something* about Isadora Duncan" (ix). In a departure from these above works, which offer a rereading of history through new lenses of analyses, or offer an examination of different voices within a practiced form, my project is to address a gap in historiography.

Secondly, through structuring my dissertation into chapters dedicated respectively to the history of a stylistic lineage, its characteristic vestiges and its present-day living tradition respectively, I offer a framework for analyzing a stylistic branch of a performance tradition.

A Note on Music

The musical accompaniment is a significant part of the Odissi dance, in both its performance setting as well as during the Odissi training session. During performances, a dancer is traditionally accompanied by an Odissi orchestra, comprising a vocalist, a percussionist playing the *mardala* (Odishan variation of the North Indian *pakhawaj* or two-headed drum played with the hands), a flautist, and a *sitar* (stringed instrument) player. The dancer's own guru is also part of the orchestra, usually playing the *ginni* (cymbals), and vocalizing parts of the performance through uttering *ukutas* (rhythmic syllables) to guide the performer rhythmically.

Music for Odissi dance is not improvised. It is usually commissioned by Odissi choreographers, who work in collaboration with the composer and musicians. Most often, celebrated Oriya or Sanskrit poems or lyrics are selected, and Odissi music composers create the musical scores for them. The music is generally composed by Odisha-based composers. An exception is the Delhi-based non-Oriya Madhup Mudgal, who has composed a number of Odissi repertoire pieces for his sister Madhavi Mudgal, a noted choreographer and proponent of the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra style.

While Oriya composers prefer using the *raaga* and *taala* system and nomenclature found in Odissi music, Mudgal favours the use of the Hindustani raagas. David Dennen examines the distinct position of Odissi music, and its claim to classical status alongside the canonized genres of Hindustani and Karnataki musical styles. Dennen states that music in Odisha is divided into four categories- *adhunika* (modern), *chalachitra gita* (film music), *bhakti geeta* (devotional music), and Odissi (classical)

("The Third Stream" 152). Within the larger umbrella of "Odissi" is the subgenre of *natyanga* (dance music) ("The Third Stream" 157).

Dennen posits that the case for Odissi as classical music is argued by notable composers such as Jivan Pani and Ramahari Das. He notes that even in their somewhat varying arguments, they all agree that Odissi music should be accorded classical status on the basis of its link to antiquity, its distinctiveness as a musical genre, and its systematized quality ("The Third Stream" 164). Among the arguments is the idea that Odissi songs are more lyrical than songs in the Hindustani and Karnatak traditions (156). Dennen also contends that a number of raagas in Odissi music are prevalent in both the Hindustani and Karnatak traditions ("The Third Stream" 158). There are also a number of raagas distinct to Odissi music alone. A unique feature of Odissi music is that the name of many raagas sound misleadingly similar to Karnatak raagas, even while corresponding musically to North Indian raagas.

For Odissi dance, the musical compositions are eventually recorded so as to make them accessible to Odissi performers who do not have access to live musicians. In some cases, the guru accompanies the student's performance on the mardala drum, instead of the cymbals. This is particularly true of the pioneer gurus of the Odissi revival. Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra was renowned for his mastery of the mardala. Guru Debaprasad Das played the mardala drum to accompany the dance performances of his students, especially during the tours with Indrani Rahman.

Guru Debaprasad Das was also known for his soulful singing voice, and also simultaneously sang and played the mardala in accompaniment of Rahman's

performances during these tours. This dissertation focuses on his choreographic work and legacy, and examines his dance style as interpreted by successive generations of followers of his lineage.

Conclusion

This project draws upon, for its methodology, both dance history and dance ethnography. The *gharana* system of the Indian classical performing arts is a phenomenon in which the past and the present are continually engaged in dialogue with one another. The tradition and its philosophies are rooted in the past, and yet are often reconfigured by the living generations. Since this dissertation bases its inquiry upon the Debaprasad Das *gharana*, it necessarily engages with the methodologies of both dance history and ethnography. This project thus contributes to the field of dance studies by presenting a study which uses ethnography as a methodology to fill a few gaps in dance history.

This project is an original contribution to the field of dance studies as it offers a study of a lineage which has, thus far, remained marginalized in scholarship. It expands the scope of scholarship of Indian classical dance by emphasizing the multiplicity which remains to be studied in the case of Odissi and other classical Indian dance forms which were revived chronologically after Bharata Natyam. Through providing an in-depth examination of the revival process of one such dance form, it probes a space which has not received much visibility in scholarly discourse on dance forms which were revived after Bharata Natyam. It emphasizes that these dance traditions are themselves not

monolithic, but consist of complex groups within the larger tradition, often with differing philosophies and historical narratives.

This dissertation engages with and expands upon the works of postcolonial studies and subaltern studies scholars such as Romila Thapar. It engages with issues of interest to postcolonial inquiry, such as identity construction in the postcolonial nationalist project, the relationship of local identity to national identity, subjectivity, and marginalized narratives of history. Using these theoretical lenses of analysis, I examine the embodied philosophies of this style of Odissi, and how this style of Odissi stands as an “alternative” voice within the larger Odissi canon. The project also draws upon literature on discourse and power, such as Foucault’s theory of surveillance.

Ultimately, by reasserting a history of the Debaprasad Das lineage into scholarship and discourse, this dissertation not only destabilizes the singular historical identity of classical Odissi dance often found in scholarship, but also provides a theorization of the characteristic philosophies and heritage of this tradition, which will help articulate an identity for this lineage in both scholarly discourse and artistic practice.

Chapter 2: The Odissi Dance Revival

This chapter and the following chapter are dedicated to the history of the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi. My approach to the history of stylistic lineages is two-pronged. I consider the socio-cultural contexts in which the stylistic lineage was developed, as well as how individuals associated with the development of the stylistic lineage navigate through these socio-political and cultural conditions to establish their distinctive lineage.

Pierre Bourdieu in *The Field of Cultural Production* states that analyzing the practice of cultural producers and their products entails understanding that they are the result of a meeting of the history of the social positions they occupy and the history of their dispositions (61). This chapter and the following chapter work together to locate the artistic work of Guru Debaprasad Das as part of the postcolonial nation-building project, as well as his participation in the movement for the recognition of Oriya culture within the mosaic of Indian regional cultures. This chapter in particular establishes the socio-political framework, or habitus in which Guru Debaprasad Das participated in the Odissi revival effort and developed his work. Through an examination of his work and choreographic career, I demonstrate that Guru Debaprasad Das's choreographic work was situated in the habitus of Odisha's move for national recognition for a distinctive Oriya culture during the decades immediately following India's independence from the British.

In this chapter, I also examine the political and cultural relationship between coastal Odisha and western Odisha from the early twentieth century to the 1950s. My analysis of the Odissi revival in the context of Oriya nationalism, as well as my examination of the cultural and political divide between coastal Odisha and western

Odisha, build toward my argument that while participating in the project for promoting regional culture, Guru Debaprasad Das also deviated from the predominantly coastal Oriya cultural discourse through his emphasis on folk and indigenous dance heritages of Western Odisha.

A Note on Habitus

I have used the framework of Bourdieu's habitus to map the relationship between the cultural scene in mid-twentieth century coastal Odisha, especially in Cuttack, where Guru Debaprasad Das worked, and the nature of his work.

Bourdieu's habitus theory is used widely and varyingly in scholarship ranging in a number of disciplines centering around bodily and movement practices. Gay Morris, in "Bourdieu, the Body and Graham's Post-War Dance," suggests that Bourdieu's habitus theory has the potential to capture the materiality of the physical body in dance studies (53). Loïc Wacquant opens *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* by stating that the book is the retracing of a personal initiation into a bodily craft, and that sociology must maintain the bodily dimension of existence (vii). He cites Bourdieu in stating that "social order inscribes itself in bodies" (Wacquant viii). His engagement in the pugilistic world counters the romanticized image of the boxer emphasizing his social discontent which manifests itself in his pugilistic practice. He argues, instead, that the boxer gains competence through repetitive immersion in the practice within the pugilistic club.

Wainwright, Williams and Turner, in "Varieties of Habitus and the Embodiment of Ballet," also suggest that Bourdieu's work is widely applied in dance studies due to the link it establishes between the physical and social worlds (Wainwright, Williams and Turner 536). Scholars of dance and movement practices have thus found the habitus theory useful in connecting between the practice and the social environment in which the form is practiced.

It is partially due to Bourdieu's connections between the social world and behaviour, especially bodily behaviour, that I find his habitus theory applicable for theorizing the choreographic vision of the late Guru Debaprasad Das. However, one of my departures from the classic interpretations of Bourdieu's habitus is in regard to the nature of the engagement with the social world which generates behaviours. Central to his theory of habitus is the idea that the social world is unconsciously reproduced through behaviour and choices of the individual. Yvonne Daniel, in her study of the rumba in Cuba highlights Bourdieu's emphasis on the unconscious reproduction of the structures of the social world (Daniel 134). In more recent scholarship on dance, scholars have increasingly employed critical extensions of Bourdieu's concept of the habitus.

Wainwright, Williams and Turner focus their research on the Royal Ballet in London, and attempt to understand the balletic body as a "series of social practices" (536). Their ethnographic study focuses on the production of habitus in the world of the ballet (536), and they view the balletic world through the lens of three forms of habitus – individual habitus, institutional habitus, and choreographic habitus. They view a dancer's individual physical capacities as the individual habitus, the dance schooling and specific training in

different stylistic schools of ballet as the cultural habitus, and the work done with different choreographers with distinctive styles as the dancer's choreographic habitus. This extension of the habitus theory extends the conceptual parameters of Bourdieu's to a highly specific aspect of the social world of a community.

Like Wainwright, Williams and Turner, I engage in a critical extension of Bourdieu's habitus. While retaining the notion of the habitus as a generative principle, I extend the parameters of Bourdieu's articulation of the habitus to consider cultural environment as a type of "cultural habitus". Focusing on the choreographic vision of Guru Debaprasad Das, I look at how an artistic voice responds to a specific "cultural habitus" in which it is developed. In part, this also responds to Bourdieu's call in *The Field of Cultural Production* that a cultural product, such as a work of literature or a piece of music, must be considered in the context of the socio-political conditions in which it was developed (*The Field of Cultural Production* 33). I draw upon Bourdieu's habitus theory in order to chart out the influence of the socio-cultural milieu upon the artistic voice of Guru Debaprasad Das.

Bourdieu's habitus theory thus helps map some of the key determinants which guided the creative practice of the late Guru Debaprasad Das. Ultimately, in a larger theoretical implication for the study of stylistic lineages, Bourdieu's habitus theory can be used to chart the development of a stylistic lineage in its distinctive direction with regards to the socio-cultural environment from which it emerges.

The Debaprasad Das Lineage in Odissi Historiography

The history of this lineage is an intrinsic part of the history of the twentieth-century revival of Odissi dance, and by extension, part of the history of the twentieth-century movement for reviving the classical Indian dances. As I have elaborated in Chapter 1, most written narratives of Odissi history did not feature the history of the twentieth-century Odissi revival. It was only during the 1990s, and the beginning of the twenty-first century that the history of the twentieth-century revival made a significant appearance in histories and scholarship on Odissi.

Sunil Kothari, in his book *Odissi Dance* (1990), briefly examines a history of the twentieth-century Odissi revival. He provides biographical sketches of the three gurus instrumental in the Odissi revival, along with photographs, as well as very brief biographical entries of significant and celebrated twentieth-century Odissi dancers. Kothari's book thus acknowledges the twentieth-century revival, and lists the key players involved in the revival project and the performance of twentieth-century Odissi. It is interesting to note that his biographical sketch of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra is more detailed than that of Guru Debaprasad Das and Guru Pankaj Charan Das. As well, his section on Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra features an insight into his style of Odissi.

Priyambada Mohanty-Hejmadi's article on the three pioneering gurus of the Odissi revival (1990) approaches the three "streams" or "voices" of twentieth-century Odissi dance, focusing on the life and contributions of each of these three gurus. Perhaps to an unprecedented extent, she provides English language scholarship and literature on the styles of these three gurus. However, in keeping with the length and intent of her

article, while she provides useful insight into the work of the three gurus, she does not examine the historical narrative of each of these lineages of Odissi.

In twenty-first century scholarship, two works which engage in more detail on the life and work of Guru Debaprasad Das are Dinanath Pathy's *Rethinking Odissi*, and Gayatri Chand's *Guru Debaprasad Das: An Icon of Odissi*, perhaps in keeping with the long professional association of both of these authors with Guru Debaprasad Das. Pathy, an artist, former set-designer, art historian, and academic, had collaborated and worked with Guru Debaprasad Das on a number of projects. Chand had been a student of Guru Debaprasad Das. Their association with the late guru is thereby reflected in the insight they provide on the life and philosophy of Guru Debaprasad Das.

In this chapter, I write the portions of this history which emerged during my fieldwork. My methodology includes archival research as well as interview-based research. I also engage in various secondary sources which provide “nuggets” of information on the history of the Odissi revival, as well as on the life of Guru Debaprasad Das or his collaborators. As the history of a dance lineage or gharanas of classical Indian dance is incomplete without the continuing history of the generations of practitioners, my historical inquiry also engages with the lives and works of the second generation of Guru Debaprasad Das gurus. This chapter examines their work from the early decades of their teaching. A more detailed examination of their work in the present era, as well as a study of the present workings of the gharana is provided in Chapter 4. The present chapter presents an examination of the early years of their teaching practice, as based on their own memories, as well as that of their students and associates.

Uncovering Histories

William Dalrymple, in *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi 1857*, asserts that even while historical characters of the Mughal dynasty in India remain central to his book, his intent as a scholar is to capture a portrait of the Delhi personified by these personalities. Dalrymple had visited Delhi for the first time in 1984 and is invested in the history of the city, especially Old Delhi, and the space of the Red Fort, which was the palace of the last Mughal emperor.

Dalrymple's histories, often ethnographic in nature, are inspired by spaces. My own history of the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi, while being inspired by personalities, which remain central to the discourse on gharanas in Odissi, is nonetheless inextricably attached to the spaces in which this narrative unfolds. In most forms of classical Indian dance, the lineages are named after their places of origin, in a manner similar to North Indian classical music, from which the term gharana is an import. For instance, the Kathak dance form has two leading lineages; the Lucknow gharana and the Jaipur gharana, each named after the city in which the style developed. Similarly, the dance form of Bharata Natyam also has lineages named after regions or of training schools, such as the Kalakshetra style, named after the institution founded by Rukmini Devi, which was also the first established Bharata Natyam institution, or the Thanjavur style, which traces its lineage to the royal courts of Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu. However, in discourse on Odissi, the stylistic lineages are named after their founding personalities, such as the Kelucharan Mahapatra style, the Pankaj Charan Das style, the Debaprasad Das style, and later, the Mayadhar Raut style and Surendranath Jena style of Odissi. The

concept of “site” informs scholarly and rhetorical discourse on Odissi to a much lesser extent than the discussions centered around the personalities and creative choices of the twentieth-century Odissi revivalists.

It can perhaps be safely said that the history of the Odissi revival began in the city of Cuttack. Cuttack is a small town, located on the east coast of Odisha, twenty-five kilometres from the state capital of Bhubaneswar city. Cuttack city is the capital of the Cuttack district of Odisha⁵. Formerly both the administrative and cultural capital of Odisha, Cuttack continues to be a culturally vibrant city today. Separating Cuttack from Bhubaneswar is the Katthojodi River. The two towns, formerly known as the “twin cities of eastern Odisha,” are connected by a bridge over this river.

Each of the three revivalist gurus was born in the Cuttack district. They also all received their early performance exposure in the theatres of Cuttack town. However, within this region, each of these gurus identified, at least ideologically, with a practice affiliated with a different space. Guru Pankaj Charan Das affiliated his dance style with the inner sanctum of the temple, with the dance of the temple dancers, or *maharis*, to whom he claimed familial kinship. Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra affiliated with the outer sanctum of the temple, and was especially invested in developing a sculptural aesthetic for Odissi, drawing inspiration from temple sculptures of dancing figures. Guru Debaprasad Das affiliated with the living dance practices of young boys at the *akhadas* or gymnasia, and the acrobatic *gotipua* dances performed by prepubescent boys in coastal Odisha, as well as local folk dance practices, all of which fell outside of the temple

⁵ Odisha is divided into thirty districts, for administrative purposes of the government. While Cuttack is the name of a city, it is also the name of the larger district itself.

grounds. The concept of space-place-region, as part of the gurus' creative choices and affiliation also becomes significant and perhaps central to the identity of these gharanas as their repertoires and embodied philosophies were further developed, as I examine in Chapter 4.

Bhubaneswar has been the capital of the state of Odisha since 1948. It is the largest city in Odisha and also the state's economic capital. The city is dotted with numerous temples from different centuries, earning it the name of the "temple city." While the Odissi revival was initiated in Cuttack in the 1940s and 1950s, Bhubaneswar eventually became the centre of Odissi learning and performance from the 1960s onwards.

Dalrymple examines the Mutiny Papers at the National Archives in his study of the four months of the 1857 uprising in Delhi. He asserts that these papers provide glimpses of real life during the mutiny, as they record everyday incidences such as a bird-catcher's nets being stolen by the *sepoys*⁶ or a horse trader being attacked in the outskirts of Delhi while returning home (Dalrymple 2006, 23). Dalrymple asserts that these vignettes from everyday life during the period of the revolt highlight the human moments which otherwise get overlooked during the study of a historical moment (Dalrymple 2006, 23). In a similar vein, Sunil Kothari, in a webcast interview, discusses his vision

⁶ The *sepoys* were the soldiers of Indian origin who were hired by the British East India Company in India. They were of both Hindu and Muslim religious backgrounds. The Revolt of 1857, which is known as India's "First War of Independence" is popularly believed to have started in the barracks of the *sepoys*. The immediate trigger was believed to be the launching of the Enfield rifle, whose cartridges were greased with the animal fat of pigs and cows, and had to be bitten off by the soldier before firing. The release of this rifle was considered offensive to both the Hindu and Muslim factions of soldiers as the cow is considered a sacred animal in the Hindu religion, and the pig is considered a foul animal in Islam.

and process of bringing out a human quality in his photobiography of Rukmini Devi Arundale, one of the key figures of the revival of Bharata Natyam classical dance form from the state of Tamil Nadu in southern India. He describes how the photobiography includes photographs of Arundale driving a car, riding a camel in Egypt, and photographs of her surrounded by birds as she loved them. He believes that revealing the moments captured in these photographs bring out the human elements in figures often considered larger than life. My own search for remaining photographs and stories of Guru Debaprasad Das in the memories of those who encountered him, is rooted in a similar desire to encounter the personality and “human element” behind the brief biographical sketches of the late Guru.

I am interested not only in the narratives regarding Guru Debaprasad Das and his work, but also the stories stored in the body. I am interested in the stories inscribed within the bodies and bodily memories of the practitioners who trained under and worked with Guru Debaprasad Das. Citing Walter Benjamin’s “To dwell means to leave traces”, Ann Cooper Albright states that “traces” are the material artifacts, the “bits and pieces of a life that scholars follow, gather up, and survey” (Albright 2). Albright contends that the word “trace” itself suggests the actual imprint of a figure that has passed. In a rhetoric similar to Albright’s, Susan Foster, in “Choreographing History,” articulates

Vanished, evaporated into thinnest air, the body’s habits and idiosyncrasies, even the practices that codify and regiment it, leave only the most disparate residual traces. And any residue left behind resides in fragmented forms within adjacent discursive domains (Foster 4).

Both Foster and Albright thus point to the notion of “traces” or “residue” left behind by individuals in history. In the context of following the history of a gharana, Albright’s

concept of “traces” takes on additional relevance. The “traces” of the gharana are left not only in material artifacts, but also in the memories of the living practitioners; in both a corporeal memory, in which the encounters of previous generations of personalities within the gharana are inscribed, as well as in memories of encounters with these personalities. Gathering the “traces” of the history of this gharana and its founder, Guru Debaprasad Das, thereby entails examining not only the material artifacts, in the manner of archival material, but also the memories of individuals who worked with and encountered the late guru.

Albright, in her study of Loïe Fuller’s choreography, states early in the study that she was interested primarily in the physical experience of Fuller’s dancing body (Albright xv). She asserts the centrality of her “kinesthetic imagination” in fuelling her research work (Albright 1). Albright states that her methodological approach consists of two strategies: an intellectual approach, as well as an approach based in physical study (Albright 3). She often uses the studio-based physical study in order to interrogate her questions from the kinaesthetic-somatic angle, centering on her own physical experience of reconstructions or revisionings of Fuller’s dances. Albright is quick to point out that in the discipline of dance studies, the scholarship is divided between a praxis-based reconstruction approach and scholars who focus on the dance in the context of a broader study of modes of cultural production and representation (Albright 7). She found that her physical explorations in the studio often challenged the historians’ assumptions that Fuller was an untrained dancer. When attempting to choreograph a dance titled *Traces of Light* using a reconstructed Loïe Fuller costume and yards of material like Fuller,

Albright found that she had to train her upper body and arms extensively for months before she was able to perform the piece.

The title of Foster's article "Choreographing History" is perhaps a nod in the direction of her argument that the body of the historian is perpetually present in the act and experience of writing the history, and therefore, that act of "writing" a history embodies the choreographic act. Foster further points out that historical bodies are themselves also engaged in quotidian activities, pointing to Marcel Mauss's theory of the "techniques of the body" (Foster 4). She suggests that the historians own techniques of the body, and that their interest in viewing or participating in body-centered endeavours mediates his or her framework guiding the selection of historical material for the study (Foster 6). The body is thus present not only in examining the corporeal experience of the historical dancer, but also seen as a guiding factor in the historian's choice of lens and framework through which to approach the historical material.

In writing on her process for reconstruction of Nijinsky's *Le sacre du printemps*, Millicent Hodson discusses her interaction with Marie Rambert as a critical part of animating this reconstruction. She points out how she and Rambert together watched a film of Massine's choreography, and that it was during this viewing that Rambert recalled the physical and kinaesthetic differences between the Massine version and the original Nijinsky choreography. Hodson describes Rambert as standing up to demonstrate Nijinsky's grounded posture physically (Hodson 21). The embedded corporeal memory was thus the key to revisiting the aesthetics, look and feel of the piece.

In *Unfinished Gestures*, Davesh Soneji contends that the mnemonic accounts of

the *devadasis* he interviewed revealed “significant lacunae in the historicization of the ‘devadasi’ in the 19th and 20th centuries” (*Unfinished Gestures* 13). He argues that during his interview and research process, his interviewees’ spontaneous singing and dancing were valuable sites for research. He provides the example of an instance when he was interviewing a group of devadasis regarding the kinds of songs they performed during the 1940s. He states that one of them started singing, and the others eventually joined in. In another example, he describes R. Muttukkannamal, one of the last female devadasis, performing repertoire for him on her rooftop. He calls this encounter “eruptive and affective,” as opposed to a discussion which “carefully charted movement through memory” (*Unfinished Gestures* 16).

In a vein similar to that of Albright, Soneji states that the process of physically recalling performance repertoire ignites “affective resonance between flashes of quotidian memory,” and mentions that through her rooftop performance, Muttukkannamal was able to recall her experiences in performances for royalty and the rituals. He argues that this recall triggered through the physical experience of performing allows for a “retrieval of historical traces (musical compositions, texts, movements) that survive only in evanescent, embodied forms and that cannot be accessed through material archives” (*Unfinished Gestures* 163). He points out how a particular piece survives only in her memory, as it had been taught through oral transmission, and hence does not appear in any of the manuscripts from Tanjore (modern day Thanjavur) and Madras (Chennai). Soneji thus points to an archive stored in the body.

During my own process of uncovering the history of the Debaprasad Das branch

of Odissi, I was interested not only in the history of the personalities of this gharana, but also of the body as it traversed the different decades of development of this lineage of Odissi. The work of Guru Debaprasad Das evolved through the years, and his choreographic works of the 1950s involved a physicality distinct from his later choreographic works. Through the process of my ethnographic fieldwork, I found that a number of my interviews and discussions with different performers and practitioners engaged in a kinaesthetic and bodily memory reminiscent of Millicent Hodson's discussion of her interview of Marie Rambert. The different transitions of the body through the decades of the gharana became especially evident during my fieldwork with Sukanya Rahman of Maine, United States, as she taught me the *Natangi* piece which she had learned in the 1960s from Guru Debaprasad Das. Guru Durgacharan Ranbir also demonstrated a number of exercises as well as movements they practiced as part of the classes taught by Guru Debaprasad Das at Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya.

I find that a sense of multiplicity regarding historical personalities and moments emerge through the research process. In his study of the last days of Mughal Delhi, Dalrymple suggests that the Revolt of 1857, which ended the Mughal hold in India, was a chain of different uprisings and acts of resistance in India, as opposed to a singular, crystallized, historical moment (Dalrymple 25). In my own research, I had previously commonly encountered brief biographical sketches in which Guru Debaprasad Das is described as being regionalist in his focus, as well as more conservative regarding changes to the Odissi dance form. This may also be partially due to the erasure of information regarding the Odissi revival in general, as well as for generating an

uncomplicated, straightforward narrative of Odissi dance history, for easier “brand-labelling” of Odissi dance as distinct among the classical Indian dance forms. Eventually, what emerges out of a reading of different sources on his life is a personality whose own dance training and background were widely eclectic, and whose focus was greatly multidisciplinary.

Commenting upon the politics of erasure of certain areas of the history of the 1950s Odissi revival, Dinanath Pathy states that:

When we think of the guru-shishya parampara in the field of Odissi dance, we find disjointed, disconnected historical facts, and the situation in the 1940s and 50s was extremely fluid to allow anyone to claim the status of a guru. The theatre people who in fact were responsible to help Odissi crystallise into a distinguished dance form and evolve into a full-fledged dance form were conveniently forgotten. The Odissi dancers of the theatre companies soon realized its importance as a distinctive dance form, revived and reconstructed it 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. (Pathy 141).

Pathy’s statement of the disconnect in historical facts, and his implication of erasure of 1940s Odissi history is reminiscent of discourses of power and politics linked in the writing of history. Noted historian J.G.A Pocock’s signal article “British History: A Plea for a New Subject” points out the politics of the term “British” as a label, which he contends began to be used during the parliamentary union of 1707 (Pocock 601). He contends that the term “British history” implies a plural history for a group of cultures which have historically considered themselves distinct, and yet have been “marked by an increasingly English political and cultural domination” (Pocock 605). Pocock also points

to the significance of written history in identity formation, stating that “the English were both making and writing their history” (Pocock 611), and that “guardianship of one’s past is power” (Pocock 611). To this effect, he points out Oliver Cromwell’s act of carrying off many of Scotland’s medieval records, and the ship bringing them back being wrecked in 1660 (Pocock 611). Pocock thus strongly suggests that history is often written by a hegemonic voice and is thus prone to strategic appropriations and erasures.

Sean Gaston, in *The Impossible Mourning of Jacques Derrida*, theorizes the notion of the “gap” and the history of the “gap,” as described by Derrida (vii). Gaston maintains that for Derrida, “history (is) *the history of departures from totality*” (Gaston viii). Implicit in this statement is the notion that gaps are an inevitable part of Derrida’s understanding of history. For Gaston, the gap in both Derrida’s work as well as the gap left by the death of Derrida appear to embody an ontological or psychic scar. Here, I borrow the metaphor of the psychic scar from Gabrielle Cody in her article “Woman, Man, Dog, Tree: Two Decades of Intimate and Monumental Bodies in Pina Bausch’s *Tanztheater*.” Intrinsic to the notion of scars are the ideas of dismemberment, severance, and fragmentation. Gaston sees the gaps articulated and left by Derrida as embodying this scar. This is perhaps most evident in his interpretation of Alan Bass’s translation of the “gap” as the open, gaping wound (Gaston 4).

In describing the nature of my research, I find useful a theory which acknowledges a “gap,” or a sense of disconnect between two continuums of information. The nature of archival material on Guru Debaprasad Das is scattered, and limited. For this reason, there is less information on certain decades of his life and work, such as the

1940s and the 1970s, than the other decades. In “What is a 'Relevant' Translation?” Derrida asserts that the act of translation stands at the threshold of all activities involving reading and writing, and that loss and debt are inevitable in this act (Derrida 175). He suggests that no word can be completely translated. The act of writing a history is itself an act of translation, as the historian attempts to “translate” a past event into a written record. It is thus vulnerable to Derrida’s notion of the loss involved during the act of translation.

Dalrymple also comments upon the politics of transliteration and accessibility in historiography. He finds that British histories as well as histories written in English by post-colonial Indian scholars tended to use only English sources, bolstered with post-Saidian theory. He maintains that on the other hand, Urdu-language histories written in India and Pakistan used Urdu primary sources, delving thereby into an entirely separate primary source material (Dalrymple 25). This example illustrates how the lens of language informs the historical research work; primary sources written in a regional, vernacular language are likely to have been written by local population, whereas sources written in the language of the ruling community are likely to reflect the views and experiences of that class and associates of that class. With regards to my own fieldwork, most of the questions in the oral interviews were asked in either English or Hindi. I received responses mainly in English and Hindi as well, with occasional Oriya inputs and additions, which I have been able to follow primarily due to my familiarity with Bengali, the language of the neighboring state of West Bengal, which has many linguistic similarities with spoken Oriya. My archival research and readings of secondary source

materials have, however, been entirely in English, as I do not read the Oriya script.

The Established Model of Twentieth-Century Odissi History

Norma Sue Fisher-Stitt, in the preface to her history of Canada's National Ballet School, brings up the historian's dilemma of choosing a start date to trace and write an organization's history. Eventually, she selects 1949 as the year from which she would begin tracing her history of the school (1). She employs the metaphor of the ballet class, progressing from the warm-up to the barre work to centre work, to, ultimately the "allegro," the culmination of the class, as a framework for describing the history of the school, and devotes a section, with chapters to each of these four aspects of the ballet class. In my history of the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi, I would like to start by examining the established rhetoric of Odissi history, and revival history, as represented by scholarly historiography over the decades.

Odissi Dance (1971) by Dhirendranath Patnaik is the first book on Odissi written in English language. Patnaik, who was an instrumental figure during the Odissi revival era of the 1950s, had previously written a volume on Odissi in the Oriya language in 1958. He states in his preface that his English volume is altogether different in approach and content. The book, by virtue of being the first published book with widespread accessibility, remains a significant source on Odissi. Here I find it apt to trace the historical narrative of Odissi as outlined in this book.

The first section of the book is devoted to describing the state of Odisha, then known as Orissa, with its ancient history, traced back to the early settlements in the region. This introduction sets the state for the framing of Odissi dance in the rest of the book, with a link to antiquity at its centre. He also states that in all Indian art, “the theme of the artist is rooted in religion; the urge is as much spiritual as aesthetic” (Patnaik 6), suggesting that the Odissi dance, the dance of the state of Odisha, was also rooted in spiritual and religious practices. The book provides extensive information regarding archaeological evidence of the Odisha-based dance practices, largely through dancing images and sculptures dating back to two thousand years of antiquity, and provides extensive photographic evidence of these dancing images.

Patnaik’s linear historical narrative of the development of Odissi dance traces archaeological evidence of dance in Odisha back to 200 BCE, to the inscription of king Kharavela on the ceiling of the cavern at Udaygiri, a hilly region on the outskirts of present-day Bhubaneswar. The inscription describes a king treating his citizens to performances by musicians and dancers (Patnaik 8). He also cites the example of relief panels on the walls of these caves, which feature images of musicians and dancers. As evidence of these inscriptions and relief panels, photographic slides are included on the facing page. Patnaik then traces the next stage of the development of dance from Odisha in the Buddhist-dominated period in the sixth century CE. Here, the dancing figures sculpted on the doorframe at Lalitagiri are cited as examples. Patnaik further states that the Mahayana branch of Buddhism, which was the dominant and most widespread religion in this period in Odisha, endorsed iconography, and the practice of music and

dance, and that the monks themselves were attuned to dance (Patnaik 11).

Further evidence is given of dancing as spiritually embraced by different cults within Hinduism, such as the goddess-centered Tantra sect, for which Patnaik cites the example of the Hirapur Yogini temple near Bhubaneswar, and the Shiva-centered Shaivite cult, for which he cites inscriptions and images from various temples, such as the Kapileswara temple in Bhubaneswar, built by the Sailodbhava dynasty rulers, dating from sixth to seventh century CE. In a significant mention, Patnaik also posits that there is evidence of the *chowka* and the *tribhanga* postures, the two basic stances of present day Odissi dance, in the postures of the dancing figures from the Parashurameshwar temple, also built by the Sailodbhava dynasty (Patnaik 17).

The book follows evidence of dancing through further centuries, through the rulings of other dynasties such as the Bhaumakara dynasty (ninth century CE), and the Kesari dynasty, who ruled until the eleventh century CE. He then discusses at length the rule of the Ganga dynasty, which institutionalized the consecration of dancing girls to temples on a large scale. The life of the twelfth century poet Jayadeva is mentioned here, as well as his contribution of the lyric poem *Geeta Govinda*, which was and continues to be a landmark of Sanskrit literature. Jayadeva's wife Padmavati being a temple dancer is also mentioned.

The historical figure of Ramananda Patnaik, the governor of Rahamehendri region, appointed by Prataparudradeva in the fifteenth century, is given special mention, and is credited for the introduction of the expressional dance in the repertoires of temple dancers. He is described as an individual who spent much time in the company of temple

dancers and musicians. Patnaik mentions that until this point historically, only male performers were allowed dramatic performance (Patnaik 51). Patnaik states that with Prataparudra's law which decreed the singing of Jayadev's Sanskrit lyric poem *Geeta Govinda* compulsory in the temple of Jagannath in Puri, the necessity of an accompanying expression-based dance repertoire arose, and Ramanand Patnaik took on the responsibility of creating and teaching this repertoire (Patnaik 51). Thus the present day practice of incorporating dances set to the songs of the *Geeta Govinda* in the Odissi repertoire is linked to this historical practice.

Patnaik's historical narrative largely traces a linear progression and continuation of dance through the various dynasties and centuries of Odishan history. In the second part of the book, he discusses historical dance practices which have informed Odissi dance. He then traces the development of the dance of the *maharis*, or temple dancers, which is perhaps the single most appropriated aspect of historical dance in Odissi revival rhetoric. He mentions the earliest records of the temple dance tradition, tracing the practice back to the tenth century CE, and describes the different classes of maharis. Patnaik also discusses the continuation of temple and temple dance traditions through the attacks of the Muslim and Afghan invaders since the seventeenth century, to the conquest of the Marathas from the southwest in the eighteenth century. The mahari dance tradition remained "untouched" through these years, although, towards the end of the eighteenth century, the maharis were also brought into the royal courts as dancers, and thus began to be associated with concubinage (Patnaik 56). He also examines the acrobatic gotipua dance practice of pre-pubescent male performers, which he dates to the seventeenth

century CE (Patnaik 60).

While the Odissi revival itself is not examined at length in Patnaik's book, photographs of noted performers of Odissi, largely female, in various sculpturesque or expressive poses, are included. Patnaik's book embodies, and can be considered emblematic of the classic grand-narrative style structuralist prose published by the revivalist scholars or the scholars deeply invested in the recognition of Odissi dance as a classical Indian dance form. This mode of writing is symptomatic of the structuralist dance history writing emerging from North America during the 1960s, as pointed out by Linda Tomko. Tomko notes that these studies of dance history typically took the form of chronologies, focused on individual careers, or analyses of certain works (Tomko 160). Tomko maintains that this mode of literature fulfills the crucial purpose of "establishing the record" (Tomko 160). She points out that recent critical theory emphasizes issues such as "embodiment, power, representation, and interpretive communities" (Tomko 161), and dance history written through these lenses is more likely to be issue-driven than limited to a chronological framework. I find that the published scholarship of the Odissi revivalists such as D.N Patnaik performs a similar function of "establishing the record" for Odissi dance. It provides an insight into the historical development and heritage of the dance emerging from the state of Odisha. However, the writing strategy of the Odissi revivalist scholars, while characteristically featuring a deep engagement with strategically selected historical dance practices of Odisha, offers very little information, or no mention of the twentieth-century theatrical dance practices in Odisha, and the Odissi revival.

Ultimately, revivalist scholars and historians of Odissi wished to establish two

points. Firstly, they sought to establish that there exists archaeological and textual evidence of distinct dance practices, both ritual and theatrical, having existed in the territory currently known as Odisha, and that these movement practices were recognized as being distinct in character in the *Natyashastra* treatise, which called it the Odra-Magadhi dance form, named after the region of its birth. Secondly, they argued that the present-day practice known as “Odissi” is informed by and in dialogue with these practices tracing to antiquity, with the mahari dance practice serving as the living, organic link.

To a certain extent, the direct association of Odissi dance with the dance of the maharis prevails in a large circle of non-English scholarship and research even today. For instance, Shukla Bandopadhyay Palit, in her book *Devadasi Nrityadhara*, written in the Bengali language and centered on the life, activities and dance of the maharis, claims that “the history of mahari dance is the history of Odissi dance” (Palit, 40, my translation). She contends that the mahari dance stayed in the Jagannath temple until it was taken outside of the sphere of the temple in 1958 (Palit 40). In this narrative of Odissi history, the Odissi dance is credited entirely to the mahari dance. Palit’s book centers on the subject of the maharis, like Frédérique Apffel-Marglin’s English-language book *Wives of the God-King: The Rituals of the Devadasis of Puri*. Both these books, in a departure from the treatment of the mahari figure in revivalist scholarship, focus mainly on the narrative of the mahari. In the work of the revivalist scholar-historians, the mahari figure is featured as an important link in the heritage of Odissi dance; however, the writing focuses on the historical mahari figure, as opposed to the life and corporeal experiences

of the living mahari.

Two points are significant to note in English-language Odissi historiography preceding the 1990s. Firstly, the mahari dance practice was largely a female-dominated practice, and was performed in the closed sphere of the inner sanctum of the temple. The mahari dance was performed in public only on special occasions, and by a different subclass of maharis who did not usually perform the ritualistic dance inside the temple. On the other hand, the Odissi revival effort was solely advocated and spearheaded almost entirely by male dancers and scholars. The maharis were not consulted or represented during the actual proceedings of the revivalists. Only one individual involved in the revival, Guru Pankaj Charan Das, claimed a familial link with the maharis, by virtue of being the adopted son of a mahari. In this case as well, while he included a few mahari ritualistic movements in his dances, the style pioneered by him was largely informed by his own creative choices and movement generation.

Secondly, I find that the local theatrical practices of the professional theatre companies in Cuttack during the 1930s and the 1940s, which had a more immediate effect on the aesthetics and development of twentieth-century Odissi, were rendered a characteristic opacity in most scholarship on Odissi, including the histories of the Odissi revival. It is critical to note that each of the three pioneering gurus was linked professionally to the New Theatre in Cuttack, and subsequently to the Annapurna Theatre A and B groups. In addition, the lived experiences and movement experiences of two of these three gurus as gotipuas (prepubescent male performers who were known for acrobatic dances) is often referenced briefly, but never detailed, in Odissi scholarship. I

argue that a potential reason for this may be the difference in connotation between the *margiya* and *deshi* split in the Indian arts. Margiya art is considered timeless, eternal and linked to “high art,” and ultimately the concept of the “classical,” whereas the *deshi* connotes regional, folk and often considered “popular art” as opposed to “high art.” It may be that the mahari, gotipua and dramatic performance practices had been caught in this dialectic between the *margiya* and *deshi*. The mahari dance form, dating to at least the tenth century CE, endorsed and nurtured through the centuries by royal patronage, is considered an elevated art form. On the other hand, gotipua practice, dating back to the seventeenth century, is a much younger practice historically, while the twentieth-century theatrical performances emerged later still, and were performed in the public arena for entertainment. Both the gotipua and dramatic performances would thus classify as *deshi*, and thus not “classical.” An association of Odissi dance with these forms through scholarship could therefore put Odissi dance at the risk of being implicated as a “local, folkloric dance form,” as opposed to a timeless “classical Indian form.”

Thus Odissi historiography dating from the 1950s to the early 1990s approached Odissi history with largely a view to providing information regarding the present practice of Odissi dance in the context of ritualistic and popular dance forms dating to antiquity. It has only been since the late 1990s and 2000s that the historical moment of the Odissi revival has been examined in more depth. In the following section, I aim to provide an account of the Odissi dance revival history in the context of the popular theatrical practices in Cuttack during the 1930s and 1940s.

Oriya Identity and the Odissi Revival

I begin a contextual history of the Odissi revival with an examination of the Oriya regionalist consciousness emerging in urban Odisha in the late nineteenth century, as well as an examination of the label "Odissi." The twentieth-century Odissi revival is inextricably linked to a rising urban movement towards establishing a nationally recognized Oriya culture.

Nandini Sikand, in her dissertation, suggests that Odisha's regional identity developed partly in response to the nature of its administration under the colonial rule ("Dancing with Tradition" 20). During the period of British colonial rule in India, Odisha was part of the larger administrative territory known as the Bengal presidency, lasting from 1803 through the nineteenth century. The Bengal presidency consisted of the neighboring regions identified today as West Bengal and East Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, and Assam. In 1936, Odisha separated from Bihar, and was recognized as a separate state in 1947, upon the end of the British colonial rule.

Sikand points to the emphasis of Oriya identity as distinct from Bengali identity manifest in discussions and rhetoric surrounding Oriya culture and Odissi dance. In this regard, Sikand highlights a historical incident which strengthened the resolve of the Oriya elite to identify and mark Oriya culture as distinct from Bengali culture. The capital of the Bengal Presidency was located in Calcutta, an urban region in Bengal, geographically removed from Orissa. Sikand states that in 1868, Rajendralal Mitra, an influential member of the Bengal intelligentsia, suggested to the British that the Oriya language be removed from the school curriculums and be replaced with Bengali throughout the

Bengal Presidency, citing the reason that there were more school texts published in Bengali language ("Dancing with Tradition" 22). Sikand points out that during this time, the Bengali intelligentsia promoted the understanding that Oriya was a regional dialect of Bengali ("Dancing with Tradition" 22). This alienated the Oriya elite, who then strove to encourage the growth of Oriya literature and of an Oriya cultural identity distinct from Bengali.

The strong identification with the Oriya language as the basis for cultural distinction from Bengal is also historically significant as it was along linguistic lines that the first proposed separation of the Bengal Presidency was based. As pointed out by Radha Mohan Sahoo, the question of separating Orissa province from Bengal was brought up first in response to the great famine of 1866. Sahoo indicates that Sir Stafford Northcote, the then Secretary of the State for India, had suggested that the Oriya speaking regions be separated from Bengal and consolidated into a single separate administrative province (Sahoo 1). He also points out that this coincided with an emerging regionalist consciousness among the Oriya elite (1). By 1903, a political movement, culminating in the Utkal Union Conference, spearheaded by Madhusudhan Das, was already underway for demanding a separate province of Odisha (then Orissa). The province of Orissa was officially created and recognized on April 1, 1936, a date which continues to be celebrated by Oriya people as Utkal Divas (Odisha Day).

The strong association of Oriya language and coastal Oriya culture with the regional identity of Odisha becomes significant in the analysis of Odissi dance's twentieth-century revival and development. It is critical to note here that Oriya is the

language historically spoken in eastern, coastal Odisha. Large portions of the population in western Odisha speak Kosali, as well as numerous indigenous languages and dialects. The political and economic capital of the state, Bhubaneswar is also located in eastern, coastal Odisha.

Translated from Oriya, the term “Odissi” connotes “of Odisha.” Implicit in the name itself as an alignment with the region, unlike the classical dance form of Bharata Natyam, which is not named after a specific region, but rather aimed at representing the nation via the name⁷ and the classical dance form Kathak, which was named after the practice of the north Indian *kathakas* or storytellers. In this aspect, the name Odissi for the dance form from Odisha is similar to the case of the classical dance form Manipuri, named after its state of origin, Manipur, in northeastern India. Manipuri was popularized through the recognition of the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, who had invited teachers of the form to teach at his arts institute Shantiniketan in 1919.

Ethnomusicologist David Dennen, in his study on the etymology and origin of the name, examines the politics and history behind the assigning of the name “Odissi” to music and dance which emerged from Odisha. Dennen's interest lies in how these names have been appropriated and interpreted at particular historical junctures (“Odissi: On the History” 1). He points out that the term “Odissi” was used to refer to a “set of musical and gestural practices drawing from traditions that developed from what is now Odisha, India” (“Odissi: On the History” 1).

⁷ The name Bharata Natyam has been interpreted in numerous ways, ranging from being interpreted as the dance form advocated by Bharata Muni, the author of the *Natyashastra*, the Sanskrit treatise on the performing arts, to being named after Bharata Varsha, or the Sanskrit name referring to the geographical territory of South Asia.

Dhirendranath Patnaik asserts that “Odissi, literally means anything belonging to Odisha” (Patnaik 73). He states that the name was derived from the term *Odra Desa*, the ancient Sanskrit language reference to the territory which is now the state of Odisha. He also cites Maheswar Mohapatra’s fifteenth century treatise, the *Abhinaya Chandrika*, in which the dance of this region is termed *Odra Nrutya*, literally translated as the “the Odra dance” or the “dance of the Odras.” Following the revivalist line of argument, which Patnaik endorses, all associations of Odissi, including the name, are thus linked to a past which is at least a few centuries old.

In a departure from this line of revivalist scholarship, Dennen examines the belief within the Odissi community that the term “Odissi,” as a referent for the newly reconstructed dance form, is attributed to Kalicharan Patnaik (“Odissi’: On the History” 1). He examines the differences in opinion regarding when Patnaik suggested this name for the new dance form, highlighting that while Ananya Chatterjea asserts that the Kalicharan Patnaik coined termed “Odissi” in 1955, Odissi practitioner Ritha Devi contends that the term was coined in 1948. Dennen also points out that Odia writer Mohapatra Nilamoni Sahoo recalls hearing the term in relation to music in 1945. Even in Sahoo’s account, the term was associated with Kaviraj Kalicharan Patnaik (“Odissi’: On the History” 3).

Dennen’s own research into the textual records of the term “Odissi” reveals that the earliest written usage of the term “Odissi” appeared in the *Purna Chandra Odia Bhasakosa*, an Oriya language dictionary dating to the 1930s, which had an entry on “odisi sangeeta” and “odisi nata” (referring to “Odissi music” and “Odissi dance”

respectively). Dennen states that the authors of the dictionary associate both Odissi music and Odissi dance with the Puri region of coastal Odisha. He states that the *odisi nata* is described as a “kind of dance performed with the singing of Odissi music (sangeeta)”, with gestures and movement of the limbs expressing the meaning of the song (“Odissi: On the History” 3). Included within these descriptions is an emphasis on difficult jumps and acrobatics, and Dennen suggests that this implies a specific association with the acrobatic dances of the gotipuas (“Odissi: On the History” 3). Dennen’s study ultimately highlights how a term used to refer specifically to regional dance, strongly suggestive of the gotipua dance practice, was later appropriated to refer to a reconstructed “classical” dance form.

Like Sikand, Dennen posits that the terming of regional cultural production in the modern period was a result of the British colonial naming of different languages and “cultures” within India for administrative purposes. He states that the development of railway lines and train travel in India increased the mobility of musicians from the nineteenth century onwards, and in this context, the identification of a musician as being “Bengali” and “Telugu” became significant, as they were distinguished largely by their regional identities. Part of the regional identities of the dances are also derived from the *Natyashastra* nomenclature. “Odissi” is said to refer to the regional dance form “Odra Magadhi” as mentioned in the *Natyashastra* text, in which the dance forms are named after their regions of origin and practice. This was the classic line of reasoning used by the revivalist scholars in the 1950s for arguing that “Odissi” was an “unbroken tradition,” establishing its links with antiquity through references dating back to the classical

treatise written between 200 BCE and 200 CE.

Dennen also contends that the choice of the name “Odissi” was a strategic choice, as “Odia” (or “Oriya”), which is otherwise the adjective used to describe the language and culture of the state of Odisha, may have had other cultural significance. He cites Dinanath Pathy in stating that “Odia” is a common caste name in southern Odisha, and thereby the use of such a name may have alienated upper caste Odishan communities (“Odissi’: On the History”). On the other hand, “Odissi” suggests “of the state” without such pre-established meanings associated with the term.

Emerging from Dennen’s discussion are two significant points; firstly that “Odissi” as a term is almost as recent as the reconstructed dance form itself, and secondly, the centrality and significance of the personality of Kavichandra Kalicharan Patnaik in the revival process, naming, and politics of Odissi dance. Kalicharan Patnaik was a connoisseur as well as an experienced professional in the realm of the performing arts from the 1920s through the 1950s and 1960s. Dennen states that Patnaik had travelled from court to court as a playwright, poet and musician, and had also spent a large amount of time in Puri from 1920 onwards (“Odissi’: On the History” 4). Dennen suggests that this indicates that he would have been familiar with the term “Odissi”, as it was most likely already in use in Puri.

Performance Traditions and Cultural Production in Mid-Twentieth Century Odisha

As pointed out in the previous section, there was a growing regional consciousness among the Oriya intellectuals by the end of the nineteenth century. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century also saw the rise of the Indian political movement for freedom from the colonial British rule. Supplementing this political movement was the propagation of an Indian national culture or the "homegrown" culture. This emphasis on the "national" or the "homegrown" was initially led by the upper classes, and manifest in many nationwide movements, such as the campaign for the homespun *khadi* cloth, encouraged by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi to lessen the dependence of the Indian household on British-manufactured cloth. Coinciding with this political movement was the propagation of music and dance as visual markers of a pre-colonial past of the Indian people. This was initiated most visibly perhaps by the establishment of Rabindranath Tagore's institution Shantiniketan (1921) in which the arts played a central role in education, and Rukmini Devi Arundale's efforts to revive and recontextualize the *sadir* dance form in southern India resulting in the establishment of her Kalakshetra institution in 1934.

Janet O'Shea's account of the Bharata Natyam revival shows the historical link between the Indian nationalist political movement and the promotion of the traditional performing arts. She points out that it was to accompany the first meeting of the anticolonial political organization, the Indian National Congress, that a music concert was organized by a group of individuals who soon after, in 1927, formed the Madras

Music Conference. This organization soon became instrumental in backing Rukmini Devi Arundale's efforts to revive the *sadir* dance form, rooted in the temple and court dance practice (O'Shea 2007, 2). The academy's officers organized a second concert in 1931 which included a performance by the *sadirs* themselves. O'Shea states that by 1935, young girls from middle-class, Brahmin families had begun to study the dance form, which began to gain respectability through its newly established association with the middle-class. Bourdieu in *The Field of Cultural Production* asserts that when a new artistic group emerges in the field of artistic and cultural production, it "modifies and displaces the universe of possible options; the previously dominant productions may, for example, be pushed into the status either of outmoded [déclassé] or of classic works" (32). In this case, the newly emerging female dance practitioners from middle-class families displaced the earlier class of court and temple performers, drawing legitimacy through the respectability afforded by their social status, as well as by purging the Bharata Natyam form of its previous sensual associations, and aligning it, instead, with spirituality.

The images of a pre-colonial past rooted in antiquity were not only promoted as part of the nationalist discourse within India, but also by orientalist artists, writers and performers in Europe and North America in the early twentieth century. Especially relevant in this context is the dance work of the American dancers Ruth St. Denis and Raagini Devi⁸. St. Denis gained nationwide and eventually international recognition for

⁸ Raagini Devi was the adopted name of the American dancer Esther Sherman, who was an active practitioner of Oriental dance and Indian dances in the New York-Delaware-Pennsylvania area in the 1920s. She moved to India in the 1920s. Her daughter Indrani Rahman, who played a key role in the propagation of the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi, was born in India. Raagini Devi herself played an

her performances of the spiritual "Hindoo dance". It is also critical to note here that both Tagore and Rukmini Devi Arundale, figures who were at the forefront of the revival of the traditional Indian performing arts, came from privileged classes of Hindu society. Tagore belonged to a family of landowners in Bengal, and Rukmini Devi Arundale was from a Brahmin family in Tamil Nadu. Both these classes not only had privileged positions within the hierarchy of the Hindu caste system but also economic capital by virtue of being wealthy families. It is also significant to note that each of these individuals had also travelled to Europe, and had interacted with European artists and intellectuals of the time. Rukmini Devi Arundale had met the Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova, and had been greatly inspired by her, and also learned ballet from her. Tagore had undergone a portion of his education in London. Even while the upholders of the tradition had been from previously marginalized classes of society, such as the *sadir* performers in southern India, who had been the hereditary performers of dances and music in the courts and temple precincts, it was individuals from the Indian elite classes and intelligentsia, who had initiated localized and national cultural revivals in the early twentieth century, who were seen as possessing valued cultural capital⁹. The traditional practitioners of these art forms, associated with social taboos, had been marginalized in society through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

important role in the revival of Kathakali dance-drama form from Kerala in southern India.

⁹ Here, I refer to Pierre Bourdieu's usage of the term "cultural capital". Bourdieu, in "The Forms of Capital," suggests that there are three fundamental forms of capital. These include economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money (Bourdieu 1997: 47), cultural capital, which can be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications, and social capital, which is based on the individual's network of social relations and can be institutionalized in the form of titles and nobility. He suggests that cultural capital can exist in three forms, the first of which is embodied cultural capital. Bourdieu defines embodied cultural capital as external wealth converted into an integral part of a person, into habitus (Bourdieu 1997: 48). In this sense, an artistic practice can also be considered cultural capital. My usage of the term "cultural capital" aligns itself with this understanding of the term.

The early twentieth century thus saw a pan-Indian move towards the construction of visual symbols of national identity and culture. Janet O'Shea highlights the strong association of Bharata Natyam as the "national dance of India" even while it is not designated as the primary Indian dance form (O'Shea 2007, 70). She also indicates that while one group of practitioners, championed by Rukmini Devi Arundale and scholars like E. Krishna Iyer, located Bharata Natyam as a national dance form, other practitioners such as Balasaraswati foregrounded the southern regional origins of the form, identifying it as primarily an embodiment of Tamil devotion. O'Shea thus sees Bharata Natyam as a site of contested regional affiliations. However, the codification and standardization of Bharata Natyam, led by Rukmini Devi Arundale, was largely driven by this nationalist discourse, locating the Indian glory in a precolonial Indian past.

The revival of Odissi dance in the 1950s deviates from the Bharata Natyam revival in its relationship to Indian nationalism. The British colonial rule in India ended on August 15, 1947. Odissi's entrance into the classical dance fold came after India's independence from the colonial British rule. Unlike Rukmini Devi's efforts towards Bharata Natyam revival, which were undertaken largely as a part of the initiative to promote a dance form representative of a pre-colonial national culture, the Odissi dance was envisioned largely as a site for constituting a distinctive Oriya identity. It was only after its recognition as a legitimate classical dance form in 1956 that Odissi dance entered the dialogue for representation of the newly independent Indian nation-state in the international cultural arena.

Two incidents illustrate the strong regionalist impetus behind the Odissi revival

movement. Firstly, in 1953, Rukmini Devi Arundale herself witnessed a dance performance in Cuttack, and called it a "poor imitation of Bharata Natyam" ("Re-imagining a History"). This incident is popularly believed to have led the playwright Kalicharan Patnaik to work towards achieving national recognition for Odissi dance as a legitimate classical dance. In another incident noted by Ileana Citaristi in her biography of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, we find an encounter between Bana Behari Maity, who was originally from Bengal and Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra upon the latter's student Sanjukta Panigrahi winning a dance competition. At the competition, she had presented the dance form which was being newly referred to as "Odissi." Citaristi documents Maity as exclaiming "'Odissi?' What is this 'Odissi'? Never heard of it!" Citaristi states

That was enough for Kelucharan, who at that very moment made a promise to himself that 'from now onward I will make every effort to show these fellows what this 'Odissi' is. Since then Kelucharan has never looked back and has worked single-mindedly to keep his promise all through his life (Citaristi 91). The interaction depicted between Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra of Odisha and Bana Behari Maity of West Bengal displays a presumed cultural elitism in Maity's rhetoric as he claims to be unaware of a dance form named after the region of Odisha. Both the abovementioned episodes depict non-Oriyas living outside of Odisha deeming the regional dance form gaining popularity in coastal Odisha during the early 1950s as not an entirely legitimate and distinct dance form. Both these incidents are also documented as historical moments which sparked the Odissi revival.

To articulate, in Pierre Bourdieu's terms, a habitus in which the creative voice of Guru Debaprasad Das developed, it is significant to situate his work historically in a time when regional Oriya pride was strongly promoted by the Oriya middle class and upper

classes in coastal Odisha, while also working against the larger backdrop of the newly independent India striving to establish its cultural identity in the international arena.

The mid-twentieth century also featured a fertile local vernacular theatre environment, in which a number of male performers, including Guru Debaprasad Das, were able to develop a creative voice. By the 1950s, the traditional structures which had supported the earlier traditional dance forms in Odisha began to disintegrate. The royal patronage for the mahari tradition came to an end when the administration of the Jagannath temple was passed to the secular Odisha state government in the mid 1950s. However, during the 1940s, another performing art, the regional touring theatre, had flourished. A number of early revivalist dance practitioners had worked in the traveling theatres as dancers, actors and musicians during the 1940s and 1950s.

In this context, it is significant to mention the *Jatra* performance tradition of Odisha. Anjum Katyal and Naveen Kishore describe the Jatra theatrical tradition of Bengal and Odisha as the “professional travelling theatre in the round” (Katyal and Kishore, 98). The performances usually consisted of melodrama interspersed with heightened comic sequences, featuring an exaggerated style of acting and dialogue delivery (98). The dialogue would sometimes be improvised in response to audience reaction (98). There would also be musical accompaniment by live musicians and the themes would generally be mythological. These plays were usually performed in the open air, with audiences sitting around the performers. The audiences gathered from nearby villages, prepared to watch all night, as the performances usually took place at night. Jatra troupes were known as “Jatra parties.” Traditionally, only male performers

performed in Jatra plays, and it was only in the 1970s (Katyal and Kishori 100) that female performers entered the Jatra. While the Cuttack-based theatre troupes, such as the New Theatre and the Annapurna Theatre, were not travelling performance groups, but had fixed performances at the theatre, their mode of performance was highly influenced by the Jatra style of acting, which featured exaggerated expression, gesture and movement, as well as often improvised dialogue.

In the early 1950s, a number of dancers of the traveling theatres rose to prominence. A number of young girls from Brahmin and upper-middle-class families began learning from dance teachers who had been part of the regional theatre circuit and were emerging as dance instructors in different arts institutions. The dance form, still in its early stages of reconstruction, received further attention when it was performed in New Delhi, at the Inter-University Youth Festival by Priyambada Mohanty in 1954. The revival movement gained momentum with a series of seminars to codify the dance form. Individuals who came together at these seminars included scholars on Oriya culture, such as Kalicharan Patnaik, and practitioner-performers such as Dhirendranath Patnaik, who had performed at the same Inter-University Youth Festival as Priyambada Mohanty, and who eventually authored *Odissi Dance*, the first English-language book on Odissi dance.

In 1958, the organization Jayantika was founded for the purpose of the codification of Odissi. It comprised the dance scholars as well as dance gurus, including gurus who had gained exposure during their days at the Cuttack New Theatres, and had now begun to teach, such as Guru Pankaj Charan Das, Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, and Guru Deba Prasad Das. The group's aim was to establish a series of codes for canonizing

and standardizing “Odissi,” as a dance form, in its movement vocabulary and repertoire. The group also included other young dance gurus such as Guru Mayadhar Raut, as well as Babulal Doshi, who eventually set up the Kala Vikash Kendra institution where Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra taught his classes. Eventually, in April 1958, Odissi was accorded classical status by the Sangeet Natak Academy, the central Indian government organization responsible for recognition and promotion of classical and traditional performing art forms.

Dinanath Pathy mentions that the Jayantika organization was set up in an open space at the Raghunath Mandir in Telenga Bazaar, Cuttack, and then, after Dhirendranath Patnaik joined it in 1960, the venue shifted to Lokanath Mishra’s drawing room in Cuttack. Gayatri Chand points out that Mishra had been the former governor of the state of Assam. The individuals involved in the organization, especially the dance gurus, each had other modes of employment during the daytime to help supplement their income, and hence the Jayantika meetings were usually held during the evenings. These meetings regarding the codification and standardization involved gathering of information from different sources. Dhirendranath Patnaik’s knowledge of the different *ukutas* (abstract rhythmic syllables), which had been used by the traditional gotipua gurus and maharis, was brought in, as were images of dance postures from Odisha’s temple sculptures (Chand 37). The *Abhinaya Chandrika*, an Oriya treatise on the performing arts, was also consulted during this codification process. Chand points out that as a result of the Jayantika meetings and organization, the Odissi gurus presented two public performances in Cuttack during this early Jayantika period: one in September 1959, and a second in

June 1960 (Chand 37).

Like the Bharata Natyam revival, the female practitioners associated with the sacred dance performances within temple precincts remained marginal to the actual revival proceedings itself. However, the Odissi revival history presents a somewhat different picture of those possessing cultural capital, in comparison to the case of the Bharata Natyam revival. This is partly because in addition to the dance practice of the maharis, the Odissi dance heritage drew significantly upon dance forms traditionally practiced by male performers, such as the gotipua and the jatra traditions. The primary gurus associated with the Odissi revival, Guru Pankaj Charan Das, Guru Debaprasad Das and Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, had each been strongly associated with either one or both of these practices. Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra and Guru Debaprasad Das had been trained as gotipuas, and had also both participated as performers in the regional theatre, while Guru Pankaj Charan Das had worked as a choreographer and dancer in the Annapurna theatres. Thus the Odissi revivalist gurus were themselves invested with cultural capital before entering the dialogue for the establishment of Odissi as a classical dance form. While the Jayantika organization did comprise Oriya intellectuals, writers, artists and theatre practitioners, the trinity of gurus most associated with the Odissi revival had not come from upper class backgrounds. Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra had come from a family of patachitra painters, Guru Debaprasad Das's father had been a police inspector, and Guru Pankaj Charan Das had come from the familial lineage of the maharis or female temple attendants. However, these three gurus, along with their female students who had come from upper class families, became the most visible face of the

1950s Odissi revival.

The choreographic career of Guru Debaprasad Das was therefore historically situated in the midst of both a larger postcolonial pan-national movement to reassert India's identity through cultural heritage, as well as a time period during which urban centres such as Cuttack in coastal Odisha had a flourishing vernacular theatre scene, and a cultural environment which fostered the development of symbols of Oriya pride and identity within the larger Indian identity. Here, Bourdieu's habitus theory becomes a fitting model for theorizing Guru Debaprasad Das's vision of Odissi dance. Much of the choreographic work and philosophy of Guru Debaprasad Das was rooted in the Oriya nationalism intrinsic to the 1950s revival. These included ideals such as the Oriya language and the construction of symbols of regional Oriya identity strongly linked to an essentially Hindu antiquity. In Chapter 3, I detail how these ideals are manifest in his choreographic practice and philosophy.

As mentioned in the Introduction, my reading of Bourdieu's habitus also aligns itself with readings based on the flexibility of the habitus to accommodate individual voices. Guru Debaprasad Das's vision of Odissi dance, as manifest in his repertoire and practice, both upheld and resisted the traditional Oriya regionalism prevalent in the 1950s. While his vision for Odissi dance was greatly informed by this habitus, on the other hand, his vision of Odissi dance resisted the traditional partiality toward coastal Oriya culture inherent in Oriya nationalism through the 1950s. This was largely through his emphasis on fostering an inclusivity towards the indigenous cultures of interior and western Odisha, as well as his promotion of Oriya folk and tribal dances.

A.P Padhi, in his Introduction to *Indian State Politics: A Case Study of Orissa*, posits that historically, coastal Odisha's geographical positioning between northern and southern India promoted trade and commerce in the region, and also fuelled a rise in political consciousness among coastal Oriyas (xxi). He points out that highland Odisha, also known as western Odisha, is geographically isolated from the rest of Odisha, as well as other states of India. He sees this as one of the chief reasons for the economic imbalance between coastal Odisha and western Odisha, leading to what he calls the "predominance of the coastal belt over the politics of the state" (xxii).

P.K Mishra identifies the period from the formation of the Odisha state in 1936 to the late 1950s as a period of unprecedented uprisings by indigenous communities from western districts such as Mayurbhanj, Seraikella and Kurswan. He also highlights the emergence of the Ganatantra Parishad on the eve of the state elections of 1952 as a signal event in the state's politics (Mishra 9). The Ganatantra Parishad Party was created by former rulers of areas which had, under the British rule, been governed independently by feudal chiefs and local kings, presiding over largely indigenous populations. Its leaders were Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo of the Bolangir district and Pratap Kesari Deo of Kalahandi. Mishra states that in the years following India's independence from the British in 1947, Odisha seemed to be divided into two political zones – the eastern coastal districts under the leadership of the Congress Party, and the Western region, under the dominance of the local kings, eventually emerging under the political leadership of the Ganatantra Parishad Party.

The Odissi revival of the 1950s was thus not only situated in the midst of a

emerging Oriya regionalist movement, but occurred in a state deeply divided in its socio-cultural and political spheres. It is in the context of this cultural and political division between eastern and western Odisha from the late 1940s onwards that I find his work resistive to Oriya nationalism in its inclusive approach to dance practices from western Odisha.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the socio-political habitus in which Guru Debaprasad Das participated in the Odissi revival and developed his artistic work. I develop this contextual history of the 1950s Odissi revival against existing models of Odissi historiography which establish the historical existence and propagation of a "classical" dance form distinctive to Odisha, and also analyze studies such as that of David Dennen, in locating the history of the term "Odissi" as a label for the classical dance of Odisha.

The Odissi revival of the 1950s was rooted in the impetus to develop a cultural symbol distinctively emblematic of the state of Odisha, and was strongly informed by Oriya nationalism. It was largely spearheaded by the intellectuals and artists in eastern, coastal Odisha. At the same time, the Odissi revival was also historically positioned at a time of a strong cultural and political divide between eastern, coastal Odisha and western Odisha. In this chapter, I examine the Oriya regionalism which formed the backdrop for the Odissi revival, as well as the artistic milieu in Cuttack in which it developed.

The history of the gharana is the first factor of my proposed framework for describing a gharana. An artist's lineage-identity, in the case of Odissi dance, is linked to

the name of the founder-guru of the tradition. In addition, the living gharana is seen as a continuation of a historical tradition. The strategic erasure of a gharana's history from scholarship, which I point out in the Introduction, may be seen as participating in a hegemonic move towards totalizing Odissi history. The title of this dissertation, "The Debaprasad Das Tradition: Reconsidering the Narrative of Classical Indian Odissi Dance History," is an attempt towards addressing this erasure of the histories of "peripheral branches" of Odissi from Odissi revival history.

As mentioned earlier, this chapter and Chapter 3 are dedicated to the history of the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi. While in this chapter, I have established the habitus in which Guru Debaprasad Das developed his stylistic voice of Odissi, I devote Chapter 3 to the life and work of Guru Debaprasad Das, and the development of his artistic work through the different decades of his career.

Chapter 3: The History of the Debaprasad Das Lineage: The Lives of the Gurus

This chapter is dedicated to chronicling the life of the late Guru Debaprasad Das, as well as the lives and work of two of the most visible gurus of the second generation of this lineage, Guru Srinath Raut, and Guru Durgacharan Ranbir. This chapter and Chapter 2 build together towards the argument that while Guru Debaprasad Das, in his artistic work, was influenced by the Oriya nationalism intrinsic to the Odissi revival of the 1950s, his choreographic work had, through his active years as a choreographer, been invested in including movement practices from western Odisha and indigenous movement practices. This chapter specifically focuses on the life and work of the late guru through the decades spanning his life.

Much of my methodology in this research has consisted of archival research as well as interview-based ethnography. As I mention in the previous chapter as well as the Introduction, there is not much information available on the life of Guru Debaprasad Das, and the existing literature is largely focused on covering his artistic achievements. The nature of a large part of this historical research, being based in oral history, helps fill a gap in historiography of Odissi: that of the personality of Guru Debaprasad Das. During my interviews, I asked questions such as “How did you first encounter Guru Debaprasad Das?” “What are your first memories of Guru Debaprasad Das?” The answers often depicted a range of contexts in which Guru Debaprasad Das worked and interacted with his colleagues and students. The biographical sketches, the most commonly available literature on Guru Debaprasad Das, mention the landmark events of his life, such as the appointment as a university faculty member, or the winning of an award. While they

provide an overview of the life of the late guru, his figure and personality remain missing from these narratives. The oral history work, based on interviews with his disciples, thus helps fill the smaller details into the larger, pre-existing, narrative of his life.

The Life of Guru Debaprasad Das

In this section, I follow the decade-by-decade approach for analyzing the work of Guru Debaprasad Das. I undertake this approach for two reasons. Firstly, the decade approach helps trace the peak of his activity. Through my fieldwork, I have found that there is more information available on certain decades of his artistic career than on others. Secondly, the artistic vision of Guru Debaprasad Das is known to have changed over the decades. The decade approach also helps trace the changes in his creative approach and artistic vision.

Early Life

The youngest of the “Trinity of Odissi,”¹⁰ Guru Debaprasad Das was born in 1932 in the Keul Chabi Seul village, near the Jhankada district in Cuttack. Little is known of his early life, outside of anecdotes concerning his passion for music and dance, which were manifest at an early age. Like most of the other figures associated with the Odissi revival

¹⁰ I borrow the phrase “Trinity of Odissi,” from the title of Priyambada Mohanty-Hejmadi’s article on the three pioneering Odissi revivalist gurus of the 1950s Odissi revival. This “trinity” consists of the late Guru Pankaj Charan Das, who was considered the “guru of gurus,” the late Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, and the late Guru Debaprasad Das.

in the 1950s, he was from eastern, coastal Odisha. His father, Durga Charan Das, was a police inspector. His mother passed away when Debaprasad was one year old. His grandfather, who was a *gomastha*¹¹ by profession, was also a professional violinist, as well as the director of a troupe named Natua Troupe in the village of Keul. Under his grandfather, he trained in genres of traditional Oriya vocal music such as Chhanda, Champu, Kantakoili, Keshaba Koili, and Manobodha (Mishra, Minati, "Late Guru").

Debaprasad Das was sent to his uncle in Puri for education, but he found himself drawn to the arts, such as painting, and especially to the performing arts, such as music, dance, and theatre. His passion for drawing and painting remained constant through his life, and he later used sketching as a pedagogical tool in teaching dance. He went to Ganjam and learned the traditional terracotta painting from Prahlad Patel (Minati Mishra website). He also joined the gotipua troupe of Mohan Charan Mohapatra, at the Pathara Akhara (Mishra, Minati, "Late Guru").

1940s

In the 1940s, there were a number of new regional theatre groups, such as the New Theatres and the Annapurna Theatre the Puri-Cuttack region of coastal Odisha. Each of the three pioneering gurus had a background of experience in these regional theatres.

According to Indian dance historian Ashish Mohan Khokar, Debaprasad Das joined the New Theatres in 1946 at the age of fourteen, upon the recommendation of his

¹¹ The gomastha professionals acted as a kind of middlemen between local Indian craftsmen and artisans, and the British government.

uncle, who was acquainted with the theatre's director Radha Raman Ray. Khokar states that at the theatre, the young Debaprasad Das was in charge of assisting the seasoned actors by doing chores such as ensuring that a pot of water was placed in the green room, preparing the actors' costumes, ornaments and make-up boxes, as well as collecting tickets and manning the gates. Even while he had trained in the gotipua arts, the dance director Ajit Das had deemed Debaprasad Das unsuitable for dancing, and hence he was not given any performing roles. Khokar states that Debaprasad Das learned the dialogues through daily exposure during rehearsals and performances, and thus, when the prompter fell ill, he was able to fill in for the position. This later became part of his usual responsibilities at the theatre.

Shortly after, Guru Pankaj Charan Das joined the New Theatres as a dancer and dance director, and Guru Mohan Mahapatra also began choreographing pieces for the theatre. With their entry into New Theatres, Debaprasad Das progressed to performing roles. He became part of the pre-show act every evening. Each night, before the actual play, there would be a short vignette featuring a large artificial lotus blossom on stage, on which would be seated a young female performer, named Nabina, dressed as the goddess Saraswati, the patron goddess of the arts. Debaprasad Das, dressed as a girl, would dance holding a lit oil lamp and perform ritualistic movements in homage to the goddess. He was ultimately given the role of a salaried performer in the theatre.

After the closure of the New Theatres, he moved to Annapurna Theatre A and B. As his former gotipua guru, Guru Mohan Mahapatra was also employed at the New Theatre, he continued his lessons under him until 1949 (Chand 46). Chand points out that

upon the closure of the New Theatres, Debaprasad Das learned Chhau for six months at the Mayurbhanj Chhau Institution (Chand 46).

1950s

The decade of the 1950s was crucial in the establishment and codification of Odissi dance in the twentieth century. This decade also saw Debaprasad Das transition from a performer in the theatres to a dance guru. During this decade, he undertook a myriad of roles. He left the Annapurna Theatre in 1951. He began teaching students private lessons, as well as choreographing for the National Music Association, a Cuttack-based organization.

The late 1940s and early 1950s were also a time during which Debaprasad Das expanded his repertoire and realm of expertise ("Gurukul"). He took lessons from Singhari Shyamsundar Kar and Kokilaprava Mahari. He worked at a printing press during the day and continued his dance and theatre activities during the night ("Gurukul"). One of the crucial relationships he formed during this time was his association with Kalicharan Patnaik. He learned a number of different aspects of Oriya theatrical traditions under Kalicharan Patnaik, on a small scholarship from Utkal Nrutya Sangeet Kala Parishad. He took further lessons from late Padmanav Das, late Chandrashekhhar Patnaik in aspects of *abhinaya* (stylized expression-dominated dance). Chand states that in 1954, he left the theatre entirely, and focused on a career as a dance teacher at the Utkal Sangeet Samaj and National Music Association in Cuttack (Chand

47). She points out that during this time, he also had the opportunity to learn the Kathak dance form from Michin Maya Laheri who also worked at the National Music Association (Chand 47). During the late 1950s, he also received a National Scholarship to train further under his gotipua guru Mohan Mahapatra (Chand 47).

During this time he taught dance to young female dancers who would later emerge as leading practitioners of the Odissi dance form. These included Sanjukta Panigrahi, who later became a leading disciple and practitioner of the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra style of Odissi. Dinanath Pathy states that at this time, Panigrahi's mother had bought Guru Debaprasad Das a bicycle so that he could cycle to their house, instead of walking the entire distance (Pathy).

Priyambada Mohanty Hejmadi was the first dancer who had danced the fledgling Odissi dance form outside of Odisha, at the Inter-University Youth Competition in New Delhi in 1954, representing Odisha at this national event. She had met Guru Debaprasad Das for the first time at the residence of Kalicharan Pattnaik, when she had gone to learn the piece. She mentions that she used to address him as "Deba Sir," as the concept of "guru" had not yet entered the vocabulary of the cultural atmosphere (electronic correspondence). She had been selected to represent Utkal University at the competition, as a number of specialists around Cuttack town had been familiar with her performances, as she had been an active dancer through her childhood and adolescence.

Guru Debaprasad Das was responsible for choreographing the dance and for accompanying her on the *mardala*, a traditional percussion instrument native to Odisha. Kalicharan Pattnaik could not dance himself as a result of an injury from an accident;

however, he was a specialist on Oriya theatre, dance and traditional performing arts. He had “directed” the composition of the dance through dictating the movements from a seated position, which were then animated by Guru Debaprasad Das, and ultimately imitated and embodied by the young Priyambada (electronic correspondence, August 30, 2010).

Hejmadi mentions that the composition consisted of one longer piece, spanning eight or nine minutes, and encompassing all the elements which later became the five-part Odissi repertoire. An abhinaya section was choreographed to a song titled *Gumana Kahinki*, which had been written by Kalicharan Patnaik specifically for this event.

Hejmadi, who ultimately learned Odissi dance from all the three pioneering gurus of Odissi, classifies the style of Guru Debaprasad Das as the “gotipua style.” She mentions that he had subsequently come to her house a few times for practice and lessons. She asserts that she learned largely “pure dance” oriented repertoire, which was being practiced by gotipuas at the time, and she from him largely through imitating him in his movements while he accompanied her on the mardala. She worked with Guru Debaprasad Das for a few years, and these lessons were almost always mediated by Kavichandra Kalicharan Patnaik.

In the years following Priyambada Mohanty’s performance at the Inter-University Youth Competition, the young Debaprasad Das choreographed a number of dance-dramas for the National Music Association, based in Cuttack. A number of these productions also toured to New Delhi. The photographic archives of the Sangeet Natak Akademi features a number of photographs from these performances. A photograph dated

“March 10, 1957,” from the production of *Manini* (1957) depicts a young male dancer enacting Krishna¹² surrounded by *gopis*¹³. Garlands of real flowers adorn the neck of the young dancers (Sangeet Natak Akademi archives). A second photograph from this collection depicts Krishna in a seated pose beseeching Radha, who is pulling away. A third photograph shows Krishna surrounded by the *gopis* under a canopy gate. The female dancers in these photographs are depicted wearing the sari in the *dakhini* style¹⁴, with small *pushpa chudas*¹⁵ adorning their hair, and white flowers encircling their hair buns. The poses are highly expressive.

Gayatri Chand writes that this performance was staged at the Sapru House in New Delhi, and the lead role of Krishna was played by Guru Debaprasad Das himself. She states that then established Bharata Natyam dancers, such as Padmini, Ragini, Damayanti Joshi, Roshan Vajifdar and Indrani Rahman were present at the show, and congratulated him backstage after the performance (Nrutyanilaya Swara Nupur Festival 2011 brochure,

¹² A dominant Hindu male deity, who was a major character in the epic *Mahabharata*. Krishna is considered one of the incarnations of Vishnu, the Hindu god of sustenance, and one of the primary gods of the Hindu trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Krishna’s adolescent years, in the idyllic rural setting of Vrindavan in Northern India, are the subject of many Hindu myths, folktales, songs, and dances. Stories of Krishna’s adolescence typically include tales of his dalliance with the milkmaids of Vrindavan, and most centrally, his romance with the milkmaid Radha.

¹³ The *gopis* were the traditional cowherdresses and milkmaids in Vrindavan. They are often depicted iconically in Hindu art and folklore as surrounding the figure of Krishna. The character of Radha emerged as the central *gopi* associated with Krishna, after the twelfth century poet Jayadeva of Odisha wrote the epic poem *Geeta Govinda*, with Radha as the female protagonist.

¹⁴ Style of sari-draping which involves the fabric to be draped in a manner resembling pants, as opposed to the “wrap” look of the everyday sari. The *dakhini* style of draping was often used by the *gotipua* dancers in their acrobatic performances due to its allowance of mobility of the legs, and was used during the first decade of Odissi dance after its 1958 recognition as a classical dance. Guru Debaprasad Das was a firm believer in maintaining this style of sari-draping as part of the Odissi costuming, as opposed to the “cut-and-stitch” costume favoured by dancers for quick and convenient costume changes as Odissi gained popularity as a dance form.

¹⁵ *Pushpa chuda* literally translates into a “tower of flowers.” This was usually a traditional head ornament of the *maharis*, or temple dancers, and was used in costuming during the early years of Odissi dance after its 1950s revival. It was constructed of a solid spoke, usually of wood or wire, which was covered with flowers, and tucked vertically into the hair bun of the dancer.

18).

A series of photographs from a production entitled *Sakhi Gopal*, from 1957, also performed under the banner of National Music Association, Cuttack, depicts dancers in saris worn in a fashion similar to those in *Manini*. A third series of photographs capture moments from a production of *Geeta Govinda*, performed in 1958, also under the aegis of the National Music Association, Cuttack, and staged as part of the Dance Seminar in 1958.

The late 1950s is also depicted in literature as a time period charged and ripe with political tension regarding different personalities central to the Odissi revival. During this time, Debaprasad Das stayed in a rented house in Peyton Street in Cuttack. The complex relationship between Guru Debaprasad Das and Kalicharan Patnaik is described in an episode in Dinanath Pathy's chapter titled "Dance and Politics". In the chapter, Pathy states that in June 1959, a congregation of dance and theatre performances was scheduled in Cuttack, under the aegis of Utkal Natya Sangha, with Patnaik as its president. Dancers had been invited from across India to perform at the event and Patnaik had personally requested Debaprasad Das to perform Odissi on the last day of the event (Pathy 275). Pathy further states that on the day of the performance, however, Patnaik visited the home of Debaprasad Das to find him feigning illness so as not to perform that evening, and further refused to teach Odissi to a willing student (Pathy 275). Pathy indicates that this professional rift was not a result of direct professional differences, but as a result of political manoeuvres by the dancer-scholar Dhirendranath Patnaik, another significant figure of the Odissi revival, who was believed to have set up a separate institution

involving Guru Debaprasad Das and some other dancers as teachers, and had asked them not to collaborate with Kalicharan Patnaik in his own institute (Pathy 274).

Association with Indrani Rahman

One of the earliest disciples of Guru Debaprasad Das was Indrani Rahman, who was already an established classical Indian Bharata Natyam dancer by the 1950s. The association of Guru Debaprasad Das with Indrani Rahman, perhaps his most well-known association, launched him into the international dance arena, and strengthened his career as an Odissi guru in India.

My fieldwork began with my ethnographic visit and interview of Sukanya Rahman, the daughter of the late Indrani Rahman. It was a rainy, misty July afternoon when I made my way to Sukanya Rahman's home in Orr's Island, Maine in the United States. Hidden beneath the canopy of trees is her home, where she has hosted many Indian dance artists and accompanists, including Guru Debaprasad Das. A photograph of Guru Debaprasad Das (or "Debu," as she fondly refers to him), adorns her mantelpiece. Near it lie her *ghungroos*, offered to him, as well as a small image of Jagannath, the patron deity of Odissi dance.

Sukanya Rahman remembers seeing Guru Debaprasad Das for the first time at Talkatora Gardens, after his performance with Priyambada Mohanty. At that time, her mother, Indrani Rahman, had not yet met him. Indrani Rahman had later seen his troupe from the National Music Association, based in Cuttack, Odisha, perform a production

titled *Manini* at New Delhi. Shortly afterwards, Indrani Rahman had visited Odisha in search of a good Odissi teacher, as Odissi was an upcoming dance form which her mother Raagini Devi had recommended as part of her repertoire. During this time, Rahman remembers a number of Odissi gurus visiting their guesthouse, and introducing them to the postures and nuances of Odissi dance. Guru Debaprasad Das had been one of these gurus, and Indrani Rahman had been inspired by his supple and rigorous dancing, and knowledge of the folkloric traditions of Odisha. As she points out in her memoirs, Guru Debaprasad Das later took Indrani Rahman to the streets where the maharis or temple dancers had lived. She sees this singular event as the turning point in the relationship between Guru Debaprasad Das and Indrani Rahman. The guru was shortly thereafter invited to teach Rahman as a private pupil at their residence in New Delhi.

In an alternate narrative, Gayatri Chand, citing Mohan Khokar's *Angarag* article, asserts that it was after the New Delhi performance of *Manini* that Indrani Rahman approached Guru Debaprasad Das to accept her as a student, and the very next day arranged to meet him, and presented him a fee as a token gesture. According to this narrative, Rahman visited Puri in May 1957, after already having arranged to learn from Guru Debaprasad Das as his student, and returned with him to Delhi eight months later, for further and in-depth training (Chand 18).

Guru Debaprasad Das was approximately twenty-three years of age when he started teaching Indrani, and ten years later, he taught Sukanya as well. Rahman's father, noted Delhi-based architect, the late Habib Rahman, had taken a large number of photographs of Guru Debaprasad Das. These include a series of photographs of the guru

in the 1950s, as a supple young man in his early twenties, dressed in a white shirt and white *dhoti* (a long piece of fabric draped as pants, worn traditionally by men throughout most parts of India), with a red sash tied around his waist, depicting a number of different Odissi poses.

Regardless of the narrative of first introduction and exchange of Guru Debaprasad Das and his legendary student, the existing accounts all state that in December 1957, while Guru Debaprasad Das was living with the Rahman family in New Delhi, Indrani Rahman presented him in a landmark lecture-demonstration at her residence, to an audience consisting of critics and scholars, including the Hungarian critic Charles Fabri, and scholar Kapila Vatsayana. This event is often cited by practitioners of this lineage of Odissi as the singular event which brought Odissi to the critical notice of the scholars and critics, as a turning point towards the establishment of Odissi as a classical dance form, after the initial performance by Priyambada Mohanty at the Inter-University Youth Festival.

A few months later, in February 1958, Indrani Rahman presented a solo Odissi performance on two days, at the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Theatre, Delhi, under the banner of the Little Theatre Group. In April, 1958, she presented a lecture-demonstration on Odissi at the dance seminar organized by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, which is believed to have ultimately led to the Akademi's recognition of Odissi as a classical dance form, alongside Bharata Natyam, Kathak, Manipuri and Kathakali.

Guru Debaprasad Das taught and toured with Indrani Rahman internationally between 1958 and 1963. During these tours, he worked largely as the dance instructor as

well as accompanist on vocals and percussion, during her performances. They performed in a number of different locations and in front of a number of celebrated personalities, including John F. Kennedy at the White House, and also before the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The earliest video recording I have found of Guru Debaprasad Das dates to this period. The clip dates to 1958, and is from a news recording in central England. It shows Indrani dancing at a dress rehearsal onstage for an upcoming performance. She wears a light-coloured blouse and a sari draped in the dakhini style, and her hair is in a bun adorned with flowers. A young, long-haired Debaprasad Das is shown as sitting onstage, providing vocal and percussion accompaniment on the mardala to her dancing. Indrani Rahman begins her performance by performing a short salutation to the earth, followed by a small invocation to the Hindu deity Shiva, the god of dance, and concluding with a form-based piece known as the *Natangi*.

Sukanya Rahman remembers Guru Debaprasad Das, whom she called “Debu,” as a quiet, shy young man. She remembers him as having opened up more once he met her father, Habib Rahman, who spoke Bengali, and with whom Guru Debaprasad Das was able to speak, due to the linguistic affinity between Bengali and Oriya. Another interest both Habib Rahman and Guru Debaprasad Das shared was doing comic imitations. She also remembers him as gentle, softspoken, and always ready to help others.

Sukanya Rahman also remembers him as a somewhat melancholic man, who was often concerned with matters of his family in Odisha when he was away for longer stretches of time in New Delhi. Paradoxically, he had a fondness for comedy as a mode of performance. Rahman remembers Guru Debaprasad Das’s comic impression of the

flight attendants onboard the airlines during their international tours. Having a theatre background, and being fond of comic impressions, he would imitate the physicality of the walk of the flight attendants in high heels, and would impersonate their mannerisms in serving tea or coffee, adding that his comic imitations would often have them reeling with laughter during the tours (Interview, June 28, 2010). Another collection of her photographs, marked 1969, from Indrani Rahman's tours, depict Guru Debaprasad Das doing a comic impression in the home of an impresario in New York while his friend, the flautist Murti, also part of the instrumentalist group accompanying Indrani Rahman, looks on. There are also photographs of Guru Debaprasad Das playing the string instrument *tanpura* during Indrani Rahman's performances and tours. During the early tours, he accompanied her performance on the vocals and the mardala drum.

Rahman remembers watching her mother take lessons from Guru Debaprasad Das. She remembers his class beginning with a few stepping exercises in the chowka and tribhanga positions, and then progressing into the repertoire pieces. By the time she and her mother had learned from him, they were both in their twenties, and hence they did not learn the acrobatic *bandha nritya* techniques from him.

During the early years of performance and touring, Guru Debaprasad Das himself provided vocal support for the singing during Indrani Rahman's performances. This is illustrated by the fact that there are a number of extant accompanying reel-to-reel recordings of Guru Debaprasad Das singing. These sound recordings on these tapes are minimalist, with the accompaniment consisting solely of Guru Debaprasad Das's singing, his percussion accompaniment, as well as a flautist. Rahman also recalls that a number of

individuals had commended Guru Debaprasad Das on his singing voice. These individuals included sitar maestro Pandit Ravi Shankar, who had commented on the “purity” of Guru Debaprasad Das’s voice. He also provided percussion accompaniment on the mardala.

Indrani Rahman and Sukanya Rahman retained their professional and personal association with Guru Debaprasad Das throughout his lifetime. Rahman’s last memories of Guru Debaprasad Das are of him being driven away in a large car after a performance.

1960s

In 1964, upon the completion of his scholarship, Debaprasad Das joined the faculty at Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya as a lecturer in Odissi. The establishment of the dance faculty at this institution and his employment in this faculty facilitated his move from Cuttack to Bhubaneswar, which eventually became the cultural capital of Odissi dance. At the same time, as in the previous decade, he also found himself travelling to New Delhi frequently, for productions as well as teaching responsibilities.

Sumitra Charat Ram, the founder of the Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra, a centre for the performing arts in New Delhi, had been looking for an Odissi director to direct an upcoming production. She consulted Indrani Rahman, who recommended her guru, Debaprasad Das, who was then invited from Odisha to direct the production *Geeta Govinda*. Thereafter, Odissi became a part of one of the dances taught at the centre (Ranjana Gauhar "Odissi Chandrika"). Initially, Guru Debaprasad Das would visit from Odisha to teach at the centre between 1968 and 1969, but as he became further engaged

in teaching at Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya and could not relocate to New Delhi, Guru Mayadhar Raut was invited to teach at the centre. Sunil Kothari recalls that Guru Debaprasad Das taught at the Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra for approximately six months before returning to Odisha (Interview, January 31, 2011).

It was during these lessons at the Bharatiya Kala Kendra that dancer Geeta Mahalik first encountered Guru Debaprasad Das. Later, when Guru Mayadhar Raut began teaching at the centre, she continued training under him, with the permission of Guru Debaprasad Das, as he was the teacher who had initiated her into the dance tradition. She later returned to Odisha upon the birth of her daughter, and was able to receive further training and guidance from him, and learned a number of repertoire pieces from him during that time. She recalls that during this time, much of the repertoire of Guru Debaprasad Das concentrated on abhinaya. She remembers his approach to abhinaya being very simple and direct. She also remembers learning character-oriented folk dances such as *Shikari* dance (hunter's dance) from him. She remembers that Guru Debaprasad Das often used to draw in order to demonstrate a specific aspect or pose of the dance, such as the *darpani* pose (interview, February 1, 2011).

Dance critic and scholar Sunil Kothari recalls that he had first seen Guru Debaprasad Das during his performance at the 1954 Inter-University Youth Competition, with Priyambada Mohanty. He asserts that it was finally the teaching position at the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya that had provided Guru Debaprasad Das with some job security. At an all-India conference, Kothari recalls meeting Babulal Doshi, who had been an instrumental figure during the Odissi revival, and who was also from Kothari's native

state of Gujarat on the western coast of India. Doshi had invited Kothari to Odisha for further research on the emerging Odissi dance form. During this trip, Kothari became further acquainted with Guru Debaprasad Das (interview, February 1, 2011).

Kothari remembers Guru Debaprasad Das as being well-versed in folk dance traditions and proficient in composing folk dances such as the Shikari dance, and the boatman's dance (interview, February 1, 2011). He also recalls that Guru Debaprasad Das occasionally choreographed dances to All-India Radio broadcasts; that he had recorded a production which had been telecast, to which live music was played. Guru Debaprasad Das had choreographed a few dances for the project.

1970s and 1980s

The 1970s remains a decade in which limited archival information is available on the work of Guru Debaprasad Das. It is known that by the 1970s, the first batch of students trained by Guru Debaprasad Das had already begun teaching, thus marking the second generation of gurus of the lineage. He continued his classes at the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya. During the 1970s, Debaprasad Das had a growing number of students, and gained further recognition and exposure. He received the Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1975, and the Central Sangeet Natak Akademy award in 1978.

Rosemary Jeanes, in her thesis, states that in the 1980s, New Delhi had prominent gurus in Odissi, including the name of Guru Srinath Raut as one of the five prominent Odissi gurus in the city (Jeanes 84). She included a photograph of Guru Debaprasad Das drawing a picture of the Jagannath temple, to show his students where the dance took

place. He started writing the manuscript for his book *Nrutysarani* in 1976. She mentioned that he believed that one of the only ways in which his teachings could be preserved were through his book, and that he spent long hours writing and illustrating the manuscript of his book during his time off from teaching.

She encountered Guru Debaprasad Das while he was lecturing at the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya. She remembers that upon her first meeting with him, he had asked her if she knew the meaning of the word “guru”, to which she had responded quoting a verse from the Sanskrit text *Upanishads* (Jeanes 21). Debaprasad Das was therefore interested in connecting his practice with the texts; he taught his students theory as well.

She mentions him lamenting the loss of certain aspects of knowledge, such as the bandha nrutya tradition, due to the standardization through the university syllabus system for Odissi at the university. She recalls that the professors such as Guru Debaprasad Das were free to teach his own classes after 1:00 pm (Jeanes 89). She also describes visiting his home as part of her ethnographic research. She recalls that his four children often watched while he taught his classes (Jeanes 90).

Some of his choreographies, such as the *Nabarasa*, and *Ashtashambhu* gained wide visibility and popularity in New Delhi, especially at the Angahar Festival organized by the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya in 1985. Sujata Mishra’s performance of the *Nabarasa* was widely acclaimed at this festival.

Vani Madhav, a seasoned practitioner of the Debaprasad Das style, is a student of Guru Sudhakar Sahoo, one of the most senior students of Guru Debaprasad Das. She

remembers meeting Guru Debaprasad Das in 1985, in Chatrapur in the Ganjam district of Odisha, when he had come to observe the classes of Guru Sudhakar Sahoo. She recalls being overwhelmed by the experience, and being nervous regarding showing him her dances (interview, January 11, 2012). Madhav had begun learning Odissi from Guru Gajendra Panda at the age of six. After some years of training, Guru Gajendra Panda took her to the more seasoned Guru Sudhakar Sahoo. In her collection is a digitized photograph from the collection of Guru Sudhakar Sahoo. It depicts Guru Debaprasad Das and Guru Sudhakar Sahoo sitting together, peering into a newspaper.

Guru Debaprasad Das passed away suddenly from a stroke on July 16, 1986. At the time, he was the Head of the Department of Dance at Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya in Bhubaneswar (Chand 47).

In the following section, I include the memories of two disciples of Guru Debaprasad Das, who have continued performing, teaching and propagating the style of their guru in the present day.

The Memories of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir

As a mark of respect for his late guru, Bhubaneswar-based Guru Durgacharan Ranbir touches his ears whenever he mentions the name of Guru Debaprasad Das. At the mention of his guru, he sometimes gets emotional.

I had heard about Guru Debaprasad Das for the first time on the transistor radio,

when there were broadcasts during the late 1950s regarding Indrani Rahman's international performances, in which he would be part of the ensemble, as dance guru as well as accompanist. During my late teens, I ran away from home in order to study dance. My family did not support my passion for dance as I was from a land-owning family, in which the male heirs were the inheritors of the land, and hence had responsibilities tied to land-owning. When I applied secretly to the newly established programme at Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya, and received the admission forms, my father tore up the form. I then ran away from the village to Bhubaneswar, to see if I might be granted an interview and audition for the degree.

I waited for hours for his interview with the selection committee at Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya. My first encounter with Guru Debaprasad Das was during these moments, when I saw a young man with wavy hair enter the room. During the audition-interview, when I was asked to show which kinds of dance I knew, I said I knew "everything," (indicating that he knew all forms of Indian classical dance, including Odissi, Kathak, Manipuri and Bharata Natyam). Guruji watched my dance at the audition, and commenting that it was not Odissi but "Fodissi." I was, however, granted admission into the programme.

When I first started out at the dance programme at the university, the programme very physically challenging. Two months after commencing, I was ready to return home and give up the programme. Guru Debaprasad Das personally spoke to me, counselling and buying me snacks, and encouraging me to continue the programme. After this, I visited my village briefly for the Dusshera holidays, and then returned to Bhubaneswar

with a sack of rice, which I offered guruji as a token offering, and then began learning under him as a private student, while continuing to train under him and the dance faculty at Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya. The first repertoire piece I learned from Guru Debaprasad Das was the Mangalacharan piece Lakshya Sindoor.

When I first started teaching my own students, I would invite guruji to my classes for counsel, and so all of my older dance students had known guruji. I think this is essential in the maintenance of the parampara of the gurukul (Interview, February 17, 2011).

Srimati Aarati Ranbir, the wife of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, popularly known among the students as *guruma*, or “guru-mother,”¹⁶ remembers encountering Guru Debaprasad Das twice after her marriage to Guru Durgacharan Ranbir in 1982. The first time was when she and Guru Durgacharan Ranbir were invited to the home of Guru Debaprasad Das for dinner, shortly after their marriage. The second time was when they, in turn, invited their family for dinner. She remembers him as a determined, yet gentle spirit. She also remembers that Guruma (wife of Guru Debaprasad Das) addressed Guru Durgacharan Ranbir as “Ranbir,” so as not to repeat the name of her father-in-law, who shared the same first name. She recalls that on his deathbed, Guru Debaprasad Das felt that Guru Durgacharan Ranbir was seasoned and capable of maintaining and carrying forward his lineage of Odissi (Interview, February 15, 2011).

¹⁶ In the traditional system of training in the Indian arts, the guru was considered akin to the father of the disciple, and thus the wife of the guru was considered akin to the mother, and hence addressed as *guruma*, translating to “guru-mother.”

Sangeeta Dash

Sangeeta Dash started learning Odissi under Guru Durgacharan Ranbir in 1974, when he was still a student at the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya. She was his first private student. Her grandmother Manorama Pani ran the Sri Aurobindo Kala Parishad, an organization which supported and promoted the classical arts. Her parents resided in Cuttack from 1977 to 1979. Guru Durgacharan Ranbir began teaching at the school, and Guru Debaprasad Das was brought to the school occasionally. Dash then received a scholarship, and began her training project under Guru Debaprasad Das. She mentioned that there were a number of students at the centre, and students from Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya also came and practiced at the centre.

After 1977, her family left for Cuttack. She studied under Guru Durgacharan Ranbir until 1980. In 1980, she came under the direct tutelage of Guru Debaprasad Das, and remained his student until his death in 1986. She remembers him as a gentle teacher. She also remembers that he taught a number of folk dances. His troupe consisted of dancers such as herself, Sujata Mishra, Manoj Behara, Dipti Mishra and Itishree Mishra. As a troupe, they performed mostly folk dances. Classes were held on Sundays, and she used to travel from Cuttack to Bhubaneswar to attend these classes. Like other students of the late guru, Dash too remembers that Guru Debaprasad Das would often draw in order to demonstrate a movement or the contextual background of a particular movement.

Dash remembers Guru Debaprasad Das as being deeply invested and interested in the traditional theories of the arts, and in particular, on the theories of character-formation and acting from the *Natyashastra* treatise on Indian theatrical arts. As Dash was

following a parallel career as a screen actress for Oriya films during this time, she remembers that she would often take her guru to premieres of her films, or other showings of her films. Sitting in the theatre, he would analyze the characters, and would quiz her on which *bhava* or emotion was being depicted at which moment in the film, and which mode of *nayika* (female protagonist), according to the *Natyashastra* categorization of protagonists, was being depicted.

Towards the end of his life, she remembers him as being disappointed for not being given recognition. In particular, she remembers him being upset during a programme arranged by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, during which the other pioneering gurus of the 1950s Odissi revival had been represented, while his work and repertoire were not presented at the programme. He still attended and watched the programme. She remembers that he had high blood pressure-related health problems. Shortly after the abovementioned programme, he suffered a rise in his blood pressure, and as a result, had a fall, recovered and had been in coma. She remembers that he passed away when she had gone to the town of Angul to visit Anita Singhdeo, another disciple and prominent dancer of Guru Debaprasad Das. Singhdeo had shown her their guru's obituary in the newspaper (interview, April 6, 2012).

The Work of the Second Generation of Guru Debaprasad Das lineage

In tracing the history of a lineage of Indian classical dance, the immediate successors of the founder guru play a significant role as protectors, maintainers and propagators of the lineage. In this section, I examine the early work of two gurus whose work was key in preserving this lineage of Odissi – the late Guru Srinath Raut, and Guru Durgacharan Ranbir. The late Guru Srinath Raut carried forward the work of Guru Debaprasad Das in New Delhi, while Guru Durgacharan Ranbir has worked largely in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. The choreographic work, repertoire and style of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir is examined in more detail in Chapter 4; however, in this chapter, a brief history of his dance school, and choreographic history is examined.

Guru Srinath Raut

Guru Srinath Raut was born in Puri. He trained in dance and music from his uncle initially and performed in the Jatras (Kothari 102). He joined the Annapurna Theatre in 1961, and in 1963 started learning Odissi under Guru Debaprasad Das (Kothari 102). He was also trained by Guru Pankaj Charan Das upon joining Ukal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya in 1963. He moved to New Delhi in 1970, at the invitation of Indrani Rahman. In Delhi, he taught a number of now-celebrated dancers who have continued the Deba Prasad Das lineage. Guru Srinath Raut passed away in 1986.

He is survived by his daughter Chinmayee Raut, and his son Guru Sushant Raut, who is himself a performer and a teacher. Sushant Raut began his dance training under

his father, and after his death, continued to train under the tutelage of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir. He recalls that when he was younger, he was more inclined towards sports, especially cricket, and his father never urged him to take up dancing (Raut, *Samarpan* brochure). He asserts that it was only after his father passed away that he wished to continue in the tradition of his father, and thus trained extensively in Odissi, and ultimately established the Guru Srinath Raut Institute of Classical Dance in New Delhi.

As Guru Srinath Raut was responsible for establishing a strong base of the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi in New Delhi, his death inevitably brought a number of transitions into the Delhi-based community of Debaprasad Das style Odissi dancers. A number of dance students who had trained under him found themselves without a consistent dance teacher, and hence transitioned into other gharanas of Odissi which had abundant representation of teachers in the city.

Some of the work of the late Guru Srinath Raut was also continued by his brother, Guru Patitapaban Raut. Guru Patitapaban Raut had trained under the late Guru Srinath Raut for twelve years, and then later, directly trained under Guru Debaprasad Das. He began teaching Odissi in 1978. A number of former students of the late Guru Srinath Raut also continued their training under Guru Patitapaban Raut. In the following section, I provide a brief account of one dance artists' reminisces regarding the time in New Delhi immediately following the death of Guru Srinath Raut.

Paulami Guha

It was a sunny January afternoon in 2011, in New Delhi, when I met Paulami Guha, the director of programmes at IRCEN. Guha's mother had been a vocalist and she had started her initial dance training under Guru Valmiki Bannerjee's troupe. After that, she had joined Guru Srinath Raut's classes in Karol Bagh. The Karol Bagh location classes were held twice a week. While Guru Srinath Raut himself was the primary teacher, occasionally, his seasoned student Nupur Bannerjee, the daughter of Guru Valmiki Bannerjee, would also teach the class at Karol Bagh. She recalls that Guru Raut's classes typically began with exercises and footwork, and then transitioned into repertoire pieces.

She recalls that after Guru Srinath Raut's death, not many teachers in New Delhi were available to teach this style of Odissi. Nupur Bannerjee initially began to teach the classes at Karol Bagh. After some months, Guru Patitapaban Raut began teaching the classes, and she became a full-time student under him. Eventually, in the late 1990s, she transitioned into the dance classes taught by Guru Harekrishna Behara, in the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra style of Odissi.

Stories Revealed: Memories of the late Guru Srinath Raut in New Delhi

In Fall 2007, as part of my MA research, I visited Bani Ray in Princeton, New Jersey.

Ray had been a student of the late Guru Srinath Raut. She had set aside an evening with me, to recount her memories of the late Guru Srinath Raut. She also had a collection of old programme notes and brochures from the performances directed by the late guru.

They were dance-drama productions put on by the students of Guru Srinath Raut from the

Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre. They included programme-brochures for the production *Sabalil* in 1985, and the dance-drama *Manabhanjana*. Inside, the brochures featured black and white photographs, along with the biographies of the Guru, accompanists, and dancers.

As I looked at the brochures, Ray told me about the lives of the performers in the photographs. She mentioned that guruma (the wife of Guru Srinath Raut) would help them with costumes, and often prepare meals for them (Kar 31). One of the brochures included a quote from a review in the newspaper *The Statesman*, dated January 31, 1971, which stated that "Guru Srinath Raut comes from a long line of Gurus who have done much to preserve the classical purity of this style of dance. Ordishee (Odissi) is safe in his hands" (Kar 31). A number of the brochures also featured a detailed biography of Guru Debaprasad Das. The biographies of the founder-guru in these brochures featured more details than I have seen in the published books on Odissi. One of these biographies was written by Sunil Kothari, courtesy of *The Times of India* newspaper. It appeared that the performances directed by Guru Srinath Raut were a lineage-conscious tradition.

Most of the dancers featured in the programmes were students in college or senior high school. As I looked at the photographs of the many young and promising dancers of the institution, I wondered what had happened to all these dancers of this tradition. I asked Ray about them. She told me that some of the dancers had passed away. Some had taken on other professions. A few still practiced and performed Odissi in India. After the death of Guru Srinath Raut, some of the dancers had continued their training under other teachers within the same gharana, and some had become students of gurus

from other gharanas (Kar 31). Ray's sister Jyoti Srivastava first encountered Guru Durgacharan Ranbir upon a visit to Mumbai. The two sisters began learning under him two years later. Ray continues to train under him through visits to India and through sponsoring visits and workshops for him in the New York and New Jersey area (Kar 31).

Among the collection was a brochure from *Shraddhanjali*, a performance held in memory of the late Guru Srinath Raut in 1995 at the Triveni Auditorium in New Delhi. Choreographies of the late guru, and Guru Durgacharan Ranbir were presented at this performance. The programme opened with an invocation to the guru performed by the disciples of the late Guru Srinath Raut along with students of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir. Ray mentioned that they had searched for and invited students of the late guru to perform in the programme (Kar 31).

The Second Generation of the Debaprasad Das lineage: Guru Durgacharan Ranbir

Guru Durgacharan Ranbir has, perhaps, been the most visible and active member of the Debaprasad Das gharana since the death of Guru Debaprasad Das. He was born in 1951 in the Khurda district in Odisha, and from an early age, took an interest in music and dance, despite discouragement from his family, who belonged to the landlord class. At Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya in Bhubaneswar, where he studied between 1971 and 1977, he trained under Guru Debaprasad Das as well as Guru Pankaj Charan Das, the earliest pioneer-revivalist of Odissi dance. Thereafter, he worked at the institution, as well as at National Music Association, Cuttack, as well as Lalitakalapitha, Bhubaneswar

(Chand 170).

As a guru, he began teaching as a private instructor during the mid 1970s, while he was still a student at the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya. His first student was Sangeeta Dash. He established the Nrutyayan Institution in 1987, in a rented residence, starting with three students. These three students were Sangeeta Dash, Rajashree Behara, and Ranjeeta Mallick. The first two dancers of this group currently perform today as soloists, and Ranjeeta Mallick operates an Odissi institution based in Ottawa, Canada. Guru Durgacharan Ranbir also remembers that prior to his marriage, four promising male dancers trained under him and lived with him. These included Guru Bharat Charan Giri, Guru Pitambar Biswal, Guru Suresh Kumar Khuntia, and Guru Sanatan Mishra, all of whom are recognized teachers and performers of Odissi today. Guru Durgacharan Ranbir remembers that it was towards the end of this period that a number of his students began winning dance scholarships at the national level, and this furthered his career as a teacher.

His brother-in-law, who stayed with the family during the late 1980s, and also works closely with the family in the administrative aspects of the institution, has written a number of personal memories regarding his time with Guru Durgacharan Ranbir in the late 1980s, recording his experiences. He had come to Bhubaneswar in 1988, and had moved with the family from 1989 to 1990. He remembers this time period as a fertile creative period, during which a number of musicians, singers and guruji would gather at guruji's rented house in the Acharya Vihar area of Bhubaneswar, where the dance classes were also held, and they would discuss music, philosophy, and the theatrical aspect of Odissi dance. These individuals included eminent Oriya music personalities such as

percussionist Dhaneswar Swain, and music composer Ramahari Das. The residence had a separate dancing area and a residence area where the family lived.

Guru Durgacharan Ranbir became a part of the roster of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations in 1990. His first international tour was China in 1990, and he was accompanied by Sangeeta Dash, Rajashree Behara and Ranjeeta Mallick, who formed the core of his Nrutyayan dance ensemble. He also toured to Russia and Kazakhstan in the early 1990s. From the mid-1990s onwards, he has toured frequently to North America, Europe, South America, and East Asia. Throughout the mid-1990s, he choreographed a number of pieces in the Odissi repertoire. In the tradition of Guru Debaprasad Das himself, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir's troupe also frequently performs Oriya folk dance repertoire. Currently, Nrutyayan is the largest institution imparting training in the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi.

The Nrutyayan institution had its roots in the 1970s, paralleling what Norma Sue Fisher-Stitt terms as the "Warm Up," in her four-part framework in documenting the history of Canada's National Ballet School, in which she likens each decade of the School to a section of a typical ballet class. She views the years between 1949 and 1959 as the foundational "warm-up" years, when the seeds were sown for an infrastructural base, including a pool of willing and talented students, teachers, a professional company, and structural funding for the National Ballet School (Fisher-Stitt 3). Borrowing her metaphor of the "Warm-Up" years, I argue that the years 1975-1985 functioned as a similar time for infrastructure-building for Guru Durgacharan Ranbir's branch of the Debaprasad Das lineage. It was during these years that the student base was created, and

expanded, and Guru Durgacharan Ranbir's own pedagogical method developed. It was Guru Durgacharan Ranbir's initial work with his students, and their success at scholarship examinations and performances which helped to set up the infrastructure for the establishment of a formal independent institution in 1987.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have traced a history of the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi, from the life and career of the founder, Guru Debaprasad Das, to the life and work of two of his most visible and prominent disciples, the late Guru Srinath Raut, and Guru Durgacharan Ranbir. In this narrative of Odissi history, my focus has largely been on the Odissi revival period, beginning in the 1940s, and extending through the second half of the twentieth century. In Chapter 2, I have examined the socio-cultural habitus which informed the work and creative disposition of the late Guru Debaprasad Das. This chapter, in dialogue with Chapter 2, seeks to establish that the work of Guru Debaprasad Das and the Odissi revival in general was deeply rooted in a desire to promote a distinctive Oriya identity within the national dialogue.

Much of the history constructed in this chapter is original history, with sources ranging from archival photographs, and videos. Oral history and memories of artists of the Debaprasad Das lineage have been a significant part of the construction of this history. This is similar to Soneji's strategy of collecting mnemonic accounts of quotidian experiences of the *devadasis* (temple dancers in southern India) (*Unfinished Gestures*

13) in his construction of a devadasi history after 1947.

Gayatri Spivak, in “Translation as Culture,” points out that the origins of the word “translation” decontextualize it from the sense imparted by the English word “translation”. She traces the origins of the term to the Latin word meaning “to transfer” (Spivak 14). The act of writing a history may be seen as parallel to the work of translation, where the historical event is ultimately “translated” into a written narrative. Derrida suggests that the work of translation remains forever in debt and forever vulnerable to “loss.” In addition to the inevitable “loss” involved in the act of translating an event into a written narrative, in the first part of this chapter, I examine some of the different types of “losses” involved in the written histories, especially those following the structuralist narrative patterns. These “losses” include such aspects as strategic erasures, as well as the erasure of quotidian life events from grand-narrative style histories.

In the case of a history of the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi, an additional “loss” is involved – that of portions of the narrative itself. During my research into the life of Guru Debaprasad Das, I have found sources to be extremely scattered and also few in number; there are not many extant archival materials on his work. In particular, there are very few narratives or archival material of his work during the 1960s and 1970s. I also encountered a similar case for extant materials on the life and work of the late Guru Srinath Raut, who passed away in New Delhi within six months after the death of his guru in Odisha. Thus the work of Guru Debaprasad Das during the 1960s and 1970s, especially in the area of his repertoire development, are areas which remain underdeveloped in this history. However, the extant archival materials, as well as the

memories of their students and collaborators help insert the “personality” of these dance gurus into the brief biographic details provided in discussions and literature on them.

The Nrutyayan institution remains one of the more visible institutions teaching and promoting this style of Odissi. In this chapter, I trace a brief history of the foundational years of this institution, as well as the engagement of its founder, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, with his teacher Guru Debaprasad Das. Chapter 4 explores the continuation and maintenance of this stylistic lineage of Odissi through an ethnography of the work of the Nrutyayan school and ensemble in the present decade.

Chapter 4: Stylistic Vestiges of the Debaprasad Das Lineage

The previous two chapters focused on the twentieth-century history of the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi as well as the socio-cultural backdrop against which Guru Debaprasad Das developed his choreographic voice and repertoire. I have argued that while Guru Debaprasad Das's work in the Odissi revival, historically situated after India's independence from the British, was informed by the regionalist impetus of Oriya nationalism, his work also departs from the mainstream Oriya regionalism by destabilizing coastal Orissa as the centre of Oriya culture. This is evident in his interest in including western Odisha in the repertoire of a dance form designed to be reflective of Oriya identity, which had otherwise strongly been associated with coastal Oriya culture and language.

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which the socio-cultural values of Oriya nationalism, as well as the late guru's departures from Oriya nationalism are embodied in the repertoire of his stylistic voice in Odissi. I also examine his repertoire in regards to issues such as gender and the representation of the female body. As the transmission of the art form to subsequent generations is central to the working of a gharana or stylistic lineage, I also look at the pedagogical methodology employed by Guru Debaprasad Das in transmission of this form.

Habitus and Stylistic Lineages of Odissi

I dedicate this chapter to an interrogation of the stylistic features of this style of Odissi, as manifest in its repertoire, technique, and pedagogy. In this aspect, I frequently draw upon comparative analyses with the other two styles of Odissi which emerged during the Odissi revival in the 1950s.

In the context of Odissi dance, I find it useful to draw upon Bourdieu's habitus theory not only as a theoretical framework for describing the stylistic practices as they relate to the socio-cultural and political backdrop against which they are developed, but also for describing how these distinctive voices within a tradition may relate to each other. It is interesting to note that Bourdieu himself uses the word "style" in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, in his discussion of the habitus. He asserts that

Personal style, the particular stamp marking all the products of the same habitus, whether practices or works, is never more than a *deviation* in relation to the *style* of a period or class so that it relates back to the common style not only by its conformity [...]but also by the difference (*Outline of a Theory* 86).

Bourdieu's usage of the word "style" appears to be synonymous with individual deviation, while also emphasizing that these variations still remain under a larger umbrella of the habitus. While the styles of Odissi differ greatly, the practitioners of each stylistic branch still self-identify as Odissi dancers, distinct from performers of other classical Indian dance forms such as Bharata Natyam, Kuchipudi, Kathak and Manipuri.

The stylistic schools of Odissi are often associated with distinct pre-existing movement traditions of Odisha. Guru Debaprasad Das's style of Odissi is often described as the "gotipua"¹⁷ style of Odissi", while Guru Pankaj Charan Das's style is often referred

¹⁷ The gotipuas usually performed in ensembles, although it was not uncommon to occasionally witness a gotipua soloist perform. The tradition was believed to have started in Odisha in the fifteenth century, when it was considered inappropriate for women to dance in the public. The tradition was also somewhat linked

to as the “*mahari* style of Odissi”. As mentioned earlier, the maharis were the “temple dancers” of the Jagannath temple in Puri. Frédérique Apffel-Marglin, in her book *Wives of the God King: The Rituals of the Devdasis of Puri* defines “devdasi” as “female servant of the deity”(Apffel-Marglin 1). The maharis were considered to be “married” to the temple deity, and their dance performance was intended for the divine audience, as opposed to public consumption. On the other hand, the gotipuas were young boys, usually of prepubescent age, who danced publicly dressed in female garb. The gotipua tradition was seen in eastern, coastal Odisha, and their dance characteristically featured acrobatic elements. Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra’s style of Odissi is exempt from dominant association with any one particular pre-existing tradition, although the words “sculpturesque” and “temple sculpture” are often used to describe the style, while acknowledging its influences from the gotipua and other movement traditions.

Anna Kisselgoff in “There is Nothing ‘National’ About Ballet Styles,” mentions the recognizable visual distinctions in the ballet produced in different regions in Europe and the United States. She describes these often stereotyped visual distinctions, noting that “the English are reserved in their dancing, the Russians are dramatic, the French have flair if not form, the Danes are charming and the Americans infuse their ballet dancing with an ingrained athleticism and exuberance” (Kisselgoff 361). However, Kisselgoff attributes these regional variations in balletic style to the individual creative choices and

to the temple dance tradition, which was an all-female practice, but was done only inside the temple grounds and not for public audiences, while the gotipua performances were specifically for public audiences. The gotipuas dressed as female dancers, and danced in the public during important public holidays, and occasionally were also employed as “house dance troupes” by certain landlords as a display of wealth.

creative influences of the major choreographers from each country, as opposed to the rhetoric of the “mystical national forces” (Kisselgoff 362). By analogy, I maintain that in the case of Odissi dance as well, it is the creative choices of the three pioneering Gurus of the lineages, as opposed to the older movement traditions they were associated with, that shaped the distinctive “flavours” of these styles of Odissi. Unlike the multiple locations of affiliation of the choreographers discussed by Kisselgoff, each of the three pioneering Odissi choreographers – Guru Debaprasad Das, Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, and Guru Pankaj Charan Das – were in the town of Cuttack in eastern Odisha during the 1950s, at the time of the Odissi revival movement. In this chapter, I undertake to point out some of the complexities in rhetoric as well as philosophies embodied by the movement and repertoire of Guru Debaprasad Das’s style of Odissi.

Describing variations in the approaches of ballet choreographers, Kisselgoff asserts “style is essentially an attitude imposed upon technique” (Kisselgoff 362). I also use the word “flavour” to describe style. During my conversations with numerous individuals during my fieldwork, I have often heard this word to describe Odissi styles, in statements such as “Guru Debaprasad Das’s dance style has a distinct folk flavour.” A second reason for the use of this word is that references to the sensory experience of taste are made in regards to the experience of watching a performance in the *Natyashastra*, the Sanskrit-language treatise on the arts which is believed to be the cornerstone of reference for the classical performing arts of India. The *Natyashastra* sets the role of the dancer during the performance as that of evoking *bhava* or psychological states in the audience through the use of *rasa* or sentiments in the performance. The *Natyashastra* describes the

phenomenon of the *rasa* in its sixth chapter. *Rasa* is defined as the sentiments without which no poetic meaning proceeds during a performance (Bharata Muni 105). *Rasa*, in Sanskrit, refers to “juice” or “essence.” Bharata, the narrator of the *Natyashastra*, explains that the sentiments are called *rasa* because they are capable of being tasted (Bharata Muni 105) by the spectator, explaining that just as food enriched with many spices provides pleasure to the consumer, the performances invested with *rasa* provide pleasure and satisfaction to the spectator (Bharata Muni 106). An analysis of a dance style would be incomplete without taking into consideration the socio-cultural contexts and historical heritage of performance. This chapter is a result of information gleaned through the ethnographic encounter as well as through visual analysis of archival material.

Selma Jeanne Cohen points out that the “classical style,” referring to ballet, is movement based on the five positions of the feet (Cohen 341). She also discusses certain classical principles which the classical style adheres to, such as the principle of the outward rotation of the legs, known as “turnout” in ballet, as well as the principle of verticality and linearity that is presented as ideal to ballet dancers. In the case of Odissi dance, the classical “form” may be defined by two basic positions of the body; the *chowka* and the *tribhanga*. In the *chowka* position, the dancer’s feet are placed a foot apart from each other, turned out at the hips, with the knees bent at ninety degrees (see Fig. 2). The *tribhanga* position, or the “triple-bend” position, is considered the epitome of the Odissi genre of dance; and of embodying its sensuality (see Fig. I). In this position, the body is bent into an “S” curve, with the knees, hips and upper ribcage bent in

opposition to each other.

Dick Hebdige, in his study of post-World War II youth styles titled *Subculture, the Meaning of Style*, points to Genet's theme of "style as a form of refusal" (Hebdige 2). Hebdige uses the term "dominant" and "subordinate" groups, borrowing from Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony. Sarah William Goldhagen, in "Something to Talk About: Modernism, Discourse, Style," maintains that the paradigm is the "accepted model or pattern" (Goldhagen 144), and acts to lend boundaries and coherence to a discipline by establishing official "restrictions" on its fields of vision (Goldhagen 144). In describing the politics of the different styles of Odissi dance, I find that even while one style emerges as dominant in its visibility and reach, the other two styles are best described as "alternate voices" within the Odissi canon, as opposed to "subordinate." An analysis of these other stylistic branches of Odissi, with respect to their distance from a "dominant paradigm" becomes more applicable. As evident through my analysis of written texts on the twentieth-century Odissi revival, the Odissi style of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra is often seen as the paradigm; its presence is more dominant in scholarly discourse. It is also more visible than the other styles of Odissi in the global performance arena. Throughout my multi-sited fieldwork, I have heard vastly varying articulations of how this style of Odissi stands out as a distinct style of Odissi. Some commented that all styles of Odissi feature the use of the chowka and tribhanga postures, and the stylistic differences within Odissi are not as strong as the visible stylistic differences of the Kathak form, and are only apparent to those who are deeply familiar with the Odissi vocabulary or are practitioners of the form themselves. Simultaneously, I have also heard the stance that the

Debaprasad Das style of Odissi stands as strongly distinct, to the extent that if the mainstream Odissi were to be considered a homogeneous and stable construct, then this style would stand apart as a different genre altogether.

Hebdige points out that the establishing of an identity of difference is often achieved through objects of association, through accessories such as a safety pin or a pointed shoe, which then acquire a symbolic significance in their usage and association with different factions of the post-war youth in London. He asserts that “the tensions between the dominant and subordinate groups can be found reflected in the surfaces of subculture – in the styles of mundane objects which have a double meaning” (Hebdige 2). In theorizing this gharana of Odissi, I find this theory of the “quoted objects,” when applied to the analysis of the choreography, becomes significant in the attempt to establish its identity. Here, I extend the reading of these “objects of association” to aspects of choreography, such as movement quotations or embodied philosophies, or specific items of the costuming. I see these aspects as symbolically significant, and drawing upon these symbols, seek to articulate and theorize – in the absence of any written theorization of this gharana – the identity of this gharana within the larger canon of Odissi.

I begin by examining some of the landmark pieces from his repertoire, and examining the content in these pieces, and, at times, drawing a comparative analysis of aesthetic and creative choices between the repertoire works in his style and the other styles of Odissi. Ultimately, I argue that Guru Debaprasad Das, in his approach to highlighting movement traditions which often originate in regions away from the eastern,

coastal Odisha, and his choreographic explorations of the subversive and “grotesque” feminine, presents a style of Odissi which destabilizes the cultural “centre”.

Embodied Philosophies

During my fieldwork in Odisha, during which I lived with the family of my teacher, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, the evenings would be taken up with dance technique classes, after which Guruji (my teacher) would help me with my research and guide me in Odissi history, sharing his memories of Guru Debaprasad Das, his teacher. During one such evening, when I asked him about how Guru Debaprasad Das approached the idea of theorizing the dance. Guruji answered, saying

the theory was in Guru Debaprasad Das’s body. His knowledge of folk tradition was extensive, and he drew upon these authentic, age-old traditions for creating his Odissi repertoire (interview, Feb 21, 2011).

I asked how this style of Odissi is distinct, Guruji gave us the metaphor of different clothes as reflective of having different *parikalpana* (vision) or imagining. Pointing to me and a fellow student sitting next to me, he said

Look at how you and Debu dress differently. You like wearing brightly coloured clothes. He likes to wear pants and t-shirts. It is the same with the way you eat. You like to eat grapes. He enjoys eating rice. Another student likes eating meat. Styles of dance are like that. It is based on the guru's *parikalpana* (vision), based on each guru's different aesthetic taste. Guru Debaprasad Das was interested in taking the earthy, regional flavour of Odisha and inserting it into the classical Odissi dance so that the world may see the dance forms of Odisha. (interview, Feb 21, 2011).

Although Guru Debaprasad Das passed away as the youngest of the three pioneering Odissi revivalist gurus, he choreographed a large and varied repertoire during his lifetime. In this section, I will analyse some of his landmark pieces, as well as

repertoire pieces choreographed by subsequent choreographers of this stylistic lineage as texts for analysis.

In order to explain the stylistic differences between the Debaprasad Das tradition and the other traditions of Odissi, it is necessary for me to first detail a few of the theories of Indian dance tradition as laid out by the *Natyashastra* treatise, and then elaborate upon the traditional repertoire of Odissi. In traditional discourse, Odissi as a classical form is often validated through tracing its reference to the mention of the Odra-Magadhi style of dance as one of the four regional dance styles mentioned in the *Natyashastra*. "Odra Magadhi" refers to the geographic region which encompasses the present-day Odisha, and the mention of a dance form from this region in the text implied the existence of a distinct dance form in the region during antiquity. The *Natyashastra* laid out the three elements of dance as *nritta* (form-dominated dance), *abhinaya* (dance dominated by the expressive element), and *nritya*. *Nritta* refers to "pure dance," which implies a focus on form, technique and rhythmic footwork. Dances which exclusively fall under the category of *nritta* are usually abstract in nature. They do not involve mimetic storytelling, and instead, focus on the kinaesthetic movement skill of the dancer. *Abhinaya* refers to expressive dance, in which the dancer, with the aid of facial expression and hand gestures and body language, typically conveys a mood or narrative to the audience. *Nritya* combines the elements of *nritta* and *abhinaya* to convey a story or message to the audience. The categorization of dance "types" into these three categories becomes an important feature in the study of the revival of the Indian classical dances. The Odissi dance repertoire, as established during the seminars of the Jayantika organization in the

late 1950s, consists of a five-part concert repertoire. Each part has a number of variations, choreographed distinctly by the different generations of Odissi choreographers.

The first item of traditional Odissi repertoire is the *Mangalacharan*, which is traditionally the first piece danced during a concert performance of Odissi dance. The *Mangalacharan* is an invocatory dance, choreographed to invoke a certain god or goddess from the Hindu pantheon. In this context, the god or goddess who is invoked becomes almost as important as the choreographic material itself in terms of establishing the identity of the gharana. Popular gods, in praise of whom the *Mangalacharan* verses are performed are Ganesha, the elephant-headed god; Jagannath, the patron deity of Odisha, Shiva, the god of dance, fire and destruction; Durga, a goddess of warfare; and Kali, the goddess of death and destruction. Here, I mention the significance of the chosen god of invocation in the *Mangalacharan* due to the inextricable link between the deity and the identity of the worshipper in Hinduism. Most of the Indian classical dances, including Odissi, trace their origins to Hindu rituals and the temple, and thereby dance is seen as essentially a performance of a religious act, even though it may be performed in a secular setting.

The second item is known as the *Sthayee*. This piece is a form-dominated piece. In this chapter, I devote a section to a discussion of Guru Debaprasad Das's composition of the *Sthayee* piece of the Odissi repertoire, which was also seen as one of the major reasons for his historic split from the Jayantika group. The third item, the *Pallavi*, is a rhythmic, footwork-dominated repertoire piece, and is usually categorized under pure dance. The fourth item, known as the *Abhinaya*, typically conveys a story to the audience.

The name of the fifth item, *Moksha*, consists of fast rhythmic footwork, and ends with the dancer expressing a phrase from the scriptures, or an ode or prayer dedicated to a particular deity, usually signalling the end of the performance. The term *Moksha* alludes to metaphysical exhilaration and liberation.

A note must be made regarding the representation of gender within the Odissi canon. The Odissi revival during the 1950s was spearheaded by a group of male dancer-choreographers and male scholars. The decision-making with regards to repertoire and movement codification thus was largely in the hands of the male choreographers. However, the majority of the students of these choreographers were female dancers from respectable Oriya families, and later, female dancers from other regions, primarily urban areas from other parts of India. Even within the pre-existing mahari or temple dance tradition, the role of the teacher was almost always undertaken by men at some level, even though the maharis were trained by other older maharis. It is also interesting to note that the percussion instrument to which the maharis danced, the *mardala*, is always mentioned as being played by men in the literature that I have examined. Even now, in the Odissi performance tradition, it is often the male guru who provides the "guiding" rhythm for the dance of the performer, through playing the mardala, cymbals or just enunciating the *ukutas* or the codified phrases to which the dancer danced. The role of the male mardala player in the temple performances places the male in the position to "guide" the rhythm of the mahari¹⁸.

¹⁸ A note must be made here regarding gender and the playing of the mardala today. Through most of my observations in Odisha as well as Odissi dance practice outside of Odisha, I have found that the mardala is mostly played by male virtuoso mardala players or sometimes male Odissi gurus as an accompaniment for Odissi dance practices. Specialized mardala players also accompany Odissi vocal performances. However,

The gotipua tradition was exclusively a male performing tradition, and both the teachers and the performers have traditionally been male. The first generation of the Odissi choreographers, coming mostly from the gotipua tradition, were all male, and subsequently, some of the female dancers also went on to teach the form; however, the majority of the teachers were male. Performance of the dance form, on the other hand, was largely the domain of the female dancers. Even though certain male performers gained repute, the male dancer was known largely for being the teacher and choreographer, while the female dancer was known for being a performer. In the rise of the third generation and subsequent generations of Odissi dancers, there have been more female teachers of Odissi, and an increasing number of male performers; however, the earlier situation still remains: there are still more visible female performers of Odissi, and male dancers are mostly noted as teachers.

Ann Daly, in “Classical Ballet: A Discourse of Difference,” points out the differentiated gendered roles of the male and female dancers within the ballet tradition. Daly argues that ballet discourse is “inevitably rooted in the notion of the ‘inborn’ or ‘natural’ gender differences. Across centuries, these differences have been an unabashed hallmark of classical ballet at every level: costuming, body image, movement vocabulary, training, technique, narrative, and especially, the pas de deux structure” (Daly 112).

Odissi draws upon and claims lineage in the mahari and gotipua dance traditions, which

there is also an increasing number of female Odissi dancers who train in and are proficient in mardala playing. One of the well-known examples of this is the Kolkata-based dancer Poushali Mukherjee, who also plays the mardala to guide her students in class. The percussion is seen as a useful tool in the class for guiding the students in rhythm as well as accompaniment during the stepping exercises in class. It is also being increasingly taught to visiting students from abroad who wish to return to their countries with pedagogical skills for teaching Odissi. This is largely a feature of the third and fourth generation of Odissi practitioners. However, the practice and performance of mardala drum is still largely dominated by men.

were movement practices followed exclusively by female and male performers respectively. Only a female child could be chosen as the young bride to Jagannath, in order to become a mahari, and the gotipua practice was entirely a male practice, although it involved the male dancers dressing in female costuming. The gotipua practice of prepubescent boys dressing and dancing as young girls is clearly distinct from classical ballet's rhetoric of the gender roles in the dance being assigned according to the "natural" gender differences; here the virtuosity and skill of the performer is also partially based on how well the male dancer is able to embody the female dancer.

However, in present-day Odissi, and most other Indian classical dances, such as Bharata Natyam, Kathak and Kuchipudi, the performer may "perform" both male and female characteristic behaviours. This is due to the heavy emphasis on the mimetic and storytelling element involved in the Indian classical dances, following which the performers enact and dance the physicality of the character they wish to depict. A female dancer, although dressed in the traditional dance costume for the female dancer, may dance the physicalities of the male character during the storytelling-centered parts of the repertoire. Consequently, the skilled male dancer may display the physicality of both a male and a female character on stage, even while they remain dressed in the traditional male dance costume. The male dancer's costume and female dancer's costume are similar; both consist of a traditional Odisha sari, and in most contemporary performances, this costume is pre-stitched, as opposed to traditionally draped and knotted. The male dancer wears the sari as a loose-fitted *dhoti*-pant style drape, which allows free movement of the legs, and dances largely bare-chested except for a narrow sash across

the chest. The female dancer wears a similar dhoti-pant drape as well as a blouse which is covered by a sash or *odhni*. Male and female dancers both wear *ghungroos* or bells on their ankles, as well as silver jewellery. In the case of Odissi dance, this is seen the most often in the *Mangalacharan* and *Abhinaya* repertoire pieces.

Guru Debaprasad Das, in his investment in the gotipua repertoire and movement vocabulary, which I discuss further in this chapter, embraced the dance tradition of men dressing and dancing as women. However, his style is noted also for its “vigorous and masculine” qualities, and its emphasis on repertoire dedicated to the god Shiva, who is considered the primordial male energy. We thus see a complex duality; that of a dance style noted for its embrace of the “masculine”, as well as drawing upon a heritage of young boys dancing as women. In the following section, I elaborate upon the choreographic repertoire in this branch of Odissi.

Oriya Regionalism

Dinanath Pathy, in *Rethinking Odissi*, employs the use of three metaphors in his theorizations of the three original gharanas of Odissi. He uses the metaphor of the *Shahijatra* of Puri to describe the Odissi gharana of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra. Puri is, in many ways, the symbolic and cultural capital of Odisha, thereby representing the cultural dominance of eastern Odisha. Pathy’s choice of metaphor in equating Mahapatra’s style of Odissi with Puri’s *Shahijatra* tradition thus places the style at the symbolic cultural “centre.” He compares the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi to the

Thakurani Jatra (a religious procession) of Behrampur, in south-west Odisha. In this metaphor, Das's style of Odissi is compared to this tradition of Behrampur, which is to the south-west, and geographically distant from the "centre" at Puri, may be seen as symbolic of this branch of Odissi as remaining distinctly distant from a paradigmatic center.

In addition to embracing movement traditions from across Odisha into the repertoire of his branch of Odissi, one of the primary ways in which Guru Debarprasad Das asserted the identity of his gharana of Odissi as an essentially "Oriya" gharana was through resisting the "Sanskritization" of Odissi. Pathy points out that the late guru used Oriya vocabulary frequently to describe movements which had otherwise been codified into words in the Sanskrit language. For example, Pathy draws attention to Guru Debarprasad Das's use of movement terminologies such as *bhaunri* (a grounded turn), as opposed to the Sanskritized *bhramari*, in his book *Nrutyasarani*.

Pathy also mentions that Guru Debarprasad Das was interested in retaining the articulation of the waist in some of the movements in the dance, quoting the *sakhinata* and *gotipua* traditions, and thereby retaining a conscious reference to the local Oriya tradition. This demonstrates another case of his resistance to the "Sanskritization" of Odissi, in which the form was "refined" and "purged" of any sensual references through exaggerations of the hips or waist, or the replacement of the articulation of these by the articulation of the upper torso, considered to be part of a more "refined" aesthetic.

Another strong example of Guru Debarprasad Das's repertoire embodying his involvement in Oriya regionalism can be seen in the fact that he choreographed a large

number of Odissi dance pieces based on Oriya language lyrics. Other than the dances choreographed to the Sanskrit songs from Jayadev's *Ashtapadi*, the *Navarasa*, and the *Ashtashambhu*, the majority of Guru Debaprasad Das's abhinaya choreographies are set to songs which feature Oriya lyrics. He favoured the works of local historical Oriya poets, such as Banamali Das and Upendra Bhanja, and the idea that one cannot imbibe the "feel" of Odissi without being Oriya, or without following the Oriya language. Some of his more celebrated choreographies to Oriya songs include *Meena Nayana*, *Ajo Sri Goshto Chondroma*, and *Sajani Kahinke*. Most of these songs featured lyrics written by late medieval Oriya poets. In some cases, he worked with specific composers who put tunes to the poems. In other cases, the tunes of these songs were already popularly known and he worked with the popularly known versions of the song. His choreography to *Gumana Kahinki* was, incidentally, included within the first Odissi performance showcased outside of Odisha in 1956, at the Inter-University Youth Festival in New Delhi, performed by Priyambada Mohanty. The song had been especially written and composed for her performance by the Oriya playwright Kalicharan Patnaik.

Guru Debaprasad Das's favouring of songs featuring Oriya lyrics over Sanskrit lyrics can be seen as strongly indicative of his habitus, steeped in the strong Oriya nationalism in the wake of India's independence from the British. As I had pointed out in the last chapter, the Oriya language is seen as one of the most prominent symbols of Oriya identity, and one of the differentiating factors between the Oriya people and the Bengali people in the neighboring state of West Bengal.

Political Implications: Eastern and Western Odisha

Perhaps the most distinct characteristic feature of the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi is the inclusion of the sabdaswarapata in its traditional repertoire. Like the mahari and gotipua dance traditions, the sabdaswarapata was a local dance tradition that existed in Odisha before the codification and establishment of Odissi. It has its roots in the temple of the Goddess Vajreshwari in the district of Sambalpur in western Odisha. I argue that it is through the inclusion of this movement practice into his repertoire of Odissi that Guru Debaprasad Das displaced eastern Odisha as the dominant narrative centre of Odissi dance. In this section, I outline the characteristic features of the sabdaswarapata, Guru Debaprasad Das's usage of this tradition within his repertoire, and lastly, the political implications of this inclusion in the context of Odissi being the classical dance of the state of Odisha.

Sunil Kothari, in his book on Odissi, describes the sabdaswarapata as the “*tandava*” aspect of Odissi, characterized by rhythmic movements which are “forceful in nature both in execution and in spirit” (Kothari 78). While the larger narrative of Odissi has been largely centered in Puri, Guru Debaprasad Das, in his fascination with local ritual dances, included elements of them in his Odissi repertoire. He traveled extensively to interior villages in Odisha to study the sabdaswarapata, and included a number of them in his traditional Odissi repertoire. Kothari, in his endnotes to the chapter, mentions that Guru Debaprasad Das himself traveled with him to Sambalpur and helped him extensively for the research on the sabdaswarapata for his book (Kothari 86).

While the other lineages in Odissi emphasize a strong historical centre in Puri,

connected with the mahari, or female temple dance tradition, the Debaprasad Das tradition extends this geographic focus beyond Puri to Sambalpur and other regions in the interiors of Odisha through the inclusion of movement traditions such as the sabdaswarapata in his repertoire. The sabdaswarapata is incorporated into the Odissi repertoire of this lineage in different dances. Most of the Mangalacharan dances composed in this lineage feature the inclusion of a fast-paced and highly rhythmic sabdaswarapata section after an initial song to the invoked god or goddess. In live performances as well as in recordings for accompanying dancers, the vocalist of the orchestra sings the ode to the deity. The transition from the melody section of the piece to the sabdaswarapata section is usually marked by a change in rhythm as well as in the tempo of the movements. The vocalist ceases to sing, and it is usually the guru who chants the sabdaswarapata section, while playing the cymbals. This musical and danced transition from the more graceful movements to the more rigorous, and occasionally even frenzied movements is characteristic of most Mangalacharans of the Debaprasad Das tradition. Since the sabdaswarapata is a ritualistic movement tradition strongly associated with Sambalpur in western Odisha, the transition to the sabdaswarapata within the repertoire piece can also be seen as symbolic of embracing the religious traditions of western Odisha. It is perhaps in this shift of focus away from the centre in Puri that the narrative of the Debaprasad Das lineage differs from the lineages of Guru Pankaj Charan Das and Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra.

A large cultural and historical divide remains between eastern and western Odisha, which is also known as the Kosal region. Western Odisha comprises a number of

districts, the three largest of which include Kalahandi, Bolangir and Sambalpur. The modern state of Odisha was established in 1936, in the territorial area which consists largely of speakers of the Oriya language. Traditionally, the twentieth-century Odissi revival was positioned, both in its narrative and cultural focus, along with the work of the revivalists themselves, in eastern Odisha, especially in the Puri-Cuttack-Bhubaneswar circuit. As we have seen, the revived Odissi dance form claimed its heritage from the dance tradition of the maharis at the Jagannath temple at Puri, and the gotipua practice, also largely specific to regions of eastern Odisha, along with the inspiration of temple sculptures from temples in coastal Odisha, especially the Sun Temple at Konark. The activities of the Jayantika organization, which marked the codification of Odissi in the 1950s, were centred in Cuttack. After the codification of Odissi and its recognition by the Sangeet Natak Academy as a classical dance form, a large number of educational and training institutes emerged in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack, making them the largest centres of Odissi training in Odisha, as well as India.

J.P Simhadaba, in his book *Cultural Profile of South Kosala: From Early Period Till the Rise of the Nagas and the Chauhans in the 14th Century*, suggests that the nomenclature of the state language as “Oriya” suggests that the language of the people of the coastal strip, the Odras, was predominant (Simhadaba xxiii). This also hints at a larger cultural predomination of coastal Odisha in “Oriya culture.” Simhadaba suggests that this may also be due to the absence of early literature from the western region. He points out that in historiography on Odisha, the general trend is to write about the history of Kalinga (coastal region of Odisha) and its Gajapati kings, and that the historical

narrative(s) of western Odisha remains neglected (Simhadeba xxv). The region is culturally, historically and geographically distinct from eastern Odisha. The topography of the land is often hilly, sparsely populated and until recently, was largely inaccessible during the rainy seasons of the year. The language of the region is called “Kosali,” and is distinct from the Oriya language, as is the traditional cuisine of the region, and the celebration of particular festivals distinct to the region. The region also has its own distinct style of temple architecture characterized as the “Kosali style”.

In the light of the dominant representation of coastal Odisha in the repertoire and philosophies of Odissi dance, Guru Debaprasad Das’s encompassing of ritualistic movement traditions of western Odisha and the Kosal region becomes significant. As mentioned earlier, eastern, coastal Odisha became the centre of the Odissi revival, in both narrative and by virtue of being the site of the Jayantika activities. Guru Debaprasad Das, through his emphasis on inclusion of movement rituals and traditions from western Odisha, shifts the narrative centre of Odissi from eastern Odisha to encompass the traditions of western Odisha as well. Guru Debaprasad Das had travelled to the Kumbhari village in the Sambalpur district, and had extensively researched the sabdaswarapata dance tradition in the temple of Samaleswari in Kumbhari. He was accompanied on these research trips variously by eminent scholars and artists such as Sunil Kothari and Dinanath Pathy. Sambalpur is the western-most district of western Odisha. It borders the state of Chhattisgarh to the west. Guru Debaprasad Das’s creative process in choreographing the repertoire of his lineage thus involves the sites of western Odisha as well.

Usually, the *sabdaswarapata* sections are inserted into repertoire pieces such as the *Mangalacharans* or the *Abhinaya* pieces which involve danced enactments of physical attributes of specific deities. The *sabdas* which he noted down in Kumbhari during his research visits continue to be used by choreographers in his lineage in their choreographic compositions, such as the *Sivastaka* by Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, and the *Ardhanareswara* by Guru Gajendra Panda. Debaprasad Das's vision of Odissi encompassed cultural representation of not only what was considered "central" to Oriya culture, that is the culture of coastal Odisha, but also the culture of the peripheral and western regions of Odisha. With the integration of the *sabdaswarapata*, the Debaprasad Das gharana of Odissi thus resists the dominant cultural representation of coastal Odisha in the form.

Debaprasad Das style of Odissi as the "Masculine" style of Odissi

During fieldwork, I have often heard remarks such as "The Debaprasad Das style celebrates the male energy in dance." The repertoire of this dance lineage is filled with dances dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva, who is considered the god of destruction of the cosmic order and the patron of the arts in the Hindu pantheon. Shiva is one of the trinity of Hindu gods consisting of Brahma, the creator; Visnu, the sustainer of the cosmic cycle; and Shiva, the destroyer.

It is interesting to note that in one of the most famous myths surrounding Shiva, his destruction of the universe is shown to be directly linked to his activity of dancing; he

literally “dances the universe to death” in a dance of rage. Shiva’s dance of destruction, known in the Hindu lore as *tandava*, is identified within Hindu art and culture as the ideal prototype of a movement representation of “masculinity” and “male rigour” and virility in a pan-India recognition. Shiva is a composite and complex divine personality, and the identification of this lineage of Odissi in the rhetoric employed by its practitioners and scholars as a more “Saivite” (referring to Shiva, or Siva) form of Odissi, thus links it directly to the dance of vigorous masculinity.

It is also interesting to note that while Shiva is recognized and worshipped throughout India as a primary and major Hindu deity, his primary associations, and the site of major following are in the southern part of India. He is considered the patron deity of the classical dance form of Bharata Natyam from the southern state of Tamil Nadu. Conversely, Odissi, as a classical dance form, follows the deity Jagannath, the primary deity of Odisha, with his famous temple at Puri, as its patron deity. The identification of the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi as a “Saivite branch of Odissi” indicates a tension with the “center” of twentieth-century Oriya culture, rooted in the Jagannath culture at Puri, and perhaps also a shift away from this cultural center. However, to render such a definitive and fixed description of the gharana would make the theorization incomplete and uni-dimensional largely for two reasons, indicating the complexity of the Saivite identity within Oriya culture and within Odissi dance. Firstly, Jagannath as a deity is himself viewed and recognized as a syncretic deity with historical roots in the tribal religions and cultures of Odisha, as well as with more Tantric and Saivite influences. Secondly, the social and political history of Odisha is replete with different rulers coming

to power and replacing the propagated cults of the previous dynasty with new cults, which were also linked with the identity propagated by that dynasty. There are a number of famous temples in Odisha dedicated to Shiva, the most famous being the Lingaraj temple in the capital city of Bhubaneswar. Therefore I argue that the identification of this gharana of Odissi as a “Saivite” branch of Odissi indicates a tension not with the cultural centre of Puri but a tension with the dominant paradigm of the Oriya culture in rhetoric in scholarship in which Odissi dance is depicted to be inextricably linked to the cult of Jagannath centered in Puri.

It is perhaps no great coincidence that the earliest extant video footage of repertoire of this lineage opens with an invocation to Shiva. The footage, from 1956, depicts Indrani Rahman performing an invocatory dance dedicated to Shiva, accompanied by Guru Debaprasad Das himself. Guru Debaprasad Das choreographed a number of repertoire pieces dedicated to the god Shiva, perhaps the most famous of which is the abhinaya piece *Ashtashambhu*. The *Ashtashambhu* was composed to the lyrics of the poet Venkatmakhin from Tamil Nadu. It depicts eight separate episodes from the mythic tales about Shiva. The majority of these episodes depict Shiva as a warrior, in his destructive personality, even while this destructive personality is often shown to be aimed towards the protection of his supplicants. The depiction of each episode is followed by a brief, form-dominated movement section depicting the vigorous physicality of Shiva’s *tandava* dance. The *Ashtashambhu* is one of the most popularly performed pieces of the Debaprasad Das repertoire. Another well-known repertoire piece is the *Shiva Mangalacharan* or the *Ganga Taranga*. This piece follows the

Mangalacharan, and the god Shiva is invoked in the invocatory section of the dance. The piece ends with a rigorous movement section which embodies the vigorous physicality of Shiva's *tandava* dance.

A number of repertoire pieces choreographed by the second generation of gurus from this lineage are also dedicated to the Saivite tradition. Guru Durgacharan Ranbir's *Sivastaka* stands prominent among these, and there are also numerous dances choreographed by Guru Durgacharan Ranbir and Guru Gajendra Panda.

One of the first comments I heard during one of my fieldwork interviews was “the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi has much in common with Mayurbhanj Chhau.” Chhau is a martial arts form which was originally practiced for recreation by soldiers in the armies. It often mirrored some of their training exercises and skills as warriors. It is a movement tradition noted for its association with rigorous exercises, as well as acrobatic and athletic movement. Traditionally, women were not allowed to practice Chhau as it was believed that the rigour of the movement and acrobatics would have an adverse effect on female fertility. Chhau was thus traditionally a male dance form. Guru Debaprasad Das had himself trained in Chhau and a number of movements from his *tandava* dance sections bear a strong resemblance to movements of the Chhau lexicon. This visual resemblance and quoting of the Chhau tradition is also noticeable in the choreographic work of his disciple Guru Durgacharan Ranbir.

Writing about masculinity as seen in dance, Michael Gard points out that the term “technical virtuosity” has different meanings, depending on its usage in association with different male dancers; he points that in the case of Nijinsky, technical virtuosity implied

partnering the ballerina and “leaping to great elevations”, while for Ted Shawn, it implied muscularity and athleticism. In the case of Baryshnikov, it was associated with exhibition of technical skills such as pirouettes (Gard 74). Gard emphasizes, however, that these selected choreographers are all concerned with the male body as a site of spectacle, and of the male body being “fast, powerful, occupying and traversing great amounts of space, and exhibiting conspicuous prowess” (Gard 74). In the case of the male Odissi dancer, especially of the Debaprasad Das lineage, these are much of the same qualities of movements that are considered “masculine,” and ideal for male dancers. The physical agility and flexibility of the male dancer in this lineage of Odissi dance are seen as the characteristics that qualify them as "masculine."¹⁹

However, a theorization which terms the Debaprasad Das gharana as merely invested in the “masculine” aspects of dance runs the risk of essentializing the gendered identity of this style of Odissi. Ramsay Burt, in his Introduction to *Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities: The Male Dancer*, maintains that masculinity as a socially constructed identity is not a stable entity, but one made up of conflicting and contradictory aspects. The Debaprasad Das style is also popularly referred to as the “gotipua style” of Odissi, contrasting with the Odissi style of Guru Pankaj Charan Das, which is termed the

¹⁹ Here, I make a distinction between the concepts of "masculinity" and "virtuosity" of the male dancer. My references to the "masculinity" of the male dancer here are also specific to this lineage of Odissi. It is also pertinent to mention here that Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra was known as a very expressive dancer, and was highly celebrated for his roles of portraying a woman, while also retaining equally masculine characteristics in his portrayal of male characters. As well, Guru Debaprasad Das himself was known for his emphasis on emoting the depth and natural expressions while depicting female characters on stage. However, Guru Debaprasad Das also strongly advocated for the maintenance of movement practices emphasizing "masculine rigour" in his repertoire of Odissi, and often imported, as I have pointed out, movement vocabulary from Chhau and other martial arts practices. Following my observations, I maintain that while expressional virtuosity is greatly valued in the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi as well, it places a larger emphasis on physical agility and acrobatic ability of the male dancer than the other lineages of Odissi.

“mahari style” (temple dance style) of Odissi. Unlike the mahari, or temple dance style of Odissi, which was exclusively a female practice, the gotipua tradition was exclusively a male dance practice.

The gotipua tradition predates the revived Odissi dance by three centuries. While the female temple dancers were not allowed to perform outside of the temple precincts, it was traditionally the gotipuas who performed for public audiences during religious festivals, and also secular occasions. This movement was a distinct feature of eastern Odisha, especially in the district of Puri, and surrounding areas. The gotipua dancers were not officially linked with the temple and its social structure, and often, local landlords were patrons for gotipua troupes. This phenomenon of the male dancer dressed as the female dancer is also partly informed by the *bhakti* religious movement which gained momentum in Odisha from the fifteenth century. The *bhakti* religious movement, linked with the rise of Vaishnavism in Odisha, emphasized a philosophy in which the relationship between the worshipper and the deity was equated with the metaphor of lovers in separation. In this metaphor, the worshipper, regardless of gender, was necessarily equated with the female lover, and the deity as the male lover. The gotipuas, in their female costume and dancing movements, were understood to signify the earthly worshipper. They would dance dances of separation between Krishna, the blue god from the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*, and his earthly lover, Radha. However, the signature dance of the gotipuas, often performed as the last dance of the performance, is the acrobatic dance featuring acrobatic movements as well as acrobatic group formations. These acrobatic elements are termed as *bandhas*. Of the three lineages of Odissi, the

Debaprasad Das lineage is the one which maximizes the employment of the bandha elements in its repertoire. Guru Debaprasad Das himself had trained as a gotipua dancer for a number of years, and the influence of the gotipua movement qualities and style is visible in his style of Odissi, in both the expressive dance pieces, as well as the form-dominated dance pieces. In a later section, titled “Form-based Repertoire,” I further elaborate upon the influence of the bandha elements upon the repertoire and pedagogy of the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi.

Of the three founder gurus of Odissi – Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, Guru Pankaj Charan Das, and Guru Debaprasad Das – the style of Guru Pankaj Charan Das has been referred to as the “mahari style” of Odissi, as he was the adopted son of one of the temple-dancers at the temple of Jagannath at Puri, and shaped his style of Odissi based on the female practice of temple dance. The style of Guru Pankaj Charan Das was thus a style which emphasized the female experience of worship. Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra and Guru Debaprasad Das had both been trained as gotipuas. Guru Debaprasad Das, in his repertoire of Odissi, chose to conspicuously quote gotipua elements, which highlight the embodiment of the male experience of worship. This “male experience” of worship itself, however, is played out through constant references to and attempts to emulate the female experience of worship within the temple. Thus the Debaprasad Das lineage, with its emphasis on the rigour of the tandava element of male vigour and the Chhau martial movement tradition, as well as the complex gendered identity of the gotipua dance, becomes a site for the presentation of a complex and often conflicting gendered identity.

Tantric and Sakta Rituals within Debaprasad Das style of Odissi

While Guru Debaprasad Das choreographed numerous dances centering on the Vaishnav themes, especially embodying the female character Radha, one of the more commonly recognized characteristics of this style of Odissi, which sets it as recognizably distinct from the other styles, is the inclusion of the Tantric traditions within this style of Odissi. Guru Debaprasad Das was deeply invested in bringing the regional Oriya flavour to Odissi, and to this end the inclusion of the traditions of the interior areas and peripheral regions and cultures of Odisha remained as central to his project as the inclusion of the “mainstream” cultural traditions of eastern, coastal Odisha. In this section, I examine how this impetus is embodied in his repertoire.

Tantrism is a sect within the Hindu-Buddhist worldview which emphasizes the concept of *Shakti*, the female power. Its ideas include belief in the concept of the grotesque, and of female unrestraint, with the movement identifying closely with the fierce Hindu goddess Kali. Thus this style of Odissi embraces the embodiment of not merely the sublime but also the grotesque, the uncontrolled and the dangerous. Some of the most celebrated and distinct pieces choreographed by Guru Debaprasad Das are dedicated to the Tantric tradition, and the principle of *tandava*, or rigorous dance, described in the above section, is often used within the repertoire pieces dedicated to the Tantric traditions. The inclusion of choreographic repertoire dedicated to the Tantric philosophies and imagery is seen not only in the repertoire choreographed by Guru

Debaprasad Das himself, but also by those of his two most visible disciples, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir and Guru Gajendra Panda.

One of the most distinctive characteristic features of the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi is the inclusion of the sabdaswarapata in its traditional repertoire. The sabdaswarapata is a ritualistic dance practice which was performed in temples of Sambalpur in western Odisha by male dancers. Like the mahari and gotipua dance traditions, the sabdaswarapata was a local dance tradition which existed in Odisha before the codification and establishment of Odissi. The sabdaswarapata tradition has its roots in the temple of the Goddess Vajreshwari in the district of Sambalpur. Sunil Kothari describes the sabdaswarapata as the “tandava” aspect of Odissi, characterized by rhythmic movements which are "forceful in nature both in execution and in spirit" (Kothari 78). Sabdaswarapata verses and movements are characteristically inserted into repertoire pieces in which the Tantric goddesses are invoked. They are also characteristically inserted into each of the repertoire pieces dedicated to the male god Shiva. While the sabdaswara tradition was traditionally practiced only by male dancers as a ritualistic tradition, its insertion into this style of Odissi created a new context, in which it was performed by female dancers as well, and also for secular events. The insertion of this tradition into this style of Odissi also extended the cultural influences of Odissi, as a dance form, to the areas beyond eastern Odisha to the more peripheral and inaccessible areas of western Odisha.

The inclusion of these Tantric elements in the repertoire of Odissi extends the range of depictions in Odissi from the sensuality of the female form, as embodied by the

emulation of temple sculptures in Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra's style of Odissi to embodying the grotesque and "terrifying" depictions of female characters. David Kinsley, in his book *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine*, asserts that the Mahavidya goddesses, in which Kali is dominant, are strongly associated with "marginality, inauspicious qualities, pollution and death" (Kinsley 6). He describes them as "antimodels" for women, asserting that their roles violate approved social values, customs, norms and paradigms (Kinsley 6). He also points out that the theme of death, which is considered highly polluting in Hindu culture, remains a dominant theme in Mahavidya iconography as several of the goddesses from the cluster are depicted in cremation ground settings, in proximity with corpses, and holding severed limbs (7). Most of these goddesses are either independent from males or dominate them, and are often depicted with loose hair, which is otherwise considered a sign of unrestraint or impurity (Kinsley 7).

In Tantric and Sakta iconography and narrative, goddesses are often depicted as being bloodthirsty, and "uncontrollable." David Gitomer, in his study of the rasas, analyses yet another theory on the goddess Kali, the primary Mahavidya, with respect to the *raudra* rasa in the *Natyashastra*. The *raudra* rasa, one of the seven rasas, or performative emotional states outlined in the *Natyashastra*, connotes the emotive state of extreme anger, with the suggestion of uncontrollable rage. He points out that the *Natyashastra* indicates that the *raudra* rasa is the dominant rasa of the *rakshasas*, or the demon-species, while *vira* rasa, an emotive state indicating valour and bravery, which he finds closely aligned with the *raudra* rasa, is more associated with kings. He also notes that of all the varieties of *vira* rasa, only one variety, the *yuddhavira*, which denotes the

display of valour on the battlefield, involves the act of killing (Gitomer 222). He takes up the narrative of Rama appealing to the goddess Durga, in versions of the epic Ramayana outside of the Valmiki-credited version. He argues that Durga, as a goddess, is initially calm, but as she enters the battlefield and erupts in fury, she transforms into the fearsome goddess Kali, displaying the raudra rasa, and the act of killing. He argues that the figure of Kali brings to surface the submerged culture theme in the rasa ideology, the theme of pollution (Gitomer 227), asserting ultimately that the raudra rasa may be a demonic version of the vira rasa. Kali is therefore associated with not only blood and death, themes which are considered “pollutants” in mainstream Hinduism, but also with the raudra rasa, which was considered the rasa of the rakshasas, or the destructive demonic race in the *Natyashastras*. Thus the female model in Tantrism may be considered antithetical to the attributes embodied by popular Vaishnav female figures such as Sita and Radha, who are characters traditionally depicted to be devoted to their male consorts.

The Debaprasad Das gharana of Odissi, in its repertoire, depicts not only dances dedicated to Radha, but also to the Tantric goddesses such as Kali and the Dasamahavidya. Kinsley’s readings and observations of the Tantric worldview can be applied in order to analyze certain choreographic choices made by Guru Debaprasad Das himself, and also the second generation of dancers and dancemakers of the gharana. One of the celebrated pieces of Guru Debaprasad Das is the *Mahakali Dhyana*, which is an invocatory Mangalacharan piece dedicated to the goddess Kali. The piece begins with the dancer entering the stage with flowers, and proceeding to pay respect to the earth, as characteristic of most Mangalacharan pieces of the Odissi repertoire. The choreography

then proceeds into a section describing attributes of the goddess, followed by a second section, ultimately followed by a highly rigorous sabdaswarapata section in which the dancer embodies the goddess's own physicality before proceeding into the traditional salutation to the audience. The piece characteristically features poses such as the dancer standing with her feet wide apart, holding the left hand close to the mouth, with the back slightly arched and the head tilting back, signifying the goddess Kali drinking the blood of the demons. This stance highlights the lack of restraint, bodily mutilation and grotesque quality of the goddess. The repertoire of the Debaprasad Das lineage thus includes pieces which embody the attributes and physicality of David Kinsley's "antimodel" of the mainstream Hindu feminine.

Both the movement quality and imagery in such pieces of the Debaprasad Das gharana is a marked departure from the other styles of Odissi, in particular the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra style, and the Guru Pankaj Charan Das style, which emphasize the beauty and benign qualities of the female form. Movements such as the wide lunge stances reminiscent of Tantric Hindu and Buddhist Tantric iconography remain distinct within the repertoire of the Debaprasad Das gharana. Both Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra and Guru Pankaj Charan Das have dances choreographed to the goddess Durga, who is recognized as a beautiful, demon-slaying goddess in Hindu mythology. Mahapatra's *Jatajuta Samayukta* describes the beauty and physical attributes of the goddess, while Guru Pankaj Charan Das's *Navadurga* is themed on her nine incarnations. Both these choreographies heavily use the tribhangi stance, and do not employ the sabdaswarapata.

Guru Durgacharan Ranbir and Guru Gajendra Panda, two of the most celebrated

second generation dancemakers of the Debaprasad Das gharana have both choreographed pieces dedicated to the Tantric tradition. Guru Durgacharan's choreographic repertoire includes the *Dasamahavidya*, a 20-minute solo dedicated to the ten goddess incarnations most closely associated with Tantrism. The piece has subsequently been rearranged as an ensemble choreography for numerous performances as well. Guru Gajendra Panda also choreographed a version of the *Dasamahavidya*.

David N. Lorenzen, in his article "Early Evidence for Tantric Religion," claims that goddess worship in India appears to have become more Tantric in character with the rise of a group of goddesses known as the "Matrkas." This group of goddesses, usually identified and worshipped together as a cluster of seven, called "Saptamatrka", appear to have been worshipped increasingly after 400 AD (Kinsley 1988: 155). Guru Durgacharan Ranbir choreographed an ensemble piece titled *Saptamatrka*, dedicated to these goddesses. Two versions of the piece exist: a shorter, ten-minute piece which was performed by the Trinayan Collective in 2008 and also in 2010, as part of their suite for the New York City Fringe Festival, and a longer, 45-minute piece which premiered at the Mukteswara Festival in 2011.

In Guru Durgacharan Ranbir's choreography of *Saraswati Mangalacharan*, which honours the benign and sublime goddess Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge and learning, a Sanskrit lyric phrase, *saraswati bhagawati* (mother-goddess Saraswati) is depicted through the pose of a demon-slaying goddess. Even while the rest of the choreography of the piece is replete with imagery highlighting the sublime and benign qualities of the goddess, the particular movement phrase in the choreography is

reminiscent of the tantric imagery of the goddess as the destroyer of evil. The Tantric and Shaiviite themes and imagery thus maintain a strong presence in the choreographic works of the second generation of dancers and choreographers of this gharana.

Guru Durgacharan Ranbir's works further explore Guru Debaprasad Das's concept of highlighting the local Oriya rituals and historical heritage, like the twelfth-century cult of sun-worship in choreographic works such as *Suryastaka* and *Aditya Archana*, the former a solo piece and the latter an ensemble piece, both dedicated to the Sun and choreographed by Guru Durgacharan Ranbir.

While discussing the work of the Debaprasad Das lineage and its connection to rituals and traditions of goddess worship, especially in regards to the vision of the goddess as terrifying and occasionally grotesque, I must mention the work of the late Guru Surendranath Jena. Guru Surendranath Jena's work in furthering Odissi repertoire, considered to be outside of the traditions of the three established branches of Odissi, largely remains unacknowledged but has gained more visibility due to the scholarship of British scholar Alessandra Lopez y Royo. Guru Surendranath Jena's style of Odissi is markedly different in look and philosophy from the three established branches of Odissi, as pointed out by Royo. It is interesting to note that like Guru Debaprasad Das, part of Guru Surendranath Jena's interests also lay in choreographing to themes of local Tantric traditions and heritage of Odisha. One of Guru Jena's choreographies is the *Shakti Rupa Yogini*, based on one of the sixty four yogini-goddesses at the Hirapur Temple. The dance is choreographed in two parts: the first part takes its inspiration from the sculptures at the Hirapur temple, and the second part is inspired by rural Tantric ritual practices particular

to the area. Guru Jena had studied, as part of his choreographic research and inspiration, the book “Chandi Purana” by Oriya poet Sarala Das. Royo mentions that Guru Jena’s work is often seen as “transgressive” as it is “unfeminine” as Guru Jena sometimes based his compositions on the rasas (emotions) of “vibhatsa” (disgust) and “Raudra” (anger). It is interesting to note that both the Debaprasad Das style and Guru Surendranath Jena’s style of Odissi, which include repertoire pieces highlighting the grotesque, excessive and frightening experience of the gods and goddesses, remain largely marginalized in scholarly rhetoric and larger visibility of Odissi. While the Guru Debaprasad Das style of Odissi is recognized as one of the three established schools of Odissi by the Odissi community, as opposed to the style of Guru Surendranath Jena, which emerged nearly twenty years after the Odissi revival, the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi continues to remain largely marginalized in scholarly discourse.

Movement Lexicon and Qualities

In 2001, when I moved to the United States from India, I took lessons under Kalashri Chitra Krishnamurthy, an established Odissi dance artist and teacher of the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra style in Maryland. Among one of the first differences in movement experience I noted was that my teacher would constantly direct me to lower my arms in the chowka position slightly, and widen the position. During my classes at Nrutyayana, at Guru Durgacharan Ranbir’s residence, I was guided to re-embodiment the original, more narrow position of the arm carriage in the chowka position that I had

originally learnt in Delhi under Guru Sushant Raut in the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi. I was told that the Debaprasad Das technique involved the arms in chowka position to remain in line with the shoulders, as opposed to being slightly lowered and to be bent at 90 degrees.

This episode illustrates part of my methodology in investigating some of the differences in movement in this style of Odissi from the other two styles. The body and its inhabited experience of the styles becomes the central point of reference. Ruth Behar posits that the body acts as a repository of memories, including sensations of pain and pleasure. In the chapter “The Girl in the Cast” in *The Vulnerable Observer: Ethnography that Breaks your Heart*, Behar describes how her childhood trauma of an accident, and her subsequent experience of instability in standing and difficulty in re-learning to walk was relived as an adult when she glimpsed her feet moving during an aerobics class. She argues that “the body is a homeland— a place where knowledge, memory, and pain is stored” (Behar 134). As in the case of Behar, I found that in taking classes in the different styles of Odissi, my body too acted as a repository of memories and sensations, and the sensation of kinaesthetic familiarity that I associated with the Debaprasad Das style, due to my earlier training in the style, often became helpful in the act of recognizing an Odissi style when not verbally articulated. The experience of learning, unlearning and relearning the movement of this style of Odissi gave me a unique vantage point, in terms of being able to inhabit the movement experience of these distinct styles of Odissi. In addition, comparative visual analysis of the different styles of Odissi also revealed further differences in movement choice and movement quality.

I find that the researcher's perception of his or her state of confusion upon arrival into the field is often an indicator of what the researcher may consider the "field." Much of Barbara Browning's positionality to the field in *Samba: Resistance in Motion* is articulated through reference to the dance itself. This is especially highlighted in the narration of her scene of introduction with the mother-of-saints. She also describes herself as participating with her sister sociás in offering libations to the Oxalá during the carnival, indicating that she is seen as an insider by virtue of being allowed to partake in candomblé ritual. This suggests that perhaps her body-mind divide, which she refers to in her Preface, alludes to an "internal" self, and an external self, characterized by the attributes of race and ethnicity. Browning's moments of confusion and challenges are discussed in terms of corporeal movement. While Browning does not describe her process of introduction to the Bahian culture or the candomblé religion, she mentions her initial apprehension and challenges in learning the "significance of the body moving in time" (Browning 32) during her interactions with her mother-of-saints. Browning's mother-of-saints reproaches her for using excessive mime instead of abstract movement in her dance. In her third chapter, she similarly describes how her body struggled while doing push-ups during Boa Gente's capoeira classes.

Browning presents herself not as an insider, but that of an individual initiated into the world that she is researching. She represents herself as an 'outsider' to the world through showing the reactions of individuals of authority in the field. Her mother-of-saints is initially skeptical and amused by Browning's dance, thereby drawing attention to her presence as a 'newcomer' to the Bahian society. Thus Browning practices reflexivity

in the text through giving the reader glimpses of her corporeal "adjustment" to the field. Like Browning, Cynthia Novack, in *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*, highlights her positionality through drawing upon her experience of corporeal "newness" to the form, often describing the bodily challenges and experiences she encountered in adapting to the new form. While Novack refers to her own experiences largely in the second half of the book, when speaking of the form and physical attributes of contact improvisation, we find Barbara Browning's presence throughout the book.

In the context of the embodied corporeal experience becoming a research tool, I found that the dance class, and the phenomenon of "corrections" during the dance class becomes a significant point of reference for analysis of the differences in movement in the different styles of Odissi dance. Along with the correction regarding the arm position in the Debasprasad Das style, I was also told that that it is characteristic to use the *hamsasya mudra*²⁰ gesture in this style of Odissi (see Fig. III), as opposed to the *katakamukha mudra*²¹ which is commonly used in the Odissi style of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra (see Fig. IV). A specific travelling walk-like movement, called the *goithi chali* is also characteristic and important in this style of Odissi. The *bhumi pranam*, or salutation to the earth, customarily done at the beginning and end of the dance class, as well as during the opening piece of the Odissi repertoire, the Mangalacharan, is also

²⁰ Hamsasya Mudra is one of the set of twenty seven asamyukta (single handed) hand gestures. The gesture is produced by touching the tip of the index finger to the tip of the thumb, while spreading the other three fingers widely.

²¹ Katakamukha Mudra is one of the set of twenty seven asamyukta (single-handed) hand gestures. The gesture involves touching the tip of the thumb with the tips of the index finger and middle finger.

significantly different between the three styles of Odissi. During the classes, the movement qualities embodied in this stylistic branch also become apparent – in my movement session with Sukanya Rahman, during which she taught me a repertoire piece titled *Natangi* from Guru Debaprasad Das's repertoire of the 1960s, Rahman emphasized that much of the movement in the piece dealt with momentum and free swing.

The dance classes also became a site in which the history behind some of the movements was explained. During one of my interviews and lessons, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir demonstrated how some of the movements used in the repertoire of this dance comes directly from the folk movement traditions. He demonstrated a simple step from the *Medha Nritya* tradition from Puri and rural Odisha, and then demonstrated how this step is used to depict certain characters in both his own compositions as well as some of the choreographies of Guru Debaprasad Das. This movement is usually used in the *Medha Nritya* tradition by performers wearing large masks and costumes which involve extension of the kinesphere of the body (for example the costume of the ten-armed goddess Durga, which involves the attaching of a large ten-armed attachment to the back of the performer). The movement itself involves a simple shift of weight between the front leg and the back leg, accompanied by a gentle rocking of the body, while keeping the spine in an upright, stiff position. This movement is quoted in many of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir's choreographic compositions, especially in scenes depicting an angry goddess in battle. The movement also appears in a few compositions of Guru Debaprasad Das. Guruji also pointed out how a similar movement appears in the *Moksha Nritya* compositions of Guru Debaprasad Das. Guru Durgacharan Ranbir additionally

demonstrated a number of movements from the dances of the tribal populations in Odisha which have been quoted in repertoire pieces in this style of Odissi.

While explaining a particular movement from the longer *Sthai* piece from the repertoire during class, Sangeeta Dash mentioned how the movement used to be performed using a lean-back type of movement, and was later changed into a tribhanga movement with the permission of Guru Debaprasad Das. She also discussed how the chowka stance had changed over the years from a wide chowka stance during the 1950s and 1960s to a much narrower ideal chowka, which allows the dancer more control over movement transitions and turns. This was also stated by Sukanya Rahman, who recalled that Guru Debaprasad Das himself had told her that the chowka in the 1980s was a much narrower chowka than the chowka stance of the 1950s and 1960s.

Guru Debaprasad Das's style has often been described by its practitioners as minimalist. In an interview, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir stated that he felt that in its philosophy, this style does not emphasize "ornamentation" through movements. He demonstrated a movement in the Guru Debaprasad Das style, pointing out how it, in its details such as the hands, was not embellished with gestures such as *hamsasya mudra*, as in Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra's style of Odissi. The hands, instead, remain in a more minimalist, *pataka hasta mudra*, and the emphasis is on the entire body's involvement in the movement. In addition, another important distinction in the "look" of the two styles lies in the degree of torso articulation. One of the characteristic features of the larger Odissi canon is the hip-upper torso opposition, which imparts a look of sensuousness to the dance form. In keeping with Guru Debaprasad Das's philosophy of minimalism, the

upper torso is articulated in opposition to the hip to a lesser degree in the technique of his style. It is also articulated to a lesser degree during transitions between movements in a phrase, a distinction which gives it a significantly different look from the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra style.

Another distinction in the “look” of this style, and one which sometimes remains a point of contention between its practitioners, is the carriage of the spine. Mostly, the practitioners of this form emphasize verticality, as opposed to an arched spine. During an interview, Sukanya Rahman pointed to the photograph of Guru Debaprasad Das which adorns her mantelpiece. She pointed out how Das held his spine aligned in a vertical line, as opposed to an arched spine. She also pointed out that Ramli Ibrahim, a student of Guru Debaprasad Das, and his dancers at the Sutra Dance Theatre, also follow this verticality of the spine. During my classes with Guru Durgacharan Ranbir in Bhubaneswar, Guru Ranbir confirmed this.

There are thus a number of movements themselves that are characteristic of this stylistic branch of Odissi. Here, I would again like to bring the work of Guru Debaprasad Das in dialogue with Guru Surendranath Jena’s style of Odissi. Occasionally, the *abhangas* movement in Guru Jena’s style is also used in travelling steps, which is not often seen in the established styles of Odissi, including the style of Guru Debaprasad Das. Royo asserts that in the established styles of Odissi under the Jayantika canon, the iconic poses taken from temple sculptures become the “highlights” of a dance sequence, implying that the poses are used largely for brief, frozen moments onstage. Guru Surendranath Jena, in his approach to Odissi, used poses from the temple sculptures to

create 24 movement units.

An analysis of movement in Guru Surendranath Jena's style of Odissi also reveals that Guru Debaprasad Das had used the movements and transitions between movements from the established movement lexicon of Odissi in the form in which it was codified by Jayantika during the 1950s. One of the easily distinguishable signature movements in Guru Jena's work is the stepping of the right and left feet alternately while standing in chowka, with the body progressively sinking into a deeper plié²² with each successive foot stamp. In the Odissi styles of the Jayantika group, including the style of Guru Debaprasad Das, the chowka is maintained at a consistent height, with the knees bent at right angles, which the dancer strives to maintain as he or she proceeds through the different movement variations. Also frequently seen in Guru Jena's work is a quick transition from the abhanga position to the tribhanga position, featuring a quick change in level. Such a transition in the Jayantika styles would be more sustained, and more controlled, as in Guru Debaprasad Das style, or more "softened" through the use of the upper torso movement, as in Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra's style.

The video excerpts from Royo's project, taped during Guru Jena's technique classes taught by his daughter Pratibha Jena, show the dancers executing the different *karanas*, or movement units, as part of "stepping practice," common to classical dance

²² I borrow the term *plié* from ballet vocabulary to describe the deep sinking movement characterizing this movement from Guru Surendranath Jena's movement lexicon. While Odissi dance has terminologies for specific postures and codified movements, Guru Surendranath Jena's style of Odissi postdated the Jayantika codification of Odissi terminology. Through featuring continual motion and transitions between postures such as this, he often transgressed the sculpturesque aesthetic commonly ascribed to Odissi, as shown in Alyssandra Royo's research on the late Guru Jena's work. I find plié an appropriately descriptive word which visually evokes the continual slow sinking nature of this movement, which is unlike a codified posture.

classes. However, these stepping exercises are very different from the stepping exercises practiced by practitioners of the Odissi styles of the Jayantika canon. These exercises draw from Guru Jena's own codified technique, while usually, stepping classes in the other styles of Odissi, even while maintaining differences amongst themselves, consist largely of exercises in the chowka and tribhanga positions and their prescribed range of usage codified by Jayantika. Guru Jena's choreographic work and technique, having evolved twelve years after the Jayantika codification, is thus different in approach from the work of the Jayantika gurus, but shares with them the concept of an inherently "Oriya" dance, the concept of taking inspiration from icons of medieval Oriya architecture, and the five part repertoire as a structure for the performance suite. He often deployed a movement vocabulary that was distinct from that established by Jayantika and, as Royo points out, borrowed nomenclature from the *Shilpa Shastras* (treatises on architecture), as opposed to nomenclature from the dance drama treatises such as the *Natyashastra* and *Abhinaya Darpana*. Guru Jena was thus heavily invested in the temple sculptures as the sources of movements, as sources from which dynamic units of movement could be developed. Conversely, Guru Debaprasad Das's interests lay in the living movement traditions and rituals. While he did use poses from the temple sculptures, he was more invested in the living movement practices of Odisha.

Guru Debaprasad Das had been involved in the codification process at Jayantika itself, and hence the stylistic difference in movement in Guru Debaprasad Das's work lies in the movement qualities of the movements themselves, and in the layering of movement with detail. Even while he added a regional Oriya, and occasionally a "rustic" flavour to

his branch of Odissi, Guru Debaprasad Das's dominant movement signatures remained recognizably in line with the movement codifications formulated by Jayantika. Guru Debaprasad Das was interested in "classicism", but a classicism which was referent to and relevant to the context of local Oriya movement traditions.

Form-Based Repertoire

It is commonly believed that it was over the nomenclature of the *Sthayee* piece of the Odissi repertoire that the Jayantika organization had split into different factions. Guru Debaprasad Das believed that the term *Batu* should be applied only to a piece which would be dedicated to the god Shiva, the god of valour and masculine dance, and accordingly, that piece should involve rigorous movements. He believed that the piece which Jayantika originally conceptualized would be more aptly named the "Sthayee," as it involves abstract explorations of movements and transitions between Odissi postures. His composition is commonly referred to as the "Big Sthayee," or the "Long Sthayee," with the sthayee composition of Guru Pankaj Charan Das referred to as the "Small Sthayee." The music score for the *Sthayee* consists of the lyric "Tham Thai na kititak taham taha tata," which is associated with the popular repertoire piece of the gotipua dancers in which they exhibited their acrobatic skill. Debaprasad Das's use of this lyric indicates a conscious choreographic "quoting" and nod towards the gotipua tradition, in which Debaprasad Das himself had undergone training.

The *Sthayee* dance of Guru Debaprasad Das also contains three brief expressive

sections inserted between the form-dominated sections. These sections feature danced expression to specific quotations from the *Shilpa Shastras*, which were treatises on architecture. These quotations provide guidelines of physicality such as postures, and angles of the head in depicting the female form engaged in various activities and moods, through sculpture.

He also choreographed five *Pallavi* pieces, including the Kalavati Pallavi, Kafi Pallavi, Mukhari Pallavi, Saberi Pallavi, and Ananda Bhairavi Pallavi (Chand 162). Some sources claim that the composition of the prominent Kalyan Pallavi was begun by him, and after his death, was completed by his senior-most disciple, Guru Sudhakar Sahu. Each of the Pallavi compositions credited to him feature a Sanskrit language *dhyana shloka* insert, which describes the *raaga*, or musical structure, on which it is based. These dhyana shlokas feature the personification of the *raaga*, in which the physical characteristics of this raaga, identified as either a male or female character (termed raagamurti, literally translated as the “image of the raaga,” essentially connoting the idea of the raaga embodied as in a figure). The dhyana shloka is also known as the raaga rupa varnana, meaning “description of the physicality of the raaga.” It may be inferred here that Guru Debaprasad Das, in his pallavi compositions, was invested in rendering physical embodiment to otherwise abstract concepts. In addition, the musical scores of the raaga rupa varnana characteristically end with a vocalization of the notes scale of the raaga. Guru Debaprasad Das choreographed a specific hand-gesture for each of the notes of the scale. In this, he drew upon the imagery of animal references for each of the notes: Sa (Corresponding to Western “Do”): Peacock

Re (Corresponding to “Re”): Deer

Ga (Corresponding to “Mi”): Goat

Ma (Corresponding to “Fa”): Bird

Pa (Corresponds to “So”): Parrot

Dha (Corresponds to “La”): Horse

Ni (Corresponds to “Ti”): Elephant

The scale is sung at the end of the raaga rupa varnana, and the dancer depicts the corresponding hand gesture for each of the notes during the singing of the scale.

The dancer Bijoylakshmi Mohanty, a student of Guru Debaprasad Das, was renowned for her presentation of the *bandha nritya*, an acrobatic dance which had traditionally been performed by the gotipuas. The *bandha nritya* was not taught to dancers over the age of fourteen, as it was believed that the difficult acrobatic feats could only be mastered at an early age (Kothari 44). Sunil Kothari's *Odissi: Indian Classical Dance Art* features two pages of photographs of a young Bijoylakshmi Mohanty, posed in various *bandha*-acrobatic poses. Many of the compositions from the Debaprasad Das lineage also feature acrobatic elements of the *bandha nritya*. It has thus become a stylistic feature characteristically associated with this lineage of Odissi.

Emphasis on Theatricality: The *Ashtapadi* series

As I have pointed out previously in my analysis of his repertoire, Guru Debaprasad Das was invested in the preservation of living movement traditions. Part of his project was to

embed these movement traditions in his repertoire, so as to preserve them, and highlight them as "homegrown" Oriya art forms. Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, in an interview, had emphasized Guru Debaprasad Das's investment in the "homegrown Oriya artform:

Guruji used to say, the folk traditions of Odisha are like homemade *ghee* (churned butter). It is nutritious to consume, and will last a long time. Any dance form enriched with the movement traditions of Odisha will last a long time. It will remain authentic and connected to its roots. The new dances are like Desighee – they will sell quickly in the market, but do not last a long time. For a real classical dance, you have to know the folk dance forms, the traditional dance forms (Interview, Feb 21, 2011)

Guru Debaprasad Das's favouring of an unchanged tradition and "homegrown" artform is reflected in his attitude towards adopting the performance modes of the regional Oriya theatres into his style of Odissi, especially as seen in his treatment of the Ashtapadi series.

As I have pointed out in the previous chapter, prior to his involvement in the Odissi revival in Cuttack, Guru Debaprasad Das was heavily involved in theatre. The expressive pieces in his repertoire bear the influence of his interest in theatricalization, and in the depiction of the human emotion. Guru Debaprasad Das's interest in storytelling lay in the highlighting of the inner mood or emotion, as opposed to the emphasis on conveying the setting of the story or the action as seen in the other styles of Odissi. This is perhaps best seen in his choreographic treatment of *Abhinaya* series set to the poet Jayadev's seminal poem titled *Geeta Govinda*.

The 12th century poet Jayadev was considered one of the foremost figures of Oriya literary history. He was born in Odisha, and wrote in Sanskrit. He composed the *Geeta Govinda*, a collection of verses which chronicle the romance between the Hindu god Krishna and his childhood sweetheart Radha. The *Geeta Govinda* is divided into

twelve chapters, and each chapter is further divided into twenty four subdivisions, also known as *prabandhas*. Each prabandha further consists of couplets, with sets of eight couplets known as the *ashtapadi* focusing on a specific theme. These ashtapadi had been historically used for the expressive dances of the maharis, or temple dancers.

The eroticism prevalent in these ashtapadis is sublimated, with the longing between Radha and Krishna equated with the devotion between the mortal and the divine. The *Geeta Govinda* became one of the cornerstones of the bhakti movement, especially in the Vaishnavite sect of Hinduism, which became very popular in Odisha during the 15th century. Upon the revival of the classical Indian dances, including Odissi, the ashtapadi formed an important part of the abhinaya (expressional) element of the dance repertoire. Typically, an ashtapadi choreography consists of choreography to the lyrics of selected verses from a specific ashtapadi of the *Geeta Govinda*; rarely do choreographers compose dances to the ashtapadi in entirety.

In this section, I have undertaken a comparative analysis of a few choreographies based on the ashtapadi lyrical scores. Since the choreographies of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra and Guru Debraprasad Das are considered to be markedly different, I examine the treatment of the same lyrical score in the choreographies of these two different lineages. It is my aim that analyzing the approaches of the two choreographers and their successors in their lineages will point to the distinctions in the underlying philosophies of these two distinct choreographic approaches.

I have done this largely through examining videorecordings and archival recordings. As there are few videorecordings of Guru Debraprasad Das himself, I have

analyzed the performance of his students, as well as of dancers of the second and third generation of his lineage. In the instance of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra's choreographies to the ashtapadi, I was able to access videorecordings of his performances, which have been well documented in the Doordarshan National Television archives. In addition, I have analyzed performances of his choreographies by his students.

Some of the archival materials of the Debaprasad Das lineage were acquired through fieldwork trips. These included original performance videorecordings from the personal collection of Sukanya Rahman. In addition, I was also able to hear vocal recordings of Guru Debaprasad Das through digitized reel-to-reel recordings of the ashtapadi, as well as access Rahman's class notes of Guru Debaprasad Das's choreographies.

Nindati Chandana: I had first watched this performance with Sukanya Rahman, at her residence in Orr's Island, Maine, as she shared her video archives of her performances of Guru Debaprasad Das style Odissi with me. This piece was the second piece in an evening of performance commemorating the release of Raagini Devi's *Book of Dances* in New York City in 1991. This ashtapadi marks the eighth song of the *Geeta Govinda*. The song is a narrative sung by a friend of Radha to Krishna, describing Radha's state of anguish in his absence. Radha's complex behaviour as she waits in both anguish and anticipation, is framed within the narrative of the *sakhi* (confidante) to Krishna. Radha's physio-psychological state is described: she finds the sandalwood paste and moonlight unbearable as together, they scorch her skin. As she waits, she also prepares beds of flowers in anticipation of Krishna's arrival.

In Rahman's performance, the dancer enters from stage left during a short musical introduction. A sense of melancholia pervades both her gait and the piece to follow. Radha is depicted as being in anguish, of shuddering as she removes the sandalwood paste which clings to her, and as she grows weary and sorrowful in her separation from Krishna. The most notably distinct characteristic of the expression is that it centers heavily in the face and the upper body, and the hands perform the gestural *mudras* in interpretation of the lyrics. The lower body remains largely in the tribhanga position, and alternates the tribhanga position on the right and left side occasionally. The movement across the stage is minimal, and the focus of the choreography seems to be on the depiction of Radha's behaviour and psychological landscape. The composition is set to four selected stanzas from the larger ashtapadi *Nindati Chandana*. The dance ends with the depiction of Radha going into a thinking pose.

In the composition by Guru Kelucharan, performed by Dipanwita Roy and telecast in the National Programme of Dance, there are musical elaborations between the stanzas. In addition, one finds *sancharis*, or multiple successive repetitions of a line in the musical score of the song. The abhinayas of Guru Debaprasad Das are characteristically known to be devoid of *sancharis*, and instead, known for focusing on interpretation of the lyrics.

Also, in comparison with the minimalist choreography of Guru Debaprasad Das, one might concur that a kind of sensuality pervades Guru Kelucharan's composition. For instance, to the line *lasa kala kamaniyam* ("a bed to practice her seductive art") the dancer lies back on the ground in a languid, lounging position. In contrast, in the

Debaprasad Das composition, the same line is depicted through the dancer leaning back in a deep tribhanga pose, resting her head on her arms. One also finds Roy's languid lounging pose in a number of places throughout the choreography, such as in the line *karoti kusuma sayaniyam* ("she lies on a bed of flowers, waiting for you"). Since the focus of the choreography in Guru Kelucharan's composition is the depiction of imagery, we often find a gamut of expressions within the same line of the verse. For instance, Roy smiles to express ideas such as the beauty of the flower bed, and Radha's desire.

While Sukanya Rahman's rendition of the Debaprasad Das choreography captures the overall mood and anguish of the piece, Dwipanita Roy's rendition in Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra's tradition focuses on the visual expression of smaller individual units, such as phrases of the verses. Rahman's rendition, on the other hand, depicts the smaller moments, such as Radha's sensual daydreams, framed within a larger narrative of Radha's anguish. Rahman's movements are also smaller and more gestural, as opposed to Roy's larger movements. Perhaps the tendency towards using minimal stage space and small gestures in the early expressive choreographies of Guru Debaprasad Das comes from his own training under the maharis or the temple dancers. In the late 1940s, Guru Debaprasad Das took lessons from Kokilaprava Mahari in singing and dancing (Nrutyan website). The maharis traditionally danced with smaller movements, due to the space constraints inside the temples (Royo, Performing Konark).

The distinctions in points of focus can be further observed in the composition of *Pasyati Disi Disi*, in the respective styles of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra and Guru Debaprasad Das. *Pasyati Disi Disi* is a song of Radha's erratic and unpredictable

behaviour as she waits for Krishna, as narrated by her confidante to Krishna. Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra's own extremely expressive rendition of this piece features him dancing the lines *Nath Hare, Nath Hare* (Oh god Hari!) by depicting, through gestures and pose, the imagery of Krishna holding the flute and with a peacock feather adorning his hair. This danced imagery draws upon the commonly recognized iconography associated with the god Krishna, of being the enchanting flute-player, and wearing a peacock feather in his hair or crown. In contrast, Vani Madhav, in her rendition of the piece in the Debaprasad Das style, depicts the line "*Nath Hare, Nath Hare*" with her hands folded together in supplication to the god.

Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, during the repeating sancharis of *Pasyati Disi Disi* enacts Radha going to her wardrobe, looking at the different saris, trying a few on, deciding that she does not like them, and then finally choosing one to put on for Krishna. The choreography for the section is filled with intricate details of wearing the sari. Ileana Citaristi, in her biography of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, titled *The Making of a Guru*, notes that he was interested in quotidian movements, and observed them keenly. One finds that his choreography draws upon the intricate details of everyday movement, and these movements are then incorporated into the ashtapadi choreography, in the sancharis or musical sections between the stanzas. The musical sections in *Pasyati Disi Disi*, for instance, feature the dancer depicting Radha leaving stealthily into the night to meet Krishna. In contrast, choreographies in Guru Debaprasad Das's style often feature smaller sections of music between the song, if any at all. Sukanya Rahman's rendition of the early *Nindati Chandana*, with vocal accompaniment provided by Karuna Bhaduri, is

entirely devoid of music between the stanzas. In addition, an original reel-to-reel recording of Guru Debaprasad Das providing vocal accompaniment for the piece also features no music between the stanzas. The musical accompaniment itself is very minimal, consisting of a single flute, and Guru Debaprasad Das himself playing the mardala percussion.

In a 1990 performance of *Rase Harimiha*, directed by Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, a young Sangeeta Dash enters the stage with a lowered gaze and sadness. In the piece, Radha sings of her memories of Krishna to her friend. The entry in this composition establishes the mood of the piece, of the protagonist (Radha) singing of the beauty of Krishna, and feeling jealous of his dalliance with the other belles of the Vrindavan village. The piece depicts Radha taking refuge in the thickets. Dash's portrayal of emotion is largely captured in the face, hands and upper torso. Her eyes are downcast, and she bites her lips in a display of sadness. On the other hand, Dwipanita Roy's performance of the piece, also aired on the National Programme of Dance, features her entering with a musical introduction. However, instead of establishing the emotional mood of the piece, Roy establishes the physical scenery of the piece, depicting the wind, the trees, and the thickets of the forest through gestures, across the stage. I find that choreographed into the introductions of these pieces are the philosophies of the two choreographers; on one hand, the composition of Guru Debaprasad Das is invested in communicating the emotional state of the piece to the audience while Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra's composition is invested in the depiction of the physical imagery of the story. It is largely the face that is emphasized as the medium of expression in Guru

Debaprasad Das's choreography, with a focus on subtle details such as how the eyes and the mouth react to these emotional states. On the other hand, the entire body acts as the medium of communication in Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra's choreography, and participates in the imagery created onstage. The emphasis on Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra's composition is on the dancer as the storyteller, capturing the details in imagery.

Thus we find that in the choreographic treatment of the ashtapadis in Guru Debaprasad Das lineage, the emotional state and mood of the protagonist is privileged over the physicalization of the visual imagery.

Theoretical Dialogue: A Note on Rhetoric

In this section, I would like to examine rhetoric as the site of labelling dance traditions within Odissi as "classical", "less classical", and "more classical", and "pure classical". I elaborate upon some of the possible reasons behind this branch of Odissi being marginalized and labelled as "less classical" by those outside of the tradition.

In poststructuralist theory, language is seen as the site where identity, power, social meaning, and individual subjectivity are negotiated (Weedon 173). Michel Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, posits that it is through hierarchical observation and discourse that discipline, and hence the regulation of bodies, is established (Foucault 1975: 170). While Foucault wrote about the relationship between discursive practices and power in the context of institutions, this argument of the discourse being a site of

negotiation of identities and power is a theme that is manifest in the scholarly writings on Indian dance since the 1980s. Uttara Asha Coorlawala, in her influential 1994 dissertation titled “Classical and Contemporary Indian Dance: Overview, Criteria and a Choreographic Analysis,” cites the example of Bharata Natyam, which was codified by Rukmini Devi, with the result that the physicality of the dance was henceforth observed through a regulatory gaze similar to the hierarchical observation theorized by Foucault (Coorlawala 74). Pallabi Chakravorty, in *Bells of Change: Kathak Dance, Women and Modernity in India*, points out, in a study of the twentieth-century development of Kathak, that the predominance of the Lucknow gharana of Kathak resulted in the “homogenization and standardization of the stylistic differences between different gharanas and the nuances of individual artists” (Chakravorty 69). She cites Mekhala Natavar in describing a seminar on codifying hand gestures held at Kathak Kendra in April 1993 in saying that later, multi-variegated styles would be labelled as “incorrect” if they differed from Maharaj-ji's style (Chakravorty 70). Chakravorty cites Leela Venkatraman in saying that “it is well-known that Durgalal, a brilliant kathak dancer, faced serious political problems with the power-brokers in Delhi during his short tenure as a kathak artist before his untimely death” (Chakravarty70).

I argue that lineage-branches of Odissi which link their aesthetic to the aesthetics established in Sanskrit texts become recognized and labelled as legitimately “classical,” while the other lineage-branches become marginalized due to their links to local traditions.

While Guru Debaprasad Das is acknowledged as one of the three leading pioneers

of the Odissi revival, along with Guru Pankaj Charan Das and Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, it is not uncommon to hear rhetoric projecting the idea that this style of Odissi is “less classical.” It brings to the core the question of what may be considered “classical” in the context of Odissi. Is it the marriage of the local dance forms with the Sanskrit *Natyashastra* text which legitimizes a local dance form as “classical”? In this case, each of the three pioneering gurus of Odissi was associated with the Jayantika organization which strove towards this end. In addition, is it also the attempt towards creating a dance form which would have a pan-Indian, and also, later on, international accessibility?

I argue that perhaps one of the reasons behind “Odissi” being considered a monolithic label is the conscious attempt by scholars to present Odissi as an ancient and timeless artform, distinct from the other classical dance forms of India, especially during the early years of the revival. The multiplicity of dance genres and dance contexts in India is endorsed by both dance artists and dance scholars, but this acknowledgement of multiplicity seems to be relegated to the level of acknowledging the distinctiveness of the eight different classical Indian dance forms. The complexity of perspectives within these dance styles, especially in the case of Odissi, often remains overlooked in scholarship. Since the Odissi revival took place after the Bharata Natyam revival, the Odissi revivalists faced the challenge of not only legitimizing Odissi as “classical” but also of establishing this dance form as distinct from Bharata Natyam, which also claimed origins in temple dance practices. I argue that the monolithic notion of Odissi is an effect of the revivalist project, reflecting a conscious attempt to create a recognizably distinct classical

dance form.

Another possible reason for this style of Odissi being labelled as “less classical” may possibly be traced back to the *Natyashastra* itself, and its emphasis on the polar distinction between the terms *desi* (local, folk) and *margiya* (eternal, classical, timeless). The *Natyashastra* was the text which was used by the revivalist scholars and Gurus to align the local Oriya dance tradition with the documented “Odra Magdhi” branch of dance in order to fashion a “classical dance” which remains unchanged since antiquity. Since Guru Debaprasad Das consciously strove to emphasize the regional folk and ritualistic dance forms within his repertoire of Odissi, albeit via an attempt to marry the *desi* with the *margiya*, his emphasis on the folk forms may have been viewed as aligning too closely with the *desi*. Here, it must also be mentioned that Guru Debaprasad Das was highly respected for his knowledge of the *Shastras* and Sanskrit texts, including the *Natyashastra*. Part of his teaching responsibilities at the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya, along with teaching repertoire, was teaching “Theory,” which included knowledge on the existing Odishan texts on dance aesthetics, Sanskrit aesthetic texts, as well as knowledge of local and folk traditions. Rosemary Jeanes, who interviewed him for her thesis on the learning and transmission systems of Odissi tradition, recalls meeting him, and being asked by him, upon her mention of the research topic, if she knew what the word “Guru” meant. Jeanes elaborates that she provided an etymology of the word “Guru” derived from the Upanishads, which appeared to satisfy him (Jeanes 21). This episode demonstrates Guru Debaprasad Das’s deep investment in linking identity and knowledge to the ancient Sanskrit religious and aesthetic texts. His vision thus did not involve

presenting the folk tradition as “classical” but rather, of inscribing folk movements into the “classically-coded” movement. However, his emphasis on the folk movement may indeed have been one of the contributing factors to the aesthetic of his style of Odissi being labelled as “less classical”.

Another reason for his style of Odissi being largely marginalized in visibility, especially during the 1990s, may have been the relatively early passing of Guru Debaprasad Das during the 1980s. Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra outlived Guru Debaprasad Das by almost twenty years, as did Guru Pankaj Charan Das. During this time, they would have had the opportunities to create further repertoire pieces in their style, as well as train more students in their style of Odissi. They would have also had the time to spread their work further abroad. The second generation of choreographers of the Debaprasad Das lineage, with gurus such as Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, and Guru Gajendra Panda, is currently involved in developing further repertoire works, and travelling to propagate the lineage.

Costuming

Before the Odissi revival in the 1950s, the traditional dance practiced by the gotipuas and maharis, on which the revived “classical” Odissi modelled itself, was practiced and performed in costumes consisting of the traditional sari which was draped and wrapped around the dancer. During the early years of the 1950s, and the first few years after the revival, the Odissi sari was draped in the *dakshini* style, resembling loose pants which

would enable the dancer the mobility and articulation of the legs. The photograph of Priyambada Mohanty from her 1954 performance at the Inter-University Youth Festival also shows her wearing the sari draped in this dakshini style. Guru Debaprasad Das continued to favour the sari worn in this draped style after the revival. An early dress rehearsal video and interview footage of Indrani Rahman, taken from her England tour in 1959, also depicts her wearing the sari in this draped style.

During the 1960s, the pre-stitched Odissi costume was introduced. This involved a costume which was pre-stitched in the “look” of the dakshini-style sari, and was a convenient costume for performers for time, and also quick changes between costumes. Neelashree Patnaik, a direct student of the founder-Guru, mentioned in an interview that Guru Debaprasad Das favoured the sari to be tied around the performer, rather than using pre-stitched saris (Acharya, "Interview"). Guru Durgacharan Ranbir mentioned that Guru Das’s preference was especially for the unstitched, tied *pata*²³ sari. Sangeeta Dash remembers that when she had ordered her first pre-stitched costume, Guru Debaprasad Das was so upset that he had stopped interacting with her (Chand 178), emphasizing Guru Debaprasad Das’s insistence on the use of the tied sari for Odissi performances.

Although this is not a uniform feature, a number of performers from this lineage of Odissi strive to adhere to Guru Debaprasad Das’s fondness for the tied sari costuming. Most notable among these is Ramli Ibrahim from Malaysia, and the dancers of his Sutra Dance Theatre. In performance, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir and his male dancers also wear the tied sari during their performances, unlike the male dancers of the other two

²³ Silk

primary Odissi lineages, who wear the stitched sari.

The performers from the Debaprasad Das lineage who use the pre-stitched costumes mostly favour the costume with the pleats visible in the center. Guru Durgacharan Ranbir also mentioned that one of the important aspects of the costuming and makeup in this style was the painting of a small “v-shaped” mark on the upper bridge of the nose of both male and female performers. Manoj Behara, in his interview in Chand’s book, states that Guru Debaprasad Das preferred the sandal paste, as opposed to face-paint or any other synthetic paint (Chand 180), for adorning the face, as sandalwood was the traditional paste applied to the face in the Vaishnav tradition. In addition, he preferred the use of real flowers in the hair, as opposed to artificial flowers. Guru Debaprasad Das thus favoured the import and continuation of traditional modes of performance in the reconstructed Odissi designed for the twentieth-century proscenium stage, in the face of newer adaptations adopted by other revivalist Odissi gurus.

Pedagogical Approach

Gharana and the Significance of the Pedagogy and Legacy in Gharana System.

The concept of pedagogical lineage is central in the discourse of stylistic traditions within the Indian classical arts, including the Odissi dance. Rosemary Jeanes, in her thesis, centering on the *guru-shishya parampara* or the tradition of the master-disciple relationship, defines this tradition as the uninterrupted succession or lineage which “connotes continuity of traditions over many previous and future generations of teachers

and students” (Jeanes 1). A practitioner of Odissi, when introducing himself or herself, first mentions their immediate teacher, and then identifies the lineage of the founder-guru. The *gharana* system lends to the artistic discipline a personalized feeling, since the dancer then has a sense of where he or she is historically placed in the line of teachers and students. The *gharana* system is therefore, essentially, a “living” system, with much of the transmission occurring orally, and through the corporeally transmitted practice in the dance class. Guru Debaprasad Das, in addition to teaching students privately, also taught Odissi dance as a faculty member in the Dance Department at the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya in Bhubaneswar.

Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, who studied under Guru Debaprasad Das at the then newly-formed Dance Department Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya between 1970 to 1977, remembers Guru Debaprasad Das as typically starting his classes with exercises, footwork exercises, and then proceeding to repertoire pieces. He recalls that his teacher “inserted theory within the practice” (interview, February 17, 2011) through adding contextual information as the students practiced a certain movement. Sangeeta Dash, in her interview in Gayatri Chand’s book, describes how the classes taught by Guru Debaprasad Das were both disciplined as well as informal; she asserts that he used to teach through discussion as well as movement (Chand 174). Sukanya Rahman also remembers his classes as starting with exercises involving footwork and bodily movement and stances, and then quickly progressing to the repertoire pieces. We thus find that there was an emphasis on the embodied knowledge, and the act of learning through “doing” in his pedagogy.

I was able to access personal choreographic notes during my interview and visit to Sukanya Rahmah in Orr's Island, Maine. These included notes taken by Sukanya Rahman herself during her classes with Guru Debaprasad Das, as well as notes given to her by her mother, Indrani Rahman, based on her memories and classes with Guru Debaprasad Das. From these notes, several relevant aspects of Das's pedagogical approach emerged. One of the significant aspects was Das's reliance on the use of sketches, in order to demonstrate movement qualities, certain bodily postures or stances, or the performance space. During an interview, Sukanya Rahman displayed an original sketch rendered by Guru Debaprasad Das, depicting the motions, use of prop, and bodily stance of a female dancer performing a traditional dance of the Bhumija tribe. During interviews, several of the first generation disciples of Guru Debaprasad Das confirmed that in addition to the actual physical demonstration and subsequent physical practice, Guru Debaprasad Das often drew pictures to support a visual understanding of the bodily movement and its historical context. Geeta Mahalik and Guru Durgacharan Ranbir also remembered him using sketches as part of his methodology. A photograph taken by Rosemary Jeanes depicts Guru Debaprasad Das drawing a temple space on the blackboard during his classes at Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya, in order to demonstrate the performance space of the mahari dancers (Jeanes 139).

Guru Debaprasad Das's book *Nrutyasarani*

In the late 1980s, the Odissi Research Centre was founded in Bhubaneswar. This centre

was later renamed the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra Odissi Research Centre. *The Odissi Dance Pathfinder* Volume 1 and Volume 2 were soon released by the Centre, and these books list the different components of technique, and these lay the fundamental points of emphasis in technique largely from the point of view of the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra style of Odissi dance.

The *Nrutyanusarani* is a compendium for technique written by Guru Debaprasad Das, and as such is integral to an understanding of his pedagogy. The book is written in Oriya, and is replete with sketches. Gayatri Chand, in her book *Guru Debaprasad Das: An Icon of Odissi*, provides a translation of a large section of *Nrutyasarani*. According to Chand, Guru Debaprasad Das began work on the manuscript in 1976 (Chand 69). The book was published posthumously in 2001, and released during the International Odissi Festival 2001, held at the Kamani Auditorium in New Delhi. Included in the explanation of each exercise is the historical name and context for the exercise or drill, implying that providing this historical context was also an integral part of Guru Debaprasad Das's pedagogical philosophy.

Conclusion

During my theory training session, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir had provided the evocative metaphor of Guru Debaprasad Das's body as a museum which housed different dance and movement forms of Odissi. Indeed this metaphor of the "museum" may be extended to the repertoire pieces of this style itself – they house elements of movement repertoires

of regional folk dances in Odisha, as well as movement traditions from the tribal communities in Odisha.

In the chapter, I have examined the ways in which a strong impetus toward Oriya regionalism is embodied in the dances of Guru Debaprasad Das's style. I also analyze the historical cultural and political differences between coastal Odisha and interior, Western districts of Odisha and point to the political implications of Guru Debaprasad Das's inclusion of Western Odisha's movement practices into his style of classical Odissi dance. I argue that through his insertion of the *sabdaswarapata* ritualistic practice into his repertoire, he includes western Odisha within the fold of classical Odissi dance. Through this, he resists the dominant emphasis on coastal Odisha in the representation of Oriya culture.

This lineage of Odissi also differs from the other two in its emphasis on the male spiritual experience. The dance of the maharis embodied female spiritual experience, as the maharis were married to the temple deity through rituals, and expressed their devotion to these temple gods through their dance. The dance of the gotipuas had its roots in *sakhi bhava*, the spiritual movement which emphasized envisioning the Divine as the male spirit, and the human self as the female lover. In addition, the gotipuas danced dressed in the female garb, thus embodying the female spiritual experience through movement. The dance lineages of Guru Pankaj Charan Das and Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, with their roots in the mahari and gotipua dance traditions respectively, are thus both rooted in practices embodying the female spiritual experience. While dance pieces involving *tandava* or dance emphasizing male rigour, exist in the repertoires of both these lineages

as well, these lineages themselves draw upon the heritage of the female spiritual experience. Guru Debaprasad Das' system of Odissi, with its emphasis on the *sabdaswarapata*, traditionally performed by male dancers performing movements representing the male rigour and physical endurance, consciously affirmed the male spiritual experience.

The complexity of theorizing the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi is demonstrated by the fact that this style of Odissi is also described in the rhetoric of some scholars and practitioners as “older” and “more pure,” especially in regards to the theatricalised storytelling pieces of the repertoire, and that Debaprasad Das actively sought to resist change. Selma Jeanne Cohen nods in the direction of Nelson Goodman in contending that “an obvious style, easily identified by some superficial quirk, is properly decried as a mere mannerism. A complex and subtle style, like a trenchant metaphor, resists reduction to a literal formula” (Cohen 340). Ultimately, the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi is thus a style of Odissi which embodies the often contrasting and fragmented aspects of Odishan history, rather than a singular ideology or narrative. In the next chapter, I examine the present-day practice of this style of Odissi in a number of settings, and some of the often-contrasting voices within this style of Odissi.

Chapter 5: Negotiating the Gharana: An Ethnographer's Observations of the living Debaprasad Das Tradition

This dissertation seeks to theorize the Debaprasad Das *gharana* of dance through probing its history, and theorizing its embodied philosophies and stylistic characteristics.

However, a theorization of the gharana remains incomplete without the consideration of the living tradition. It is through the practice, teaching, and artistic work of the present-day practitioners, or the “living tradition” of the gharana that this style is propagated, filtered, distilled, and carried forward. Accordingly, this chapter is dedicated to observations and encounters with this gharana of Odissi as it functions in the twenty-first century.

I trace a genealogy of different contexts in which this style of Odissi is maintained, negotiated, performed and propagated. I examine issues such as the teaching and practice of this style both inside and outside of India, the creation of new repertoire, and creative agency. I also undertake a detailed analysis of the work and style of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir as a second generation choreographer of the Debaprasad Das legacy. Here I examine how the work of choreographers of the second generation of this lineage dialogues with the ideas of Guru Debaprasad Das. In the previous chapter, I argued that Guru Debaprasad Das's technique and repertoire embody the larger ideas of the Odissi revival, such as an emphasis on Oriya regionalism, while also deviating by highlighting the previously marginalized cultures of western Odisha. Here, I contend that while the second generation of choreographers of this lineage adhere to Guru Debaprasad Das's policy of inclusion of movement practices associated with western Odisha as well as

tribal and folkloric practices, they often deviate from his emphasis on Oriya songs in order to make their work more accessible nationally and internationally.

Bourdieu, in his opening to *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, states that the anthropologist's account invariably features an inescapable theoretical "distortion" by virtue of the ethnographer's presence as an observer in the field (*Outline of a Theory 1*). My fieldwork and scope of my research has been informed by my positionality in the field, of being a researcher as well as a practitioner and student of this stylistic lineage of Odissi. While this positionality has enabled me to inhabit the experience of a contemporary practitioner of this lineage, both inside Odisha as well as outside India, it has, on other occasions, somewhat limited the scope of my research in other ways. For instance, I observed and participated in the classes taught by my own guru, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, at Nrutyayan in Odisha. Within the tradition of the *guru-shishya parampara*, a student cannot train under other gurus, even within the same stylistic school. Thus, while I was able to inhabit the experience of a trainee in one of the premier institutions of this style of Odissi, I could not take classes under other gurus and thus access the corporeal and kinaesthetic experiences of their pedagogical systems.

Yvonne Daniel's disclaimer regarding not representing the individual voices of her informants due to fears of being implicated in and putting her informants in danger of being implicated in counterrevolutionary activity and discourse (Daniel 23) underlines the political realities of the ethnographers and the responsibilities and political currency that their writings are capable of carrying. This also, perhaps, highlights the larger significance and association of dance with political representation, nation and identity.

Guru Debaprasad Das's style of Odissi has been considered to be less mainstream and also less widespread in visibility and outreach than the style of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra.

The Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi currently enjoys a transnational presence. This is largely a feature that has come up in the first decade of the 2000s. I argue that the artistic practice within the gharana is marked by heterogeneity. Different teachers have slightly different versions of the same repertoire pieces of Guru Debaprasad Das. In addition, as the teaching practice within this gharana and in the field of Indian classical dances in general is based on oral transmission, different teachers emphasize different aspects of the complex philosophy of Guru Debaprasad Das, which is embodied in their choreographic works.

The gharana currently has, at its most active and visible core, the choreographic work, living practices, and students of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir and Guru Gajendra Panda. Part of this chapter consists of my participant-observation-based ethnography at various sites, such as New Delhi, Bhubaneswar, and Kolkata. Other methodologies include video analysis, video observation and visual culture analysis.

An Ethnography of the Corporeal Encounters

Dance ethnography over the last three decades has been characteristically invested in the understanding of human body, its participation in movement practices and relationship to

"meaning" in different contexts and societies. This interest has been in the body of both the observed research subjects as well as the ethnographer's own body, thereby self-consciously disclaiming the anthropological "distortion" articulated by Bourdieu. This chapter is based largely on my ethnographic fieldwork in Bhubaneswar in Odisha, and New Delhi, in India. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a number of my understandings of the distinctive characteristics of this stylistic tradition occurred in the dance class, and were felt corporeally. My body was thus a mediator between the field and my understanding of it. It was through the medium of the body that I was able to participate in the field, as a dancer and ensemble member of the Nrutyayan troupe, and as a student in Guru Durgacharan Ranbir's dance class.

Over the last thirty years, dance scholars have understood dance as a site where bodily performance is physically manifest. Gail Weiss and Honi Fern Haber note that the very expression of "the body" has become problematized and is increasingly supplanted by the term "embodiment" (Weiss and Haber xiii). In *The Body, Dance and Cultural Theory*, Helen Thomas marks this historical shift of scholarly attention to the body, claiming that the body had been a marginal topic before the 1980s, and that it gained much popularity in dance scholarship during the 1990s (Thomas 11). This discursive shift, with its characteristic embrace of the body and the bodily, is termed as the "body project" by Thomas.

Tomie Hahn, in her preface to *Sensational Knowledge: Embodying Culture through Japanese Dance*, describes the marks on the floor of the studio of her *nihon buyo* teacher in Tokyo. Her teacher describes the floor as being marked with sweat and tears.

Hahn reads these marks as a metaphor for the body being inscribed onto the floor, hinting, perhaps, that the body will be inscribed in her writing as well. Indeed, she mentions later in her preface, that the lessons of the body have inspired her ethnographic methodology (Hahn xiv). Her investigation centers around how dance is transmitted, and "absorbed" through the body, taking as a case study, a distinct pedagogical lineage of the Japanese *nihon buyo* dance tradition. Hahn theorizes the body as a mediator between the self and the world. She describes her learning process of the *nihon buyo* dance as the experience of "corporeal lessons" (Hahn 3). She is particularly invested in investigating the phenomenon of the senses being the primary instruments of transmission and learning in the learning process of the dance (Hahn 4). Her emphasis on learning through the senses indicates that there is, in essence, a sense of "absorption" involved in the learning process. Hahn asserts that in her approach to dance ethnography, she perceives her own body itself as an essential part of the "field" (Hahn xiv). Her own body thus, is an important site of her ethnographic investigation. Hahn's approach is thus based heavily on the phenomenon of corporeal experience and the reliance of the body on the senses in order to learn a dance.

In this regard, Hahn's approach may be considered reminiscent of the approach of Sally Ann Ness during her fieldwork in Cebu City in the Philippines. Ness likens the ethnographer, in the process of participation-observation-based fieldwork, to a dancer learning a new choreography from a choreographer (Ness 11). She asserts that like the dancer, who in the process of learning new choreography submits herself in trusting the judgement of the choreographer, the ethnographer also submits and is open to

"absorbing" the field (Ness 11). Ness, like Hahn, sees the body as a means to "absorb" the movement through kinaesthetic perception in the field, and is invested in the sensory perception of the field. In her fieldwork process, she observes not only the visible and auditory phenomena, but also describes the perception of the field through her skin, and how the skin itself is perceived in the culture of Cebu City as an indicator of a person's emotional nature (Ness 44).

My corporeal experience both marked and was marked by my varying positionalities in the distinct "fields" I encountered during fieldwork in my multi-sited ethnography. While in some sites, I was the dancer-student-performer, in other sites, I was solely the interviewer. Thus while in some sites, I inhabited the corporeal experience of the working professional dancer of the Debaprasad Das style, in other cases, I merely observed the dancers, or engaged in discourse with the dancer regarding their practice. During my fieldwork with Sukanya Rahman in Orr's Island, Maine, it was not until Rahman pulled out her "dancing rug"²⁴ and taught me the *Natangi* repertoire piece from the 1960s, which the late Guru Debaprasad Das taught her, that I was able to experience the more momentum-initiated movements of the early works of the Debaprasad Das repertoire. Similar to the experience of Ness and Hahn, I found that particularly during my first forays into the field, a large part of my "fieldnotes" were taken through my sensory experiences of the field.

Along with being marked by corporeal experience, this ethnography is also

²⁴ The "dancing rug" was a rug Rahman pulled out to cover the floor as we practiced the dance. She mentioned that it had been gifted to her mother, Indrani Rahman, by the Shah of Iran, after a performance in Iran.

intersected by the notion of affect. One of the highest compliments that an Oriya individual can pay an Odissi dancer of non-Oriya origin is by telling them that they “dance like an Oriya.” It is interesting to note, in this context, that the dancer from outside Odisha, or from outside India, is told that in order to learn Odissi dance properly, they must come to Odisha. My guru, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, often states that Odissi dance can only be learnt in Odisha, when a person experiences living on Oriya soil, and eating Oriya food with their hands. Seigworth and Gregg, in “An Inventory of Shimmers,” introducing *The Affect Theory Reader*, claim that “affect arises in the midst of *in between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon” (Seigworth and Gregg, 1). They claim that “affect is in many ways synonymous with force or forces of encounter” (Seigworth and Gregg 2). We find, in Guruji’s rhetoric regarding the non-Oriya dancer learning to dance Odissi properly only when fully immersed in Oriya culture and the Oriya lifestyle in Odissi’s homeland, an echo of this notion of affect – of a body’s ability and potential to “absorb” an art form through the experience of being in the space where it is practiced.

In this respect, it may be argued that a notion of “affect” is central to the Hindu discourse on the body, as well as to the *rasa* aesthetics elucidated upon in the *Natyashastra*, the Sanskrit treatise from which most forms of classical Indian dance draw reference. Barbara Holdrege, in her study on the Hindu worldview on the body, points out that the body represented, in the Brahmanical tradition, a site of central significance and maintenance of social, cosmic and divine order (Holdrege 341). She highlights that the Brahmanical texts require that the body is “regulated through ritual and social duties,

maintained in purity, sustained through proper diet, and reproduced through appropriate sexual relations” (Holdrege 342). This understanding of the body is particularly highlighted in the Brahmanical texts’ anxiety and regulation regarding the female body – that female bodies are characterized as “less pure” than male bodies, due to their “polluting processes” such as menstruation, and childbirth, and are thus excluded from ritualistic activities which require a state of ritual purity, such as performing sacrificial rituals, or reciting the Vedas (Holdrege 369). The ritualistic cleansing points to a deeper fear of “contamination.” In the theorization of the *rasa* aesthetic in the *Natyashastra*, *rasa* refers to “essence” or “that which may be tasted”. It refers to the psychological-emotional response created in a spectator upon watching a performance. Underlying both these ideas, firstly that a body must be ritually purified through regulation or ritual purification, and secondly, that a performing body is capable of inducing an emotional state in another individual, is a notion of “affect”– that a human body is charged with potential to “affect,” to influence and potentially transform. The body, in Hindu discourse, is thus a body deeply charged with “affect,” as theorized by Seigworth and Gregg.

It is with this understanding that I would be corporeally immersed in a lifestyle in which my bodily presence was seen as both vulnerable to absorption, as well as charged with affective potential, that I began my fieldwork in India.

Propagating the Lineage: Odissi Classes at Guru Durgacharan Ranbir's Nrutyayan Institute

A dancer in New Delhi invites her Guru to visit and stay with her to teach her repertoire pieces. International students come and reside in the homes of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir and Guru Gajendra Panda, sometimes over a course of months, to receive intensive training in the Odissi dance of this lineage. In turn, these maestros are invited for extended workshops, occasionally stretching for as long as six months, to countries in Asia, United States, and Europe. Young Delhi-based students go to class on a weekly basis. These are some of the varied contexts in which the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi is taught and learned.

At his residence and primary studio in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir teaches Odissi technique and repertoire to students who come to him from across Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India, and the world. His institution Nrutyayan, registered with the government of Odisha, has three branches in Bhubaneswar, one at his residence in Rasulgarh, one in Acharya Vihar, and a third studio in BJB Nagar. Students from different regions in Odisha, such as Talcher, Behrampur, Angul, Puri, and from different parts of India, such as Kolkata in West Bengal, New Delhi, Bangalore in Karnataka, and Mumbai in Maharashtra, come to learn from him as well. In some cases, they come to him for furthering their technique and repertoire after already having learnt the basic Odissi technique and primary repertoire from other teachers who are either students of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir himself, or other seasoned artists from within the lineage. In some cases, especially in the case of international students, the students begin their primary training with Guru Durgacharan Ranbir as well.

Twice a week, classes are held at the Rasulgarh studio. Once a week, Debu, the resident dance student, ensemble dancer and apprentice-teacher, teaches at the Acharya Vihar studio. He is aided by another seasoned male dancer in teaching. The Rasulgarh studio is a large room, fitted with a mirror. The walls of the studio have framed photographs of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir onstage, doing different poses, as well as a large photograph of Guru Pankaj Charan Das. A glass display case features photographs of guruji's teacher and the founder of this lineage, Guru Debaprasad Das, and a famous photograph of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, as a young boy, standing next to a seated Guru Debaprasad Das. There are also a number of paintings of Ganesh throughout the room. As guruji enters the room every morning, he pays his obeisances to each of the deities in the room, and also to the photographs of his two teachers, the late Guru Pankaj Charan Das and the late Guru Debaprasad Das.

The front of the room is covered with long jute mats. A tape player sits in the middle of the jute mat, playing the music for the dance pieces. The group classes typically begin with the teacher singing the *Namami Vignarajatwam* verse in praise of the Hindu deity Ganesh, the remover of obstacles, who is also considered the god of auspicious beginnings, and is hence invoked each time an individual or group before they begin a new venture, project, or even a new class. The teachers lead the class through warm-up exercises such as jumps and turns, progressing to footwork, movements and phrasings of Odissi technique. Finally, at the end of an hour, the younger students sit in the front of the class, watching while the older students practice their repertoire pieces, such as the *Mangalacharan*, *Sthayee*, and *Pallavi* in sequential order, while the teacher

provides notes to each dancer.

The students wear the prescribed uniform of the institution – a white fitted *kurta*, or long shirt, with loosely fitted pajamas, with a red *odhni* (sash) tied around their waist and upper torso, in order to outline their upper torso movement and postures for the *tribhanga* and other movements of the Odissi vocabulary. The dancers practice in class without *ghungroos*, or ankle bells customarily worn in performances to highlight the sound of the footwork. This may also be due to the pedagogical belief of Guru Debaprasad Das that a dancer should strengthen their footwork and the sound of their footslap firmly before progressing to dance with *ghungroos* (Chand 199).

The number of younger students in these group classes is disproportionately higher than the number of older dancers. The “younger” students are mostly between the ages of five and thirteen. Most of the older dancers who come to the class are in their early twenties, and are practicing for their certification examinations, or scholarships. Occasionally, guruji himself sits and supervises the classes, providing corrections and directions.

The certification examinations feature a written theory section, as well as a practical section, which might also feature some theory-oriented questioning. The “theory” component includes material such as the history of Odissi dance, contextual history of other classical Indian dance forms, the names of the classical and traditional hand gestures, foot positions, and body positions, the *rasa* theory of the *Natyashastra* text, and how it is applied in Odissi dance, as well as about medieval Oriya dance treatises. The younger and older dancers are both given their theory lesson orally in class;

the younger dancers are taught the theory section before the dance class, or during “dance breaks” of the class, while the older dancers are taught the theory section after dance component of the class, often by guruji himself. Once dancers finish their certification, they usually continue to learn from guruji in private, and not in group settings, in order to refine their artistry and technique.

Guruji himself also sits on the mats, and is sometimes flanked by his students. Most times, the students dance while guruji observes, critiques and gives notes on performance and technique. When a student is learning a new piece, guruji himself teaches the physicality of the movements and the transitions between the movement phrases. The students largely learn through observing and imitating his movements.

Rosemary Jeanes argues that while imitative repetition, of which the abovementioned is a model example, had been the mode of transmission of artistic knowledge traditionally, there had, in recent years, been a shift towards what she termed the explicative model of teaching (Jeanes 104). She observed that her own guru moved towards this model. Jeanes credits this to the older student, who is unlike a “small child who approaches dance training as the unquestionable path” (Jeanes 104). Jeanes does, however, point out that during the years between her fieldwork intervals, the number of foreign students of her guru had increased, and that when she returned to the field, she found that her guru often resorted to a more verbal explanation of movements, as opposed to a physically demonstrated movement like his earlier teaching model (Jeanes 105).

I argue that the shift in pedagogical style is caused not only by the rise in number

of older students or foreign students, but also by the rise in number of students who are Indian but non-Oriya, and hence removed from the language and context of the dance. During my classes with Guru Durgacharan Ranbir in Bhubaneswar, I often asked my guruji questions, to which he provided answers. I observed that other non-Oriya and non-Indian students also asked questions in English, and guruji addressed these questions through phrases in English, as well as demonstrations of the movements and historical origins of the movements. In one particular class, comprised largely of “foreign students”²⁵, a student from South Africa demonstrated a postural movement accompanied by a certain hand gesture, which guruji then corrected, and sang *natyarambhe pataka* (translation: the pataka hand gesture establishes the beginning of the dance), which was a small section from a Sanskrit chant regarding the *vinnyogas*, or contexts in which the pataka mudra must be used. He then explained the dance, its lyrics, and the contextual meaning to the students.

In contrast, in the case of the Oriya students, the transmission continued to occur in Jeanes’s imitative repetition mode. During the weekly Nrutyayan group classes for children and young students preparing for their certification exams, the movements, as well as hand gestures and the *vinnyogas* explaining the different hand gestures, were taught via repetition, and assimilated by the students via repetitive choral chanting.

During these settings, often a slightly more seasoned student would be called to the front

²⁵ I insert quotation marks here for the use of the word “foreign” due to the ambiguous nature of the use of the term “foreign” in the field. While in most cases, “foreign” referred to students who were visibly from a foreign ethnicity, in some cases, the term also referred to students who were ethnically Indian but had grown up outside of India, or currently resided outside India. In all cases, however, the students were non-Oriya.

of the class to lead the chanting, or demonstration of the movement. Seasoned older students (usually Nrutyayan ensemble members), who had trained under guruji for many years continued to learn via imitative repetition.

In one case, I also observed guruji demonstrating a movement and explaining it to an Oriya student. In this case, guruji wished for the student to follow a specific aesthetic while executing a certain movement. The dance was an expressional piece called *Meena Nayana*, an original composition of the late Guru Debaprasad Das, based on a poem by Bhagirathi Das. Guruji was observing and coaching a male dance student who was practicing the piece for an upcoming performance. As mentioned earlier, some of the choreographies have become distilled through successive generations of performers and teachers. As the student progressed to a step in the dance which was imitative of the movement of a frog in the rain, guruji stopped the student and demonstrated a movement distinctively different from the movement demonstrated by the student. The student's step imitating the frog had consisted of a gentle toe tap, reflective of a more restrained, and perhaps more "classically refined" version of the movement. Here, guruji interjected, asserting that the dance piece originally consisted largely of "*akhada*²⁶ steps," and that this flavour of the piece must be respected and retained. The student then promptly imitated the new movement given to him. Guruji thus interjected in instances of even Oriya students whom he found distant from the context of the "original choreographic intent" of Guru Debaprasad Das. It is generally believed that the original students of a

²⁶ The *akhada* or gymnasia were institutions that had come up contemporaneously with the *gotipua* tradition. The institution comprised a similar system, where young boys would train in rigorous, and often martial or acrobatic exercises. However, unlike the *gotipua* tradition, the *akhadapilas* (the "boys of the *akhadas*") did not dress and dance as girls.

guru (in this case, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir was a direct disciple of the late Guru Debaprasad Das), are the authority on the “original choreographic intent”, through their association with the guru.

Dance Productions

During my stay with guruji and his family in Bhubaneswar, I was able to observe his creative process and preparations for a few productions, including the *Samarachana*: National Choreography Festival of Dance in Bhubaneswar (March 2012), and the tour of his production *Sri Rama Charita* to the state of Uttarakhand (April 2012). I was also invited to join the cast as a dancer for both these productions.

The cast of the dance productions is often in flux, and varies from performance to performance, even if the same production is remounted. The participants for each production are decided on the basis of the availability of the dancers. The organizers sometimes specify the number of performers, especially in the case of tours. In rehearsal, dancers who have previously participated in the production teach the new dancers their roles. A few dancers from the previous staging of the production are inevitably away; some are out of the country, touring with their own solo performances overseas. Other seasoned dancers fill in their roles. Also joining the troupe are newer, younger inductees, often arriving from out of town to perform in these productions. Some seasoned performers arrive from out of town as well, some from neighboring towns such as Cuttack, while others arrive from distant areas of Odisha such as Behrampur, Balasore,

Angul, or even Kolkata in the state of West Bengal or Bangalore from the state of Karnataka. They travel via trains, buses, or sometimes even air travel. A large number of dancers arriving from out of town often hold other occupations in their hometowns, such as being students of commerce, or pursuing an MBA. These dancers arriving from distant areas often stay with guruji and his family for the duration of the production rehearsal and performances. Those who are students also often bring their books along, to study between rehearsals, especially when their exams are near. During this time living in the Ranbir household, they also occasionally learn, practice, or teach repertoire classes, sometimes with other visiting students, such as myself. Occasionally, they also help with household chores such as cooking, along with being involved in their dancing duties. Many of the company members living within Bhubaneswar or neighboring areas are women and full-time dance practitioners with families.

Guruji's home becomes a shared family space during these rehearsals; occasionally, the children are also brought into the rehearsals, and during smaller visits to nearby locations, they are sometimes taken along. After rehearsals, the dancers are often invited to stay for lunch or dinner. Guruma cooks large meals during these rehearsals, for the dancers, and also often, for the accompanying musicians as well.

On the day of the performance for Samarachana: National Choreography Festival of Dance, held at the Rabindra Mandap theatre in Bhubaneswar, the dancers all arrived at guruji's home by early afternoon. The girls sat in front of the studio mirror, making their hair into the Odissi buns, and applying the elaborate Odissi face and eye makeup. When all the dancers were ready, the group was transported to the venue in different batches.

Backstage at the location, all the dancers put finishing touches on their makeup. As a Nrutyayan academy tradition, guruji himself ties on the ghungroos or the ankle bells on the feet of each performer. As another troupe tradition and bonding experience, all the dancers gather together backstage, and sing the *Hanuman Chalisa*²⁷ together, and pray. They also touch the feet of all the elders around the backstage area, soliciting blessings and good wishes for the performance. After the programme, dancers from out-of-town return to Guruji's home, and leave the next morning. The regular morning class resumes the next day.

Guruji's daughter teaches the newer dancers while he is away. Occasionally, Guruji and his students are invited to perform for a small tourist lodge, in front of foreign tourists, as a representation of authentic Odishan culture. For these smaller performances, Debu Bhai often rearranges the solo choreographies into duet formats.

While currently the group performs feature-length productions, a seasoned dancer of the company remembers that earlier, they would present suites of shorter Odissi repertoire pieces, along with folk dances. Another seasoned dancer mentioned that pieces such as *Aditya Archana* and *Balgopalastak*, both around fifteen minutes in length, were probably the most widely performed pieces of their repertoire. The girls would change from the Odissi costumes to the folk dance costumes while the boys danced the *Moksha*, or the concluding piece of the Odissi repertoire onstage. While all the dancers participated in the classical Odissi section of the performance, as Nrutyayan is primarily a classical dance institution, only some of the dancers, generally those who are stronger at

²⁷ A prayer-poem dedicated to the monkey-god Hanuman, who is believed to be the god of strength and devotion.

the traditional folk dances, participated in the folk dance section of the programme.

While touring nationally, the size of the group varies from usually six to eleven dancers, and between four to six musicians. Due to the large sizes of the ensemble, most of the travelling to go out of state within India is done via train. During travel overseas, a smaller number of dancers, and fewer musicians are flown. The travel is sponsored by the organizers of the event. In keeping with the family metaphor of the gharana, Guruma travels with the troupe on most of its tours.

The Household of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir: A Shared Space

As mentioned earlier, the term “gharana” refers to “household.” In the traditional *guru-shishya parampara*, the students were considered part of the guru’s household, where they stayed, worked and in return, trained with their guru. In the twenty-first century context of the gharana, where the term is largely understood to refer almost exclusively to a stylistic lineage. The term “gharana” in this case is also interchangeable with the term *gurukul*, which is, in the case of the Debaprasad Das lineage, the preferred term of usage while referring to itself as a distinct substyle of Odissi. The term *kula* refers to “family,” and thus, like gharana, the term gurukul also refers to an extension of the guru’s household or family.

Over the years, a number of male dancers have lived and worked in the Ranbir household while training with Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, in a system reminiscent of the gurukula tradition. Rosemary Jeanes, in her thesis, discusses how a young Gajendra

Panda lived and worked in the home of Guru Debaprasad Das at the time of her fieldwork. Guruma, during an informal discussion, had mentioned to me that over the years, a number of male students had lived and worked in Guru Durgacharan Ranbir's household, and usually moved out and started their own dance schools after a number of years of experience. Currently, the dancer Manoj Pradhan, known in the household as Debu, lives with the Ranbir family. He participates in household chores, shares teaching responsibilities, and also performs as an ensemble member in the Nrutyayan troupe. During my interviews, Debu mentioned that he had first seen guruji teach at the Odissi Research Centre, and had admired his work for a long time, and then joined him as his student. Another older, seasoned senior student had been recruited from the travelling *jatra* theatre troupes and inducted into classical Odissi dance by guruji. He too had lived and worked in guruji's home.

In a different dynamic, a number of female students have also stayed in the Ranbir household for long periods of time. The dancer Sangeeta Dash, the first student of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, stayed at the guru's home for six years when her family moved from Odisha to Pondicherry. During this period, she trained intensively with guruji. Barbara Curda, a cultural anthropologist from England, lived in the home of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir for twelve years, and trained intensively with him as well. Visiting students from outside of Bhubaneswar also come and stay with guruji for shorter durations of time, and practice their technique and learn newer repertoire pieces from him. Dancer Swapna Rani Sinha from Angul, Odisha, mentioned that during her training period, she used to come to Bhubaneswar weekly, and stay in guruji's home for four or

five days (incidentally in the same room that I stayed in – the room is reserved for visiting female students), learn from him, and return to Angul. Since 2003, she has been running her own dance institution *Nrutyanilaya* in Angul, training a large number of students in the district in Odissi and folk dance.

The home of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir also becomes a temporal shared space when the troupes of their students from outside of Bhubaneswar have performances in Bhubaneswar. In one instance, I remember an eight-member strong troupe of dancer Swapna Rani Sinha arriving in Bhubaneswar in the morning for a performance in the city in the evening. They had arrived in a large van from Angul, which is a distance of four hours from Bhubaneswar. The troupe members consisted of schoolgirls, aged between eleven and fourteen. Her own niece, who had trained intensively with her, was also performing in the troupe, as well as competing in a scholarship competition a few days later. The dancers arrived around midday, and partook in regular activities of the dance school, such as practicing repertoire and technique with the students who were taking class in the school. During this time, Swapna Rani Sinha also helped coach the students who were there for the *Nrutyan* class. Following the class, they practiced the piece which they would be performing that evening: a new group composition choreographed by Swapna Rani Sinha. Guruji then gave a few brief notes to the dancer for their performance. Another dancer from the troupe was preparing a folk dance piece for the scholarship exam. A seasoned dancer who specialized in and taught Sambalpuri folk dance at the Odissi Research Centre had come over in the afternoon to observe and give notes on technique to this young folk dance student, in order to help prepare for her

exam.

The dancer Sangeeta Dash, currently based in Pondicherry, frequently arrives at the home and sometimes stays overnight, when she has performances in Bhubaneswar. During this time, she teaches class in the morning to other residing or visiting students, and rehearses for her performance with the musicians in the afternoon or evening. The prominent Odissi percussionist Vivekananda Panda, who is otherwise based outside of Bhubaneswar, frequently lives in guruji's home when he is called to accompany or rehearse in Bhubaneswar. He is familiar with guruji's entire repertoire, and often accompanies the morning class on the pakhawaj as well.

In *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*, Loïc Wacquant calls the gym the "temple of the pugilistic cult" (31). He compares the gym to a protected space, where outside life is left outside and only sporting events are given immediate importance (Wacquant 38). He argues that it is in the gym that the boxer learns to internalize a set of dispositions which are at once both mental and physical, and contends that in the seasoned boxer, "the mental becomes part of the physical and vice versa" (Wacquant 95), thus indicating that the boxing club is the pugilistic habitus in which the boxer is forged.

I assert that in the case of the Odissi dance students, the dance studio of the Guru functions in a similar manner, acting as the habitus in which their dancing discipline and stylistic "purity" is forged and maintained. Wacquant points out that the task of the coach is to "monitor the fistic conversation" (83), and that each member passes on knowledge, techniques and tricks received from those above him through these sparring sessions.

The home of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir can be theorized as a shared space where a similar transmission occurs, not only between the Guru, who is seen to be the most senior transmitter of the stylistic facets, but also between more seasoned students and newer students.

The home of the guru becomes a site where individuals encounter, encourage and nurture the dance as well as younger dancers. However, while in the case of the boxing club in Wacquant's analysis, the club's habitués attended the club often outside of their working and family lives, I find that in the case of Guruji's home, the space of the dance studio is also shared with the immediate family of the Guru himself. Guruji's own family is heavily involved in dance. His daughter Gayatri Ranbir, along with being a dancer in the Nrutyayan troupe, also carries out many administrative duties of the performance company such as correspondence. Guruma's brother manages the different Nrutyayan branches in Bhubaneswar. Guruma manages some administrative aspects of the school, and the household. Other relatives are also involved in the administration and running of the dance school and its three branches.

Creative Process

In this section, I explore the creative process of the artists practicing this lineage of Odissi. For this purpose, I locate creativity in the creation of new choreographies, reworkings of previous choreographies and group stagings of previous choreographies. During my fieldwork in Odisha, I was able to both observe and interview Guru

Durgacharan Ranbir with regards to his creative process.

When I asked guruji regarding his creative process for new repertoire pieces, he answered that his inspiration behind most of his solo compositions has been a specific text or theme. He has a large collection of books in Oriya and Sanskrit in his home. His choreographic composition functions as a “danced translation” of the text through gesture. As an example, in the specific case of the composition of the *Suryastaka*, a solo choreographed during the 1990s, he said that he conceptualized the piece while contemplating on the theme of prayers and odes to Surya, or the sun. He said that he was inspired by the yogic *asanas* or positions performed by the ascetics in the Himalayas in the morning, in salutation to the sun, and he inserted these yogic postures into the piece (interview, February 18, 2011). As a lyrical score, he took up a text by the medieval Hindu saint-poet Adi Shankaracharya, in praise of the sun, and choreographed to that. Similarly, his *Dasamahavidya* solo, based on the ten Tantric goddesses known as the *mahavidyas*, took, as its lyrical score, sections from various works among a body of work known as the *Tantrashastras*.

A number of his pieces feature *sabdaswarapata* sections which were choreographed by Guru Debaprasad Das. Guruji mentions that Guru Debaprasad Das had a number of *sabdaswarapata* compositions which had not been utilized in his own choreographies, and he often inserts them into his own compositions as a link to his guru’s work, and also in keeping with the tradition of this lineage of Odissi (interview, February 18, 2011). These *sabdaswarapata* sections are featured in some of his well-known works, such as *Dasamahavidya*, *Shivastaka*, *Bhagavati Ashtakam*,

Krishnastakam, Balgopalastakam.

During preparations for performances, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir takes student input into consideration while reworking the solo choreographies as ensemble pieces. Sometimes, the students provide input or suggestions regarding the group tableaux or movements.

The third generation of dancers from this lineage of Odissi has also ventured into creation of new repertoire pieces. Rahul Acharya, whose ongoing career as an ensemble dancer with the Nrutyayan troupe has spanned two decades, and who has emerged as a prominent soloist over the last five years, is currently choreographing new repertoire pieces for the lineage. He is invested in the *Natyashastra* as a source for creative guidance and is creating a number of new pieces, including abhinaya pieces from the *Geeta Govinda* text of Jayadeva, as well as new pallavis and abhinayas. His investment in Sanskrit texts such as the *Geeta Govinda* and the *Natyashastra* is largely due to his mastery of the Sanskrit language, due to his priestly familial background. This develops the repertoire of the Debaprasad Das gharana in a new direction, in the realm of Sanskrit language text-based repertoire, as the late Guru Debaprasad Das had generally favoured Oriya language song over Sanskrit songs, and this outlook had continued into the second generation of choreographers of his lineage. While remaining a departure from Guru Debaprasad Das's alignment with Oriya regionalism, the choreographies of second and third generation practitioners of his lineage of Odissi nevertheless develop the gharana's repertoire further and in a newer direction, and perhaps in a direction more accessible to a wider audience.

Other established performers who trained under Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, such as Guru Bharat Charan Giri, and Guru Pitambar Biswal have also choreographed new repertoire pieces, thereby adding to a new generation of male choreographers creating works in the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi.

Guru Durgacharan Ranbir: The Work of a Guru

Guru Durgacharan Ranbir began teaching in the early 1970s. As outlined in Chapter 2, his first student was Sangeeta Dash, today a prominent female soloist of the lineage. She was soon joined by Rajashree Chintak and Ranjeeta Mallick.

Guru Durgacharan Ranbir is responsible for adding a number of form-dominated *pallavi* pieces to the Debaprasad Das repertoire. His first pallavis were the *Kafi Pallavi* and the *Kedar Kamodi Pallavi*, created in the late 1980s. In 1998, he created the *Chakrabaka Pallavi*, for dancer Sonali Mohapatra, in collaboration with her father, composer Nirmal Kumar Mohapatra, featuring call-response style phrasings in the dance. A later pallavi, the *Vajrakanti Pallavi* (2007), also features call-response phrasings. His other pallavis include *Rageshri Pallavi*, *Shuddha Deshi Pallavi*, *Desakhya Pallavi*, *Kirvani Pallavi* and *Mukhari Pallavi*.

He also created a number of abhinaya compositions, including the much performed *Kielo Sajani*, *Shivastaka*, *Bhagavati Ashtakam*, *Suryastaka*, and a number of ensemble pieces such as the *Saptamatrika*, *Buddha Upakhyan*, *Navagruha* and *Aditya Archana*.

One of the distinctive features of his pedagogy is his emphasis on individuality. He observes a dancer's movement quality, and often tailors the existing repertoire piece to highlight the dancer's strengths. For instance, the *Kedar Kamodi Pallavi* I learned from him was slightly different in certain movement phrasings from the *Kedar Kamodi Pallavi* learned and practiced by older generation of students, and the *Vajrakanti Pallavi* I was taught varied greatly from the *Vajrakanti Pallavi* performed by other dancers. Rahul Acharya also asserts that the *Shivastakam* piece he learned was separate from the *Shivashtakam* piece learned by senior dancers such as Jyoti Srivastava and Leena Mohanty (Narthaki website interview). However, this is largely the case for instances where he teaches his own compositions; in his teachings of repertoire composed by the late Guru Debaprasad Das, he maintains an identifiable homogeneity in the phrasings.

Having trained a large number of students over the years, he laments that many of his students have not kept in touch with him over the years. He also said that many female dancers he has groomed as strong soloists and ensemble dancers stop dancing after their marriage²⁸.

²⁸ As per my observations in the field, the reason for these women not continuing to train and perform after their marriage is largely due to their increased family responsibilities upon marriage. In one case, I also observed that a dancer returned to the Nrutyayan troupe after eleven years, when her daughter was deemed old enough to be left alone at home. In many of these instances, these women also have their own dance schools and smaller-scale institutions, where they continue to teach classes, even if unable to devote time to performing.

Divergent Voices within the Lineage: Differing Interpretations of the Style of Guru Debaprasad Das

Through the course of my observations and interviews, I found that there was a heterogeneous variety of interpretation within the lineage, regarding the philosophy and aesthetic of the Debaprasad Das style, as well as of directions in which the gurus of the lineage extend the repertoire of the lineage. To a certain extent, the choreographic work and aesthetic of Guru Debaprasad Das himself changed through the course of his career. As noted in Chapter 2, his earlier choreographies, from the 1950s consisted of short, 3-5 minute repertoire pieces, largely created for the touring repertoire of Indrani Rahman, whereas his later choreographies, especially those developed during the 1980s, were longer, with some of the expressional solo pieces extending to as long as 25 minutes. In addition to the length of the pieces, there were differences in subject matter, as well as in the tempo at which dancers practiced and performed these pieces. During an interview, Sukanya Rahman had noted that dancing in the 1960s and 1970s was at a much slower tempo, and that she had observed a greatly increased tempo practiced by dancers in the 1980s and 1990s, especially by students of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, marking a shift towards technical virtuosity, from an earlier emphasis on graceful transitions and expression. In her thesis, Rosemary Jeanes notes a similar shift in the practice of pieces from the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra repertoire of Odissi. She notes that various versions of the repertoire piece *Battu* were “known and performed by dancers who had learned under Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra,” (Jeanes 103) and that their respective versions demonstrated quickening pace (Jeanes 103). Thus there was a wide variance even within the repertoire choreographed by the late Guru Debaprasad Das himself.

It is in the work of the second generation gurus of the lineage that one notes a greater heterogeneity. Different gurus of the second generation appear to be invested in different aspects of the philosophies of Guru Debaprasad Das. A seasoned Delhi-based dancer of the gharana was of the opinion that within the work of current choreographers of the Debaprasad Das tradition, there is wide variation, noting that while the work of one choreographer displays an investment in the *tandava* tradition (dancing featuring rigorous and athletic movements) of the Debaprasad Das lineage in his compositions, other choreographers also engage with the *lalitya* (a more “feminine” style of dancing, associated with softer movements) of the tradition. She maintained that while the Debaprasad Das lineage is known for its *tandava* compositions, the work of some of the choreographers of this lineage focus exclusively on this feature, and the tradition’s *lalitya* aspects are often forgotten (Personal Interview, January 11, 2012).

Guru Gajendra Panda, in his rhetoric and compositions, sees the style of Debaprasad Das as deeply invested in the tribal movement traditions. Accordingly, his own compositions often feature movements closely reminiscent of and often directly quoted from tribal movement practices themselves. This belief is shared by the artist Dinanath Pathy, a close associate of the late Guru Debaprasad Das, and an artist, art historian and scholar. The style of Guru Debaprasad Das, as envisioned and propagated by Guru Gajendra Panda and Dinanath Pathy is probably best articulated in Pathy’s description of the production *Interfacing* (1998), in his Prologue to his book *Rethinking Odissi*. Pathy states “we tried to give Debaprasad’s concept a concrete shape: Odissi evolving from a primitive state to the temple precincts passing through folk forms like

Kalishi, Osakothi and Danda and finally culminating in *mahari*” (Pathy 19). In this discourse, we thus find a linear progression from the pre-existing traditional and folk movement practices, culminating into the mahari dance form, the immediate predecessor of twentieth-century Odissi. This notion of the linear trajectory between these dance forms was probably materialized onstage through rendering a transparency in the movement vocabulary of these heritages in the Odissi choreography.

In programme notes accompanying a live performance, Pathy writes:

The dance is enacted against the backdrop of a Saura icon, Osakorhi mural and a temple facade, symbolizing the three traditions. These Saura icons are related with nature-spirits seeking redressal of physical ailments through a process of appeasement. It has connotative relevance in the Bejuni dance that bridges the gap between the spirit and the matter. Thakurani- the village goddess worshipped under a tree (who got slowly transformed into the classical Mahisamardini with iconographic features), later emerges as a vegetarian deity Mangala with strong linkage to the cult and worship of Jagannatha. She with her entire family (kutumbh) also appears annually in the Osakothi murals. The devata/gayni of Osakothi or the dancer-priest-shaman-kalisi, exactly performing like a Bejuni in the annual/weekly/daily rituals of the Thakurani, acquires transpersonal features, which is termed in Parapsychology as SSC or the Shamanistic State of Consciousness. At such an Altered State of Consciousness or ASC, the kalisi imbibes an expanded view of reality and enters into a cosmological arena in which the body and its essential soul-principles merge together. This phenomenon of abstraction and unison according to the mainstream Vedic metaphysics is postulated as moksha. Kali, the presiding deity of Dandanata and the denominator of time and creative principles, typifies the symbol of an archetypal cosmic dancer through Shamanistic rituals. The painted Kaliprabha fixed to a stick/pole is carried by the dancer bringing an inseparable relation between the painting and the person or the manifestor and the manifested. The chadheya, bird hunter in Dandanata performance, who carries a three-eyed pole, represents the icon of Siva. The use of ritualistic poles signifies the fundamentals of creation. The pole, which formed the centre of the dancing arena, slowly becomes an iconic symbol in the hands of the dancers and at a later state, is transformed into the cosmic dancer Narasimha, the man-lion who manifests himself from a pole to affirm the presence of life and continuity. The narrative dance sequence of Prallada Nataka eulogizes this thematic narratology. (Pathy, "New Choreography")

The above discursive approach strongly often suggests seamlessly uninterrupted links and parallels between very distinct movement practices and traditions. While this may be a

problematic approach towards viewing the evolution of these dance forms, the argument for the different local movement traditions of Odisha being an intrinsic part of Guru Debaprasad Das's vision for Odissi is a valid one. Guru Debaprasad Das strongly advocated for the regional and folk flavour of Odissi, and a number of his early compositions during the 1950s consisted of folk dances. Indeed, the choreographic work of Guru Gajendra Panda is often described as having a more "folk" flavour. Upon the death of Guru Debaprasad Das, Guru Gajendra Panda continued his work and legacy at his institution titled *Tridhara*. The name *Tridhara* implies "triple stream," referring to the simultaneous presence of three heritages: classical, folk, and tribal.

In a slightly differing opinion, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir believes that while Guru Debaprasad Das's Odissi lineage, and Odissi in general, inevitably has roots in folk culture, these appear in a more distilled form in the choreographies of Guru Debaprasad Das. He feels that his guru had worked very hard to bring the folk dance traditions into the fold of the classical dance style, and hence the movement was reworked to "look more classical" (Interview, February 17, 2011). Thus certain movements from indigenous dance repertoires were "translated" into the classical movement vocabulary. In his own compositions, he uses certain motifs from folk dance. One of the recurrent movement motifs I have observed in his dance is the slightly forward rocking movement from the *medha nritya* tradition of Puri; he uses this movement in his compositions usually to depict angry goddesses in his *shakti*-based repertoire pieces. Another folk dance-originated movement frequently featured in his dance ensemble productions is the movement of the chariot, usually performed by a formation of dancers.

Guru Durgacharan Ranbir also stated that he occasionally consciously deviated from the philosophies of the late Guru Debaprasad Das in order to create his own compositions. For instance, while the *abhinaya* compositions of Guru Debaprasad Das feature no *sancharis*, or repetitions of the chorus phrases which would be interpreted in a different way during each repetition, his own abhinayas, especially centred on themes of the Krishna-Radha dynamic, often feature *sancharis*. Guruji, in an interview, stated that his own guru, Guru Debaprasad Das, believed in “very simple, direct *abhinaya*” and that his own abhinayas were more *sansari*, or worldly and accessible to a larger audience.

Guru Durgacharan Ranbir is also known for adding a large number of pallavi pieces to the lineage’s repertoire. His pallavis are characteristically longer than the pallavis of Guru Debaprasad Das. In an interview, he stated that in his pallavi compositions, he has consciously diverged from the *sthayee-antara* musical structure of the earlier pallavis of Guru Debaprasad Das (Interview, February 17, 2011). An example of the earlier pallavi compositions of Guru Debaprasad Das can be seen in the *Kafi Pallavi*, performed by Indrani Rahman. The piece begins with abstract Odissi movements, with an interval in between during which the music enacts the *swara-varnana*, or the notes of the *raaga* or musical structure on which the song is based, as well as the *raga-rupa varnana*, or the description of the personified embodiment of the *raaga*. After this, the form-based element of the pallavi resumes, and ultimately progresses into an abhinaya or storytelling piece based on the same musical structure and *raaga*. As outlined in Chapter 4, the *saabhinaya* pallavi is considered a characteristic of

the Debaprasad Das lineage.²⁹ A divergence is seen in this structuring of pallavis in the later works of Guru Debaprasad Das himself, in pallavis such as the Kalavati Pallavi, in which the form-based pallavi is seen as one continuous segment, instead of one with the insert of the raga-rupa varnana in the middle section. However, a “movement response” section, responding to the musical manipulations and rearrangements of the specific notes of the Kalavati Raaga is seen near the end of the pallavi. It is this musical structure which became the model for the pallavi compositions of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, who composed his first pallavi, based on Raaga Kafi in 1988, and a second, more musically complex *Kedar Kamodi Pallavi* in 1989. Some of his later pallavis depart radically from this pallavi model as well. In *Kirvani Pallavi*, the dance begins in a fast-tempo, challenging manner, and gradually builds up to a very complex form-dominated piece. This is also seen in the *Vajrakanti Pallavi*. Both of these pallavis depart from a format seen in the earlier and more established choreographic model for pallavis, of initially playing with the same movement motif choreographed to different tempos within the same musical structure.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir also often teaches different students the same repertoire piece in a manner tailored to highlighting their strengths as a dancer. Perhaps the emphasis on the dancer’s individuality in Guru Durgacharan Ranbir’s work is further highlighted by the fact that during ensemble performances, while the ensemble dancers are required to wear a uniform costume, the silver jewellery pieces are often non-identical looking, unlike the uniformity in

²⁹ A number of pallavis in other lineages of Odissi also currently end with the dancer performing abhinayas in the same raaga.

accessories emphasized by other professional Odissi ensembles.

Guru Durgacharan Ranbir had also been a student of the late Guru Pankaj Charan Das, during his days as a student at the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya. Guru Pankaj Charan Das had been the first Odissi guru to choreograph for the professional theatre stage, prior to joining the faculty at Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya, and like Guru Debaprasad Das, he had spearheaded his own distinct style of Odissi, as one of the three styles of Odissi which emerged during the 1950s Odissi revival. The choreographic influences of Guru Pankaj Charan Das have informed the choreography of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, and these influences are especially evident in his pallavi compositions. Guru Pankaj Charan Das, in addition to deploying elements of the *mahari* dance tradition, also widely used movement vocabulary from the folk dance traditions, especially of folkloric dance traditions centered in the Puri-Cuttack region, such as the popular *Medha Nritya* tradition, or movements imitating often-seen occurrences, such as the movements of the wheels of the chariot during *Ratha Yatra*.

The late Guru Pankaj Charan Das had used these movements widely in his choreographies, as evident in pallavis such as his *Shankaravarnam Pallavi* composition. Guru Durgacharan Ranbir quotes the movement vocabulary of Guru Pankaj Charan Das widely in his own compositions, especially in his pallavis. Guru Debaprasad Das and Guru Pankaj Charan Das had both worked as teaching faculty at the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya, where Guru Debaprasad Das taught theory and abhinaya (expression-dominated repertoire pieces), and Guru Pankaj Charan Das taught pallavis. While their styles were distinct, they both often invited each other to choreograph for their groups of

students. A number of students of Guru Pankaj Charan Das remember Guru Debaprasad Das being invited to teach them folk dances, due to his expertise in the folk dance area. In a similar fashion, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir often invited Guru Pankaj Charan Das to choreograph works for his performing ensemble. His studio contains a large portrait of the late guru, as a token of respect for him. Perhaps his pallavis may be considered closer to the pallavi models of Guru Pankaj Charan Das, while his content for his abhinayas, and insertions of the sabdaswarapata sections into his abhinayas and mangalacharans remains in the tradition of Guru Debaprasad Das. In addition, the movement technique he practices and teaches is also characteristic of the Debaprasad Das lineage, in its minimalism. While Guru Durgacharan Ranbir had been a lifelong disciple of Guru Debaprasad Das, he also worked closely with Guru Pankaj Charan Das. As an alumnus of the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya institution, where he learned under both teachers, the work and style of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir is a complex style, displaying elements of both Guru Debaprasad Das, his primary guru, and Guru Pankaj Charan Das, under whom he also trained at the institution. Thus we find in the choreographic voice of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, a stylistic hybridity which bridges the gap between the Guru Pankaj Charan Das tradition, and the Guru Debaprasad Das tradition.

Other prominent disciples of Guru Debaprasad Das, such as Guru Sudhakar Sahu, believed to be his first student, Sujata Mishra, and Sangeeta Dash also choreograph in his style. Guru Sudhakar Sahu is widely credited for the composition of the well-recognized *Kalyan Pallavi*, created in the style of the later Guru Debaprasad Das pallavis. Sujata Mishra choreographs a number of abhinaya repertoire pieces, designed for solo dancers,

as well as a number of duet and ensemble repertoire pieces. One of her duet pieces, titled *Prakruti Purush* (“Nature and Man”), is designed as a duet between a male dancer and a female dancer, and was one of the pieces featured in the Jugalbandhi: Duet Festival, which she organizes annually in Bhubaneswar. She organizes the festival in order to promote the “duet dancing mode,” which she claims is not a traditional feature of Odissi presentation, but is an area which holds much potential for creativity and choreography in Odissi. Mishra is thus invested in developing further choreographic formats for presenting this style.

In her choreographic work, Sangeeta Dash sees the original composition of Guru Debaprasad Das as a launching point. She is invested in restoring and furthering a few existing repertoire pieces of his lineage. For instance, while working on restoring one of the pieces dedicated to the god Ganesha, she added a new and differently choreographed introductory *sloka* to an existing *tandava sabdaswarapata* section, and felt that it could stand as an independent piece by itself (Interview, April 2012). In addition, she also choreographs new compositions, such as the *New Moksha*.

As Rosemary Jeanes points out, a number of students, in a departure from the traditional guru-shishya experience, undergo the experience of learning from multiple gurus in systematized university-level training, as in the case of the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya. In this case, the guru under whom the student learns in private for further, specialized training, is considered the primary guru.

As pointed out in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, the first generation of students of Odissi dance was comprised largely of young girls from upper-class Brahmin families, as

in the case of Sanjukta Panigrahi. Established female dancers such as the Delhi-based Indrani Rahman were also among the first generation of students of the dance form. However, the dance form became more accessible to aspiring male practitioners upon the opening of college-level degree-granting programmes, such as that in the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya. This was especially true in the case of young boys from rural areas of Odisha, who then moved to urban centres such as Bhubaneswar, in order to learn the dance form at these institutions, often aided by scholarships. The late Guru Srinath Raut was among the first class of graduates of the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya degree programme, and Guru Durgacharan Ranbir was also an alumnus of the programme. In the case of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, his aspirations to dance were not supported by his family, who were of a land-owning class, as dancing was not historically considered a lucrative and respectable profession for men. His dancing aspirations materialized when he joined the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya as a student, upon running away from home.

While the college-level institutions provided opportunity to students, they also altered the contexts in which learning of the arts had traditionally occurred. The case of having multiple gurus, designated to teach different aspects of the dance, as opposed to a single guru responsible for the students overall learning of the art is an example of such change of context.

Thus the umbrella of students who had trained under Guru Debaprasad Das represented a heterogeneous community, with students who encountered his teaching in different contexts; ranging from students who lived and learned in his household to a large number of the female students had exclusively trained under him, or had come to

him upon the recommendation of their own teachers who had also trained under him. He also had students who, while learning under him as the primary guru, had also been exposed to the distinct movement vocabularies and choreographic style of Guru Pankaj Charan Das, who shared faculty responsibility at the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyala. I argue that this heterogeneous training experience was ultimately also reflected in the fragmented and divergent choreographic voice of the second generation of dancers of this lineage. The complexity of choreographic voices within the second generation of choreographers of this lineage might thus also be partially attributed to this factor.

There are thus a number of different approaches to interpreting the vision of Guru Debaprasad Das within the artists of the lineage, especially among the choreographers and artists of the second generation of dancers and choreographers of the lineage. The choreographers of the second generation, in their choreographies, are invested in distinct aspects they see as central to the artistic philosophy of Guru Debaprasad Das. This gives rise to a significant heterogeneity within the “look” of the style.

Learning and Teaching the Style Outside Odisha

The Odissi style of Guru Debaprasad Das perhaps enjoyed its greatest popularity within Odisha. As many of his choreographies were in Oriya language, and employed specifically a movement language derived from Oriya folk dances and ritualistic traditions, it was perhaps a style that was most identifiable and accessible to individuals within Odisha. There are more select faces of representation of the Debaprasad Das style

of Odissi outside of Odisha, and these “faces of the gharana” outside Odisha are headed largely by students of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir and Guru Gajendra Panda.

New Delhi

In India, the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi is perhaps most visible in New Delhi, after Odisha. The style had an early start in this city; Guru Debaprasad Das himself lived in the city as resident dance teacher to the Delhi-based Indrani Rahman during the late 1950s. During this time, Indrani Rahman performed a few times in the city, and Guru Debaprasad Das himself gave a historic performance in the living room of the Rahman home, to an audience of scholars and critics who were instrumental in pushing for Odissi’s recognition as a classical dance. He visited New Delhi frequently thereafter for teaching Rahman, and also during the 1960s as guest choreographer for productions of Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra.

A significant event in the history of the Debaprasad Das form’s propagation in New Delhi was Guru Srinath Raut’s immigration to the city. In 1975, Guru Srinath Raut, a celebrated disciple of Guru Debaprasad Das, and one of the first graduates of the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya certification degree in Odissi dance, shifted base to New Delhi upon the request of Indrani Rahman. His constant presence until his death in 1987 helped promote this style of Odissi in New Delhi, and also created a large number of dancers of this style in the city. A number of dancers trained under him continue to dance and teach this style in New Delhi. Accordingly, New Delhi was one of the sites of my multi-sited

ethnography. I observed classes, and conducted interviews of a number of dancers and dance teachers in the city.

The Natya Ballet Centre building is located on Bhai Vir Singh Marg. The Centre has a long history of association with the Debaprasad Das tradition. The Centre was founded in 1960, by Shrimati Kamala Lal. It continued under the directorship of Ms Rupa Lal, who had been, herself a student of the late Guru Srinath Raut, and in her earlier years, was a dancer and performer of this style of Odissi, along with other forms of classical Indian dance. The institution continues in the tradition of teaching the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi today. The current resident Odissi teacher, Guru Aniruddha Das, is a seasoned student of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir. While he is trained in the landmark repertoire pieces of the Guru Debaprasad Das style of Odissi, he has also been trained in the style of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra.

As I enter the studio, Guru Aniruddha Das welcomes me. The Natya Ballet Centre building is a multi-storied building, with a studio on each floor. From the second floor studio, I can hear the sound of footstamps of an Odissi stepping drill. Outside the studio, I see the students' shoes, and waiting parents. The studio has wooden floors, and a large wall mirror, reminiscent of dance studios in North America. The students practice the elementary Odissi footwork to a CD which plays the rhythm on the *mardala* percussion.

In addition to teaching at the Centre, Shri Aniruddha Das also regularly performs and choreographs numerous Odissi productions under the umbrella of the Natya Ballet Centre. In addition to casting his own students in these productions, he also frequently invites guest artists from Odisha, as well as other dancers of the lineage in the city to

perform in his productions.

My first Odissi teacher, Guru Sushant Raut, is the son of the late Guru Srinath Raut, and had established the Guru Srinath Raut Institute of Classical Dance in 1999 to propagate teaching of this style of Odissi in Delhi. A wider representation of the repertoire of Guru Srinath Raut is done by the Vaishali Kala Kendra, under the artistic direction of Jyoti Srivastava, who had been one of the most seasoned students groomed by the late Guru Srinath Raut, and who currently furthers her training under Guru Durgacharan Ranbir. She presents a repertoire of work choreographed by Guru Debaprasad Das, Guru Srinath Raut, and Guru Durgacharan Ranbir. She has performed internationally, across the United States, South Asia and Europe. Currently the Vaishali Kala Kendra troupe has been prominent in dance festivals in India, such as the Mukteswar Dance Festival 2012.

Vani Madhav teaches this style at her institution Nrityadara, based in Gurgaon, in the outskirts of New Delhi. She travels frequently to New Delhi for classes, performances, workshops and meetings with programming coordinators. She invites her teacher, Guru Sudhakar Sahu to come to Delhi, to teach each year. Here we see a reversal of the tradition of the student living with the Guru's household, in a case somewhat similar to the dancers of the tradition living outside of India, who are unable to visit India for extended periods of time, and instead, invite and sponsor their teachers to visit for intensive lessons and workshops.

The Patitapawan Kala Niketan also teaches this style of Odissi at a number of locations in New Delhi. The institution was founded by the late Guru Pravash Mohanty,

and is currently run by his four children. Parallel to the pedagogical philosophy of the late Guru Debaprasad Das, along with the Odissi repertoire, the instructors at the Delhi-based academy also teach their students gotipua techniques, and use this within their performances, billing it gotipua performance as well. Traditionally, gotipua repertoire was performed exclusively by pre-pubescent boys in coastal Odisha. The Patitapawan Kala Niketan's new branding and performances of gotipua feature girls also performing acrobatic movements. Late Guru Pravash Kumar Mohanty, the founder of the school, was also trained in gotipua, and Rajnikant Mohanty, his youngest son, specializes in the gotipua art form, and performed it frequently as a child.

The innovations of the Patitapawan Kala Niketan also lie in the costuming and the visual look of their presentations. For instance, one of their performances of the *Dasamahavidya*, featured the female dancers leaving their hair down, as opposed to the traditional Odissi bun, and also, with painted faces and body paint to represent each goddess of the Tantric *Dasamahavidya* pantheon. In a traditional Odissi performance of the piece, the dancers would otherwise wear the traditional Odissi costume, with the hair and face made up in the traditional Debaprasad Das Odissi style, as outlined in Chapter 3.

The group also performs a number of folk dances, and also dance dramas, often choreographed by guest choreographers such as Guru Gajendra Panda from Odisha. Each year, one of the principal teachers of the company, Rajnikant Mohanty, visits Guru Durgacharan Ranbir in Odisha, and stays with his family for a period of a month, and learns newer repertoire pieces, and returns with this repertoire to New Delhi.

Poulomi Guha, a student of the late Guru Srinath Raut, teaches this style of Odissi

under the aegis of IRCEN in New Delhi. After the death of Guru Srinath Raut, she continued her Odissi training under the guidance of Guru Patitapawan Raut, the brother of late Guru Srinath Raut, and eventually under Guru Hare Krishna Behara. She performs, travels and teaches this style of Odissi in various parts of India.

Reporting on her ethnographic observations during the early 1980s, Rosemary Jeanes notes that the gurus in the capital city of New Delhi lamented being “sandwiched into institutional time” (Jeanes 84) such as a forty-minute span class, while teaching at institutions or to private groups of students. She reports that they mention that in contrast, during the 1960s in Odisha, they would often spend the entire morning teaching their student. Jeanes reports that in the 1980s, the majority of the Delhi-based dance gurus, the classes remain in the individual student-teacher format. Based on observation, I argue that from the 1990s onwards, with the rise of a new generation of Odissi dance teachers in New Delhi, classes are increasingly designed to accommodate group lessons, as opposed to the individual student-teacher classes as in the pedagogy emphasized in the traditional Indian guru-shishya parampara system. This third generation of male Debaprasad Das dancers often hold “day jobs” such as dance instructor positions in public schools and private schools during the weekdays, and often teach the group classes in the evening or during the weekend.

According to Jeanes’s observations, the majority of the Delhi-based Odissi gurus during the early 1980s were male dance artists. She points out that it is only the gurus who are from Odisha, and that the “students are foreign to the culture that gave rise to the dance” (Jeanes 86) by virtue of being from different regions of India, or from outside

India. In the present decade, there are a number of prominent female teachers of this style of Odissi in New Delhi, such as Jyoti Srivastava and Vani Madhav, who are also established performers of the style. In addition, a large number of female performers and teachers of Odissi in New Delhi come from non-Oriya backgrounds. However, the male dance performers and teachers mostly continue to be of Oriya background.

Kolkata

Unlike New Delhi, Kolkata, the capital city of West Bengal, had primarily been a space for widespread practice of the Odissi style of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra. However, the city currently has a few institutions and artists teaching the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi. Shatabdi Mallick, a student of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, and a company member of his Nrutyayan touring troupe, established her institution, the Shatabdi Nrutyayan, in the city. She had initially rented a room in the ground floor of her apartment building for her own dance practice, upon her family's relocation to Kolkata from Bhubaneswar, where she was a young emerging dance artist and dance scholarship winner. Gradually, the personal dance studio grew into a fledgling dance institution, where Guru Durgacharan Ranbir would visit on a monthly basis as master instructor. Eventually, Mallick herself ventured into teaching Odissi classical and folk dances in her school. Today, she continues to teach at the institution, and perform as a soloist widely in Kolkata.

Kolkata-based Puspita Mitra also performs and teaches this lineage of Odissi. A student of Sudhakar Sahu, she is currently the Head of Department at the Dance

Department at Rabindra Bharati University. Due to the eclectic nature of her own training in Odissi, she teaches a mixed repertoire of the works of the Debaprasad Das lineage as well as some pieces from the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra lineage of Odissi. Within the works of the Debaprasad Das lineage, she teaches pieces choreographed by Guru Debaprasad Das, as well as by her guru, Guru Sudhakar Sahu. She also invites Guru Sudhakar Sahu to guest-teach her students at the department occasionally. Through her work, repertoire pieces of the Debaprasad Das lineage became a standard part of the university curriculum, marking perhaps the first time that this lineage received representation in a university dance curriculum outside of Odisha.

The eclectic repertoire is a feature I have found to be more common in repertoires of dancers outside of Odisha than of dancers within Odisha. A number of these practitioners perform repertoire which involves more than one lineage of Odissi. Although traditionally in the classical Indian arts, a student adheres to one specific guru, and switching teachers is frowned upon, a number of dancers from urban, cosmopolitan cities in India are able to pick up repertoire from different gurus, due to circumstances linked to lack of accessibility to teachers of this lineage, and of being geographically distant from Odisha.

I also found that a number of practitioners living in urban centres outside of Odisha felt that “all Odissi derives from chowka³⁰ and tribhanga³¹” the differences

³⁰ Basic Odissi posture reminiscent of the posture of the deity Jagannath at the famous Jagannath temple in Puri. The chowka is a square position, in which the knees are bent at right angles with the legs being placed exactly under the hips and turned out. The position is held with knees deeply bent.

³¹ The characteristic “S”-shape triple bend in Odissi dance.

between Odissi stylistic schools are visible only to the initiate, and not to those who have not seen it as much. The visual signifiers that they read as identifiers of a universal Odissi include the costume and the basic postures of the chowka and the tribhanga, and these, they argue, remain largely the same for all the styles of Odissi. It is also interesting to note that a number of established newspaper dance critics shared this sentiment. A critic, during an interview, mentioned to me that the differences between the stylistic schools of Odissi dance are not as visible as the differences between the stylistic schools of Kathak. This statement is strikingly different from guruji's statement regarding how the body language, the primary *bhumi pranam* (invocation to the earth, performed before beginning a dance class, practice, or recital), and the movements themselves identify this style of Odissi as distinct. This discursive practice of muting the stylistic differences within the Odissi lineages continues to propagate the monolithic image of Odissi.

While many of the dance schools I observed in Bhubaneswar had prescribed “uniforms” for dance class, dance classes in New Delhi did not have prescribed uniforms. However, a standard code of a “uniform” seemed to exist – most students came to class wearing *salwar kurtas*³² in varied colours. In some classes, the more seasoned students also wear “practice *saris*”, which are saris worn slightly higher than ankle-length, with loose-fitted pajamas or tights underneath. This is also the general dress worn by students during upper-level certification examinations as well as scholarship exams.

Gayatri Ranbir, daughter of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, has recently opened a branch of Nrutyayan Institution in Bangalore in the state of Karnataka, to where she

³² A traditional garment, consisting of a long loose-fitted shirt, and pajama-style, loosely-fitted pants.

relocated in 2011. As a Nrutyayan company member, she continues to travel frequently to Bhubaneswar, Odisha to rehearse and participate in the company performances and tours. In addition, she organizes a festival, titled the Meera Festival of Dance.

Creative Work by Dancers within India, outside Odisha

The most common expression of individual creativity of Odissi dancers remains in the rearrangement and restaging of known repertoire pieces into group ensembles. The artists living in cities outside Odisha have less access to musicians who would perform in the orchestra for studio recordings as well as live recordings of the productions. Original repertoire pieces are usually created in collaboration with an Odissi composer who creates the score, and musicians who animate and the score. Some dance artists travel to Odisha to collaborate with the composer and musicians, and eventually record the piece for future choreographic and performance use. However, for most proponents based in cities outside of Odisha, this lack of frequent access to musicians and composers often becomes a hindrance in creation of new repertoire pieces. In addition, in the power structure of Indian classical dance, it is only after practitioners establish themselves in a career as a dancer over a few decades that they engage in choreographing new repertoire pieces, as additions to the repertoire are seen as the work of the senior gurus within the tradition.

The creative agency in the performances of the Patitapawan Kala Niketan, New Delhi, lies in the ensemble-oriented restagings of well-known pieces of the Debaprasad

repertoire, such as the *Suryastaka* and *Dasamahavidya* choreographed by Guru Durgacharan Ranbir. Both pieces were initially choreographed as solo works.

Patitapawan Kala Niketan usually performs professionally as an ensemble, and hence the co-artistic directors restage the popular solo repertoire pieces as group presentations.

Occasionally, the third generation of Debaprasad Das style dancers living away from Odisha will choreograph large-scale productions. For instance, Aniruddha Das choreographed and staged *Nirvana*, a dance-drama based on the life of the Buddha, in New Delhi, in 2010. Often, during these productions, guest dancers are invited from Odisha to join the ensemble cast. Sometimes, dancers outside of the Debaprasad Das lineage are also co-choreographers or dancers in these productions. A similar fluidity exists often in the professional freelance dancers schooled in this style of Odissi in the cities, who often work with choreographers practicing other lineages of Odissi in large-scale productions. They are also often hired as cast members for touring repertoire.

In some instances of creative work done by the dancers of the third generation of Guru Debaprasad Das lineage, the artists display a desire not only to further the repertoire of lineage through creation of new pieces, but to re-engage with original pieces of the repertoire. For instance, Pondicherry-based Sangeeta Dash, who runs the Meera Dance Academy, and was a student of the late Guru Debaprasad Das and Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, has reworked a *Ganesh Tandav* of Guru Debaprasad Das with a new introductory *sloka*, or verse, ultimately creating a new repertoire piece (Interview, 10, 2012). She has also created a new *Moksha* piece.

Sometimes, these artists also engage in restagings. The production of *Krishna* in

New Delhi by the Vaishali Kala Kendra with a cast comprising of her students was a restaging of the late Guru Srinath Raut's production of the same name. It was staged by Jyoti Srivastava as a tribute to her late guru.

Debaprasad Das Style Odissi outside India: A Genealogy

The Debaprasad Das style Odissi enjoys clustered communities of practitioners as opposed to a more widespread practice as in the case of the community of practitioners of the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra style of Odissi. Certain cities, such as New York City, and Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia have large, visible communities of practitioners of this style; however, the practice of this style outside of these regions is mostly limited to individual practitioners with smaller dance schools and companies.

In describing the presence of practitioner communities of this style of Odissi outside of India, I refrain from using the term “diaspora” as it denotes a community of individuals outside of a homeland. I find that this term is not necessarily applicable to the global community of Debaprasad Das style Odissi practitioners as there are dancers not of Indian origin who practice this style of Odissi. Perhaps the most celebrated Debaprasad Das style artist of non-Indian origin is Ramli Ibrahim of Malaysia, who is Artistic Director of the Sutra Dance Theatre, also based in Malaysia. Sutra Dance Theatre enjoys a transnational presence through its frequent tours of India, as well as Europe and North America.

Guru Gajendra Panda was commissioned to create the *Dasamahavidya*, which

was originally created as a solo for Ramli Ibrahim, and was later performed by Sutra Dance Theatre as an ensemble piece. This perhaps stands as example of how the practicing community outside of India affects the works of the gharana, through the commissioning of new pieces, thereby adding to the repertoire of this gharana of Odissi.

Sutra Dance Theatre's visibility has been wide and significant in both India as well as in Europe, Asia and North America. They were perhaps the only Odissi troupe from outside of India to have performed at the prestigious Khajuraho Festival, an event which is seen almost as landmark for recognition in the career of a classical dancer in India. The troupe performs almost annually in India, often with live music. The troupe's performances have often been marked by controversy, as in the case of what Nandini Sikand terms the "Odhni controversy" in 2005, or their performance at the Konark Dance Festival in 2010, when they were criticized for not conforming to the complete Odissi costuming. In addition, the troupe has also been criticized for its employment of certain techniques from ballet and contemporary dance, such as the use of lifts and *pas-de-chats* within its traditional Odissi repertoire. The criticism for the use of these techniques outside of the traditional Odissi canon has been prevalent especially in Odisha. Ramli Ibrahim and the Sutra troupe also performed in a U.S tour in 2011, in cities including New York and Washington DC.

Another large community of dancers of the Debaprasad Das lineage Odissi is in New York City, which is the home of the Trinayan Dance Theater, formerly known as the Trinayan Dance Collective. The Collective was established in 2001, and is comprised primarily of the students of Bani Ray, a student of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir and the late

Guru Srinath Raut. Bani Ray has held Odissi classes at the Lotus Music and Dance Center in Manhattan since 1998. The Lotus Music and Dance Center is an organization which had been fostering classes of different world music and dance forms in New York City. The Collective has also invited Guru Durgacharan Ranbir as resident choreographer for a number of productions. Typically, during his stay, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir teaches technique and repertoire to the company members, and other students and directs a production. During two of the productions, *Shravan* (2007), and *Guna* (2008), soloist Rahul Acharya was also invited as a guest artist. In addition, the company regularly invites other visiting or touring dancers of the lineage to give guest workshops to students and company members as part of its master-workshop series.

Trinayan has its own studio in downtown Manhattan, and has performed widely at dance events in New York, New Jersey, and the surrounding states, as well as in Trinidad. In March 2011, Trinayan Dance Theater launched the first Professional Training programme of this style of Odissi in North America. The programme recruits trainees through audition, and trains the students in primarily the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi. The company also became the first Indian dance company to perform in the New York City Fringe Festival in 2010, with their production *Swaha: Rituals of Union*, directed by Leena Mohanty.

Since 2009, a second company performing this style of Odissi, Sakshi Productions, was co-founded in New York City by two of the co-founders of the earlier Trinayan Collective, Nandini Sikand and Kakoli Mukherjee. Sikand performed a duet with guest soloist Rahul Acharya at the festival of Indian dance in Manhattan in 2008.

The Jyoti Kala Mandir in San Francisco, under the Artistic Directorship of Jyoti Rout offers classes and performances in the Debaprasad Das style. The institution trains a large number of students, and performs widely through the United States. Jyoti Rout has choreographed a large number of repertoire pieces for the company. The company frequently performs at the International Odissi Festival in Bhubaneswar.

The dancer Gudrun Märtns from Germany has been a student of Sangeeta Dash for over a decade, and she performs and teaches Odissi across Europe as well as India. In addition, Dash's student Sita Spada, of Indo-Italian heritage, performs in Europe and India as well.

Since 2011, there has been a small but increasingly growing community of dancers of this style of Odissi in Trinidad. Akshay Vinod Kevin Bachan, originally a Kuchipudi dancer, started training under the male Odissi soloist Rahul Acharya. Between 2011 and 2012, he stayed for twelve months in India in order to further his training in technique and repertoire, often training with Guru Durgacharan Ranbir while Rahul Acharya was overseas on his solo tours. In June 2012, he performed an evening-length solo debut recital, traditionally titled a *Mancha Pravesha*, in Trinidad, marking the first *Mancha Pravesha* of this style of Odissi in Trinidad. Among the repertoire pieces performed during this evening was the world premiere of Rahul Acharya's new choreography of the abhinaya *Ahe Nila Saila*.

In Singapore, there is also a small emerging community of dancers of this style of Odissi, fostered primarily by the students of Guru Gajendra Panda, and Manishika Baul, a student of Rahul Acharya. Sasmita Pal, a student of Guru Gajendra Panda, established a

branch of Tridhara, the institute run by Guru Gajendra Panda, in Singapore. In March 2011, there was a performance titled *Legacy of a Guru*, featuring repertoire choreographed by Guru Debapraad Das, led by Tridhara, Singapore, and featuring students of Guru Gajendra Panda from India, Japan, Malaysia and Singapore.

A similar emerging community of dancers of this lineage can also be found in Japan. Kaori Naka, a dancer of Japanese origin, studies Odissi with Guru Gajendra Panda. She performs regularly in Japan, and also in India, and joins her guru in performances through South Asia, such as the abovementioned festival in Singapore. Eiko Shinohara is a student of Rahul Acharya, and learns from him in Odisha, and also organizes tours and workshops by him in Japan.

Malaysia was the first country to have a community of Odissi dancers of predominantly the Debaprasad Das style with the establishment of Sutra Dance Theatre by Ramli Ibrahim since the 1980s. The Temple of Fine Arts is another organization which fosters this style of Odissi through annual intensive workshops for which Guru Durgacharan Ranbir is invited from India. The dancer Geeta Shankaran-Lam, a former student and company dancer at Ramli Ibrahim's Sutra Dance Theatre, joined the faculty and started teaching the Debaprasad Das style Odissi from 1992 (Odissi profiles, dancing Odissi blog). She had been one of Ramli Ibrahim's first Malaysia-trained Odissi dancers. The organization features annual performances and workshops, along with weekly classes, in this style of Odissi.

Nritta Ganeshi Manoharan, a young student from this school, performed her mancha pravesha in Bhubaneswar in 2010. The daughter of Shangita Manoharan, who

had trained in Bharata Natyam at the Kalakshetra Academy, the institution established by Rukmini Devi Arundale, Nritha is a student of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir. In an interview, guruji mentions that each year, Nritha visits India and learns a few repertoire pieces, and then, when he himself visits the Temple of Fine Arts in Malaysia annually, she furthers her repertoire through the intensive workshops.

In the case of most of these dance companies and artists, the gharana is maintained through constant touch and classes with the gurus of this style, either through taking classes in India, or, when possible, through inviting the gurus to teach intensive workshops in their cities. The transnational touring is often responsible for the increased visibility of this style of Odissi, leading to the growth of its international student community over the last decade. This is often true in the case of prominent touring soloists, such as Rahul Acharya, who find a growing student base through their mobility as touring soloists.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the present practice of the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi in its varying socio-cultural settings. I analyze the propagation and transmission of the stylistic lineage in its homeland of Odisha, as well as in large, cosmopolitan cities of India, such as New Delhi and Kolkata, which are geographically removed from Bhubaneswar. I have argued that while Guru Debaprasad Das's vision of Odissi, through its emphasis on Oriya lyrics, was deeply rooted in Oriya regionalism, the second

generation of choreographers of his lineage often deviate from this position, and choreograph repertoire pieces to Sanskrit songs. This has increased the accessibility of their choreographic work, and hence also the visibility of choreographic works in this style of Odissi. In addition, I also provide a glimpse into the transnational circulation of this dance style

Nandini Sikand, in her dissertation, indicates the heterogeneity of the global Odissi community in general. Through her fieldwork and interviews, she undertakes a comparative analysis of aspects such as *riyaz* or discipline, artistic creativity, and the boundaries of the Odissi discipline, as they relate to different Odissi dance artists in different regions of the world. In the next chapter, I undertake a detailed analysis of the creative work of Debaprasad Das style practitioners who live outside India. These two chapters, both dedicated to the current circulation and creative work within the gharana, build together toward the argument that the Debaprasad Das style, with its current transnational presence, can be best theorized through an approach which considers it as an "interpretive community," drawing upon Stanley Fish's theory of multiple interpretive communities. In the next chapter, I further examine this theory, and the advantages of its application in the context of theorizing the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi.

Chapter 6: Creative Agency in the work of the Transnational Debaprasad Das style Odissi Community

In this chapter, I examine the creative work of performers who practice this style of Odissi outside of India, locating the creativity in their work, and the critical and popular reception of these displays of creative agency. Along with the previous chapter, this chapter seeks to theorize the contemporary practice of the Debaprasad Das gharana. As my methodology, I frequently rely on my own viewings of dance productions, and frequently also employ video analysis and use of secondary data, such as reviews and forum responses in this section.

Creativity in the work of Ramli Ibrahim and Sutra Dance Theatre, Malaysia

Dinananth Pathy, in his book *Rethinking Odissi*, hails Ramli Ibrahim as a “significant catalyst, who concentrates on the expansion of Odissi in several new directions” (Pathy 299). In the work of Sutra Dance Theatre, ensemble restagings occur frequently, as the company is, at a time, at least eight members strong. The dancers are primarily female, with one or two male dancers, featuring mostly Ibrahim himself, as well as a second male dancer, often trained under him. In 2005 and 2006, Rahul Acharya was the resident guest dancer at the company.

Often in the work of Sutra Dance Theatre, narrative is woven into the *pallavi* structure, which is predominantly an abstract, form-dominated repertoire piece. English-language introductions at the beginning of the piece “translated” through dance movements and performed onstage in nearly every Sutra production. The company is also

known, and sometimes criticized for, its incorporation of classical ballet and contemporary dance vocabulary, such as ballet-like lifts, floorwork, and the use of props.

A measure of creativity is also seen within the costuming of the Sutra Dance Theatre. In the 2011 performance tour of the production *Vision of Forever*, the company's female dancers wear tied cotton saris featuring the traditional Sambalpuri *Pasapalli* pattern from western Odisha, as opposed to the Ikat print or Bomkai embroidered saris from eastern Odisha, which are the saris traditionally used for Odissi dance costuming. Their choice of sari may be read as an interpretation of the philosophies of the Debaprasad Das lineage, especially with respect to its investment in the tribal cultures of Odisha. This artistic choice may be seen as representing a deviation from a "mainstream culture" within Odissi, while extending on a philosophy within the gharana.

Ramli Ibrahim, in his interpretations of the repertoire, is often invested in specific aspects of the Debaprasad Das style. At times, his pieces display an investment in the vigorous nature of the *tandava* qualities of much of the repertoire and style of the Debaprasad Das lineage, following the characteristic approach of Guru Gajendra Panda, under whom he trained upon the death of Guru Debaprasad Das.

At other times, he chooses a specific quality which he sees inherent in the specific repertoire piece, and elaborates upon that quality through his reinterpretation. Here, I find his choreographic approach to what Susan Foster describes as "resemblance" (Foster 1986: 65). For example, in his restaging of Gajendra Panda's *Saaveri Pallavi* (originally a solo piece, danced as duet by a male dancer and a female dancer in Ibrahim's

rendition), he takes on the characteristic of the serpentine nature of the *raaga*, as explained in the *raaga rupa varnana* (character description) at the beginning of the piece. He uses this characteristic of the “serpentine quality” to choreograph floorwork, which he inserts towards the end of the pallavi, and also weaves a dynamic between the male and female dancer in the piece to resemble that of a serpent and its victim. In traditional Odissi repertoire, floorwork is limited, depicted almost always in the sitting position, with limited contact with the floor. Ibrahim’s *Saaveri Pallavi* features the male dancer turning in roll-like movements on the floor, while the female dancer is balanced on his back. Foster, in her semiotic approach to reading dances, sees four types of representations evident in dance, and suggests that in most dances, one of these four modes of representation usually predominates. She describes “resemblance” as the form of representation in which a certain, specific attribute of an entity is selected, and built upon in the choreography. I find that Ramli Ibrahim’s restaging of *Saaveri Pallavi* can be read in terms of Foster’s notion of “resemblance” in choreography; in his restaging, he selects the attribute of the serpentine characteristic of the Saaveri raaga to layer the suggestion of a narrative onto an originally abstract, form-dominated piece.

In the piece, the *swara varnana* section of the *raaga rupa varnana*, a characteristic of the Debaprasad Das style compositions, is also layered with this “resemblance;” the male and female dancers depict each *swara mudra* with darting, percussive movements with the hand and upper torso while sinking to the floor. Traditionally, the swara mudra is depicted with the dancer moving from stage centre to stage right, alternating between tribhanga and chowka positions while depicting the

mudra for each *swara* with the hand. Here, the original movement of the composition is kept as a template, onto which Ramli layers motifs and narrative, in this specific dance, in a representation similar to Foster's "resemblance" mode. In the middle of the piece, the piece alternates between the dancers performing the abstract movements to embodying the respective characters, and towards the end, a call-response section culminates in a climax of the snake striking the prey.

A similar layering with narrative is done in his reworking of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir's *Chakrabaka Pallavi*. In the reworked pallavi, danced by a number of female dancers and one male dancer, the form-based choreography is layered with the narrative of the female characters tempting the male character, who represents Nijinsky. The female dancers are representative of the forces of madness. Ultimately, by the end of the dance, the male dancer falls prey to these female dancers. However, not all of Ibrahim's restagings involve such layering. In the *Shankaravarnam Pallavi*, a choreography of Guru Pankaj Charan Das, performed by three dancers at the International Odissi Festival 2011 in Bhubaneswar, there was no such noticeable layering, and the choreography presented was the traditional choreography.

Thirdly, in the manner of numerous dance artists from India, he reworks solo choreographies into duets and ensemble pieces. Nearly all of his Odissi performances are reworkings and restagings of classical Odissi compositions of Guru Debaprasad Das, Guru Gajendra Panda, and Guru Durgacharan Ranbir. Fourth, he brings the body language of the Odissi canon into dialogue with ballet and contemporary dance, in which his own initial dance training is steeped. Quotations from the ballet and contemporary

dance lexicon are seen in movements such as lifts and partnering, usually not characteristic in Odissi choreographies.

Parallel to the Odissi repertoire, the company also practices and performs a repertoire which may be termed as “contemporary.” This repertoire does not involve movements and themes from Euro-North American ballet and contemporary dance alone, but rather features works that involve a confluence of the ballet and contemporary dance techniques and the classical Indian dance techniques. The company also performs Ballet Russes repertoire, especially of works involving pieces which featured Nijinsky, such as *Scheherazade*, and *L’apres midi d’un faune*. These reworkings of famous twentieth-century dance works inevitably feature some aspects taken from Indian classical dances, as well as some taken from traditional movement practices from Malaysia. Rahul Acharya, in an article, discusses how he was made to learn contemporary movement vocabulary and to improvise during the rehearsals for *Scheherazade*, upon his first trip to Malaysia as an invited guest artist at Sutra Dance Theatre (Acharya, "Transformation"). Ramli states that “It is the critics who attempt to compartmentalize and put our style of presentation into various slots. In some items, the music may be Odissi like in “Pallavi,” but I have deconstructed it and given it a contemporary layering. We can define contemporary aesthetic now from an Asian point of view and not from a Euro-American stance” (Ibrahim, *Narthaki Website* interview, 2001).

Sutra Dance Theatre’s *Kamala*, choreographed by dancer Guna and approximately seventeen minutes long, perhaps best embodies the mode of “contemporary dance” that Ramli Ibrahim envisions. In the dance, a number of female

dancers, clad in white saris with red borders, in the style of Odissi practice saris perform around a male dancer. Motifs and movements from Odissi are noticeable in the choreography, especially in iconography evoking the tantric folklore-based repertoire of the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi. This is evident in the use of *mudras* and body language depicting a severed head, or a bow and arrow. Iconography of other, more demure and maternal Hindu goddesses such as Laxmi are juxtaposed with recognizable images of the Madonna. The music oscillates between European choral singing and the sound of the classical Indian *veena* and a Sanskrit sloka chant praising the physicality of the goddess Laxmi. The male dancer, at different points in the choreography, embodies Shiva, a demon, or the Christ. At a striking moment in the choreography, the female dancers sit in a circle, with their feet and knees flexed and facing into the circle, reminiscent of a womb-space. At the end of the piece, the image of the Christ lying on Mary's lap is juxtaposed with the image of Vishnu lying in his bed made of the body of the serpent Shesh Nag, with Laxmi, his consort, attending him. Thus through the choreography, Sutra Dance Theatre's work creates a bridge between two cultures. Ramli Ibrahim uses the movement and thematic vocabularies of both Odissi and contemporary dance to create works which bridge the gap between the two dance cultures.

Pathy, in his book, devotes his last chapter to the new directions taken by Odissi choreographers. He terms Ramli Ibrahim's brand of work, especially in his consciously contemporary work such as *Kamala*, *L'apres midi d'un faune* and *Scheherazade as navya Odissi*, meaning "new Odissi" (Pathy 306).

Creative Work of the Trinayan Dance Theater, New York

While New York City's Trinayan Dance Theater performs dances from the traditional Debaprasad Das Odissi repertoire, the group's work is also often experimental in nature. In a review of a performance of the Trinayan Collective, the previous organizational structure of the current company, Robert Abrams recommended "If you like classical Indian dancers who are also not afraid to experiment, don't miss The Trinayan Collective the next time they perform" (Abrams 2006). One of the aspects that developed in Trinayan's process of adapting to the new space was a relationship of the practice and performance of the form itself with modern-day media. In a production titled *Sakshi: The Witness*, staged in the Joyce SoHo Theatre in New York in April 2006, the Collective performed a series of interdisciplinary dance works. Among these dance pieces was a film-live dance collaboration, the "New York City *Sthayee*." The program notes on the preview by Robert Abrams, who as noted above reviewed the event for the ExploreDance.com internet magazine, describe the piece as a "carefully choreographed 'pas de deux' between dance and film" (Abrams 2006). According to the Abrams' review, the film began with footage of dancers tying on their ghungroos or ankle bells, and painting their fingertips with the traditional *alta* or red dye. The film then featured four dancers dancing at various landmark locations in New York City, such as Central Park, or Times Square, while four dancers danced live onstage. The film's footage of four dancers adorning themselves with the ankle bells and the *alta*, can be seen to signify the identity of the Odissi dancer. Ms. Bani Ray and Nandini Sikand presented a variation of the "New York City *Sthayee*" in New Delhi in India as well.

Abrams commented that the integration of live performance and the video was seamlessly executed and that the dancers in the film at times mirrored the movements of the dancers onstage, while at other times presented different moves, complementing the live movements to create a choreographic whole. This conscious inclusion of the New York City landscape into what was traditionally a characteristic dance of the Debaprasad Das repertoire may be seen as symbolizing the Collective's desire to represent their identity as New Yorkers within their artistic work, while maintaining their identity as Odissi dancers. It represents a conscious acknowledgement of the space of New York City.

One of the requisites of adapting a dance practice for an audience unacquainted with the culture of the dance's origin, is the issue of accessibility. The Collective's adaptation to the performing space of New York manifests itself in the need for an intermediary between the dance itself and its audience. The production of *Sakshi: The Witness* also featured a solo work titled "A Dialogue with Death: The Story of Savitri." The story, a well-known mythological tale in India, was conveyed onstage by Rajika Puri, through narration and movement. She presented Death as a character, that of the husband, represented by a black mask worn at the back of her head, and she often danced with her back to the audience in order to present the character to the audience.

Unlike Ramli Ibrahim's Sutra Dance Theatre, the Trinayan Dance Theatre practices and performs only Odissi repertoire; however, occasional guest artists are invited to teach workshops in their specializations outside of Odissi, such as the martial arts-based Chhau dance, or Bharata Natyam techniques.

Aditya Archana: Creative Agency and Variations on a Celebrated Repertoire Piece

In this section, I undertake a comparative analysis of the creative life and variations of one of the most celebrated pieces of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, an ensemble piece titled *Aditya Archana*, which is a dance dedicated to the sun, or *Aditya*, and describes the attributes of the sun. I have watched this piece performed in three different contexts by three different dance companies: by the Trinayan Collective in a temple in Wayne, New Jersey, United States, in a video by the Sutra Dance Theatre, and by Guru Durgacharan Ranbir's Nrutyayan in rehearsal and performance in Bhubaneswar, India. In this section, I analyze the different approaches taken in staging and interpreting the piece in each of these three contexts.

Jennifer Fisher, in her study of *The Nutcracker* ballet presentations throughout North America, makes a case for the heterogeneity in the presentation of the celebrated ballet. She argues that the ballet, which debuted in 1892 in Russia, was performed by the San Francisco Ballet in 1944, and finally, the New York City Ballet performed it in 1954, ultimately making it an "American tradition" (Fisher 3). She traces many variations of the ballet, as it is performed throughout the United States and Canada. Although *The Nutcracker* is a feature-length production, and the piece *Aditya Archana*, is a fifteen-minute long piece which is often inserted into Odissi suites comprising of shorter dances, the two share much in common. *Aditya Archana* is one of the most widely performed works from the repertoire of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, and is celebrated widely. It

dialogues with the philosophy and work of Guru Debaprasad Das in a number of ways. The piece was recreated a number of times for group restagings, and continues to be performed today in group settings in both Odisha, India and abroad.

Fisher argues that *The Nutcracker* continues to assimilate local traditions of the region where it is staged (Fisher 3). Fisher's analysis of the ballet *The Nutcracker* may have a strong parallel in the multiple, heterogeneous restagings of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir's *Aditya Archana*. In this case, the original skeletal composition of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir functions as the base, which is layered, in each different context and location, with a restaging relevant to the local context and identity. The libretto consists largely of the lyrical verse by Adi Shankaracharya, describing the splendour of the sun, and ends with a sabdaswarapata section, characteristic of the Debaprasad Das lineage.

Sutra Dance Theatre's production begins with the prologue in English language, which is danced onstage by the entire cast. Among the different poses created in tableaux by the dancers is the pose of the chariot of the Sun God, a motif which recurs in the dance, and a motif which is prominent in Oriya heritage, especially visible at the Sun Temple in Konark, which is built in the shape of a chariot drawn by seven horses. As the vocals of the song begin, the female dancers move rapidly across stage, converging to and diverging from the centre. After a verse in the song, an image of the sun is projected onto the cyclorama behind as the dancers converge into a chariot formation centre stage. The chariot then slowly advances towards the audience. The stage is bathed in shades of blue light, alternated with warmer shades of red.

The linear aesthetic of the company is visible in the danced prologue itself – the

dancers point their feet and extend them into straight lines in front of them, much in the manner of balletic *dégagés*. Odissi, as a dance genre, favours the aesthetic of the “curve” as opposed to a linear aesthetic. The stylistic aesthetic of Guru Debaprasad Das occasionally features some linearity; however, this linearity is usually derived from a movement of folk dance or ritual dance origin. The movements in Sutra Dance Theatre’s rendition of *Aditya Archana* also frequently feature dancers rising onto their toes, reminiscent of *relévés* in ballet, as well as *pas-de-chat* and stag-leap movements.

In another section in which three of the Nrutyayan dancers converge to the centre and perform slow movements while in a formation, the corresponding three dancers of Sutra Dance Theatre perform the movements while moving rapidly across stage. While the emphasis of Nrutyayan was on the gestural *mudra* translating the lyric of the song into movement, the emphasis under Ramli Ibrahim’s direction was on a movement dynamic and energy. In a footwork-dominated section, a female dancer is lifted at centre stage by a male dancer while performing a turn, while the remaining cast performs the footwork.

In 2007, I watched the New York-based Trinayan Collective perform the piece at the Hindu Temple at Wayne, New Jersey, as part of their production titled *Shravan*. The performance was the last programme of their multi-sited run of the production, which had included venues such as the Joyce SoHo in New York City. For their production, Guru Durgacharan Ranbir had been invited from India to mount the repertoire pieces on the company, and soloist Rahul Acharya had been invited as a guest dancer. Their performance of *Aditya Archana* was the concluding piece of the evening. The entire cast

was onstage throughout the piece, including the beginning. Paralleling Nrutyayan's rendition of the piece, Bani Ray and Rahul Acharya played the role of the dancers on either side framing the central tableaux, performing acrobatic yoga-based movements such as the iconic sun-salutation, and deep backward bends of the spine. At the beginning of the piece at Joyce SoHo, graphic images were projected onto the screen in the background as the company performed the piece. The images included photographs of the sun rising while temples were shown in silhouette. However, through most of the performance, the stage remained in a warm wash of red, and there were no graphics displayed on the cyclorama. The lighting design also seemed more minimal, in contrast to the Sutra Dance Theatre's performance, and the emphasis of the performance was on the form.

The Nrutyayan dance troupe rehearses this piece frequently for performances, as it is one of the most frequently performed pieces of the troupe's history and current repertoire. During my stay in Odisha, I watched Nrutyayan rehearse it in preparation for an upcoming tour. One of the regular dancers was not able to join the tour, and hence a new dancer had been recruited to fill in for her. The focus of the rehearsal was on ensuring that the new dancer had marked the choreography. A regular company dancer was learning a different role from the role that she was accustomed to, to help accommodate the new dancer. One of the company members had returned to the company after a hiatus of seven years, during which she was away as her daughter was very young. She had performed this piece frequently when she had been a regular troupe member. She remarked that some of the movements had changed subtly from the

movements that she remembered and had marked in her muscle memory, and hence she too had to adjust to a slightly altered choreography. Guruji watches and provides notes and critiques different dancers, pushing for a symmetry in body bends and postures for two corresponding dancers.

Fisher states that in each of the cases, a ballet such as *The Nutcracker* can be used to tell a story about themselves (Fisher 124). I find, in the case of the different ensembles performing Aditya Archana, the different variations of it serve a similar function, of affirming and projecting the identity of the different performing ensembles. In the case of the Odisha-based Nrutyayan ensemble, the performance consists largely of technique and expression, perhaps also reflecting the identity of the troupe as consisting of “authentic” torchbearers of the Odissi technique and tradition, from Odisha. In the case of the Malaysia-based Sutra Dance Theatre, the Odissi technique is interspersed with elements of ballet and contemporary dance technique, such as lifts and a higher centre of gravity, perhaps reflective of the company’s extensive cross-training in ballet, and the ballet-oriented aesthetic and dance history of its director Ramli Ibrahim. In the case of New York City’s Trinayan Collective, the production is an exercise of maintaining a balance between a form-oriented performance and newer trends, such as the incorporation of multimedia projections.

Voices Within the Gharana: A Case for Heterogeneity

The reconstruction of modern-day Odissi as a classical dance form took place through the late 1950s, extending into the 1960s. During the early attempts to garner recognition for Odissi as a classical dance form, scholars such as Dhirendranath Patnaik wrote extensively about the history of dance in Odisha, citing as evidence the cave frescoes of Udayagiri and Khandagiri Jain caves as the earliest evidence of dance in Odisha. Odissi was ultimately depicted as a dance which inherited from the legacy of the *mahari* or temple dance tradition, as well as the *gotipua* dance tradition. During these early efforts, one of the challenges that the revivalist scholars faced was to establish the emerging dance form as distinct from the already-established classical dance form of Bharata Natyam, whose revival predated its own by twenty-five years.

The history of the twentieth-century revival of Odissi has, only recently, gathered visibility in scholarship and scholarly discourse on Odissi. In addition, in recent years, the international Odissi festivals consciously attempt to be inclusive of the different stylistic branches of Odissi. As pointed out earlier, the second generation of Odissi gurus of the Debaprasad Das lineage are invested in different aspects of the philosophy of Guru Debaprasad Das, and this is reflected in their choreographic work. During my discussions and conversations with practitioners, dance scholars and critics in Odisha, a number of them mentioned that this heterogeneity of choreographic voices and interpretations of the founder-guru's philosophy is unique to the community of Debaprasad Das style Odissi practitioners. In contrast, they point out that the majority of practitioners of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra's style of Odissi are familiar with the same repertoire,

and are unified in their understanding of the choreographic voice and familiarity of the pioneering guru of their lineage. They also point out that this has led to a more consolidated community among the practitioners of the style of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra.

In the case of the practicing community of Guru Debaprasad Das style Odissi, the existence of a monolithic image of this style is further complicated by the existence of major performing ensembles outside of India, including the Sutra Dance Theatre, and the Trinayan Dance Theater. While these troupes have been instrumental in presenting this branch of Odissi to a wider and more international audience, some of the visions represented in their productions depart from the views of practitioners of this form within Odisha. An example of this was seen in the incident of what Nandini Sikand terms the “*Odhni* controversy” in her dissertation. The controversy was sparked by a performance in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, in September 2005, of the Sutra Dance Theatre, in which the female dancers wore saris wrapped around them in the dhoti-style, along with blouses, but no “*odhni*” to cover the blouses, as is seen in the standardized stitched costume in Odissi. This piece of costuming, also known in Oriya as the *angarakha*, is popularly taken to be symbolic of a danseuse’s modesty, carrying out a function similar to the *odhni* of a *sari* worn by an Indian woman in her everyday life. Sikand, in her dissertation, devotes a chapter to this incident, examining the implications of costuming of an Odissi dance troupe from “abroad” coming under intense scrutiny in Odisha. Sikand postulates that underlying the controversy was firstly, “a general anxiety about Odissi’s relation to the erotic” (“Dancing with Tradition” 130), and secondly, a tension between Oriya

identity and national or global culture ("Dancing with Tradition" 130). I argue that the diversity of positions to the incident from within the Debaprasad Das gharana serves as an example of the heterogeneity of voices within this stylistic tradition.

The performance during which these costumes came under scrutiny was staged on September 5, 2005 at the Rabindra Mandap in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. The next day, critic Bibhuti Mishra published a critical review of the performance in the popular and established national English-language newspaper *The Hindu*. While the initial article critiquing the show appeared in *The Hindu*, a large part of the debate was carried out on Narthaki, a popular online forum on Indian classical dances. Different parties posited different positions on the issue on this forum. Ramli Ibrahim, in a Narthaki interview soon following the incident and Mishra's review, responded claiming that the performance was organized as part of a two-day seminar titled "Dialogue with the Disciples of late Guru Debaprasad Das," which was organized by the Bhubaneswar-based Dinanath Pathy, a scholar, art-historian, and long-time colleague of the late Guru Debaprasad Das. By situating the performance within the context of a scholarly seminar centered on Guru Debaprasad Das, he positions his own work as embedded within the context of Guru Debaprasad Das tradition. In the interview, Ibrahim states "if you look at those delightful pictures of Indrani Rahman in the Odissi poses which she made famous, you would see the exact picture of what the Sutra dancers were wearing!" (Ibrahim, "Storm in a Teacup"). He thereby draws upon some of the earliest performances under the guidance of Guru Debaprasad Das as evidence that this costuming was part of the "authentic" Debaprasad Das tradition. Although he cites primarily aesthetic reasons for

the odhni-less costume, he also states that the odhni was created by Odissi pioneers of the Jayantika tradition, from which Guru Debaprasad Das opted out. He also states that in the published *Nrutysarani* of Guru Debaprasad Das, a costume inclusive of the odhni garment is not included, thereby drawing attention to the idea that Guru Debaprasad Das did not see this garment as a necessary aspect of Odissi costuming. Ultimately, he states that

we are distorting the Orissan tradition is a gross exaggeration and blatant misrepresentation of the first order of a more authentic and less puritanical cultural statement of this often misunderstood Guru! In fact, the late Debaprasad opted out of Jayantika and caused a furore in the then Odissi ‘crusaders’ mainly because he was not into a “uniform Odissi” and “homogenizing” its methodology and presentation (Ibrahim, "Storm in a Teacup")

In a counter-article titled “Putting the Record Straight” (October 14, 2005), Bibhuti Mishra contended that Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, who had been the choreographer for the majority of the pieces of the performance, had claimed to have never allowed the odhni-less costume, citing the example of Sutra Dance Theatre’s Khajuraho performance the preceding year, which he had also guided, and during which the female dancers were dressed in costumes inclusive of the odhni. Mishra strongly asserts that the concept of the odhni-less costume is at odds with even the community of Debaprasad Das style Odissi practitioners, stating that

Guru Ranbir is a star disciple of the late Guru Debaprasad. Then there is Gajendra Panda too. Many of the disciples are leading dancers like Sangeeta Dash, Manjushri Panda, Prativa Panda, Sujata Mishra- all of Debaprasad style. Why do none of them dance wearing the costume of Ramli’s lady dancers if Debaprasad approved, nay advocated it? (Mishra, "Putting the Record Straight")

He further states that Indrani Rahman “danced mostly outside and if Ramli says he

belongs to Rehman school, not Debaprasad school, that is understandable” (Mishra, "Putting"). In this statement, Mishra positions Indrani Rahman’s work as being outside of a more “mainstream” section of the Debaprasad Das lineage. Ultimately, Mishra ends the article with a petition protesting the “distortion and corruption” of Oriya culture as seen in such performances. The scanned petition is shown to include the signature of major practitioners of the Debaprasad Das style, such as Guru Durgacharan Ranbir and Prativa Panda.

In response to the controversy and Indrani Rahman’s involvement in establishing the costuming for the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi, Sukanya Rahman’s article stated that she was in Puri with her mother Indrani Rahman in the summer of 1957 when Indrani Rahman created the costume she chose to wear in her Odissi performances. She maintains that this costume was created under the guidance of Guru Debaprasad Das, drawing inspiration from the sculptures of dancing figures in the temples of Odisha (Rahman, "Dance Costumes"). Male dancer Rahul Acharya, who performed as a guest dancer in the performance by Sutra Dance Theatre, in his own interview on Narthaki states that most of the dancers within the Debaprasad Das gharana who wear the stitched costume do so for convenience (Acharya, "Being Traditional"). He cites the example of Bijoylaxmi Mohanty, who used to perform the *bandha nritya* (acrobatic dance), under the guidance of Guru Debaprasad Das, also wearing an unstitched costume and without the *odhni*.

The responses to this incident highlights not only the larger Odissi community but also the community of the Debaprasad Das style practitioners as divided in their ideas of

costuming and presentation of the dance. While some members of the community are invested in a costuming which distances the form from any implications of eroticism and sensuality, other members are invested in a costuming which they see as being more true to the philosophies of Guru Debaprasad Das himself. These instances, along with the second generation Debaprasad Das style gurus developing different choreographic voices within the tradition, serve to highlight the complexity within the lineage, and that the stylistic lineage, while remaining distinct and problematizing a monolithic identity of the classical Odissi dance, is in itself a complex and diverse community, and cannot be identified as a singular entity.

The diversity of the Debaprasad Das community, and the complexity of Guru Debaprasad Das's philosophy renders a challenge in theorizing this gharana of Odissi. Since the 1980s, dance scholars have increasingly applied the lens of Bourdieu's "habitus" to their understanding of their field. According to Helen Thomas, Bourdieu's "habitus" refers to an internalized, deeply inscribed sense of social distinctions, identities and reality (Thomas 117) upon the body. Barbara Browning, in her ethnographic study of the samba, considers not only the samba-dancing body in itself, but also examines it in terms of its interaction with rhythm and sound. Browning looks at the musical and rhythmic structure of the samba, and proceeds to provide a detailed analysis of how the dancing body interacts with this rhythmic structure. She argues that the samba involves the suppression of the dominant beat and the location of the bodily movement between rhythms, thus reading into the movement of samba and its interaction with music, the metaphor of resistance (Browning 12).

Cynthia Novack attempts to place Contact Improvisation practice in the larger national context. She argues that Contact Improvisation began as a dance of young, middle class Americans for whom the egalitarian interaction embodied within the practice of Contact Improvisation in the early 1970s was reflective of their communal living experience as well as ideology, and ultimately was "the perfect vehicle for social life" (Novack 206). Novack draws upon Mary Douglas's concept of how the body reflects social order (Novack 7). She problematizes researchers looking exclusively at the body, and, in line with Browning, emphasizes that the mind and body must be looked at together in ethnography as they are "not only closely related to, but reflect each other" (Novack 7).

It may be argued that the complexity of Oriya society, a society deeply divided by social class and ethno-political lines, is represented in the twentieth-century Odissi repertoire, especially by the distinct stylistic lineages within the Odissi canon, where each stylistic lineage may be seen as representative of a specific community of Oriya society, such as the maharis or temple dancers, the gotipuas, and the indigenous peoples. I have argued that the habitus, as articulated by Pierre Bourdieu, may be observed as being embodied in the work of Guru Debaprasad Das, who was deeply influenced by the Oriya nationalism dominant in the Odissi revival and the larger socio-cultural milieu in mid-twentieth century in Cuttack in eastern Odisha. I also contend that his vision of Odissi dance departs from the typical model of Odissi as reflective of this Oriya nationalism through his inclusion of movement practices of western Odisha and his emphasis on the folk dance forms. In this chapter and the preceding chapter, I have also demonstrated

that the second and subsequent generations of choreographers of this lineage, while retaining Guru Debaprasad Das's emphasis on the inclusion of folk dance and movement forms from western Odisha, deviate from the Oriya nationalism embodied in his work through his choice of songs in Oriya language. An increasing number of works in this repertoire are choreographed to songs in the more accessible Sanskrit language. As Sanskrit is the root language of most spoken and written languages in India today, the choreographers creating more dances to Sanskrit songs has added to the accessibility of their choreographic work, and has made it more marketable internationally as well.

While the Debaprasad Das style can be theorized through the lens of Bourdieu's *habitus* when applied to the work of Guru Debaprasad Das himself, I argue that Stanley Fish's term "interpretive community," as applied by Janet O'Shea in her article "'Traditional' Indian Dance and the Making of Interpretive Communities" is a better-suited model for understanding the complex heterogeneity which exists within the Debaprasad Das tradition of Odissi today. O'Shea points out that Bharata Natyam dance styles "diverge in their interpretations of concepts such as authority, authenticity and history" (O'Shea 1998, 51). She examines the history and change in context of the dance form in its revival-rooted transformation from a temple-dance tradition to a concert-stage performance as the roots of these differences, and points, in particular, to the two distinct and divergent stylistic voices spearheaded by two pioneering figures of the twentieth-century Bharata Natyam revival—Rukmini Devi Arundale, and T Balasaraswati.

O'Shea argues that the notion of "interpretive communities," as developed by the reception theorist Stanley Fish, is an apt lens to apply to the case of the different stylistic

voices within the Bharata Natyam community. She points out that while Fish's original model was based on the relationship between the text and the reader, in the case of the Bharata Natyam community, the term "interpretive community" applied to a three-way relationship, between the dancer, her construction of the past, and her subsequent twentieth-century choreography (O'Shea 1998, 51). I argue that O'Shea's application of the three-way relationship to Fish's model may be extended to apply to the case of the Debaprasad Das style Odissi community. Here, the three-way relationship is between the practitioners of the Debaprasad Das lineage, their understanding and construction of the philosophy of Guru Debaprasad Das, and their own choreography.

I would also argue that in addition to the multiple understandings of the vision of Guru Debaprasad Das by the second generation of his followers, the transnational presence of the gharana is an additional factor which expands it beyond Bourdieu's habitus as exclusive lens of analysis. Bourdieu's theory of the habitus, as articulated in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, presupposes a localized containment of regularities which birth the dispositions of the individual. Bourdieu supports his arguments based on his observations of the Kabyles in Algeria. Bourdieu's habitus theory, and its emphasis on the social networks and interactions behind the production of culture, helps situate the historical conditions which generated the Odissi revival in general, and also informed Guru Debaprasad Das's specific vision of Odissi. However, in the case of the transnational production and circulation of choreographic works in the Debaprasad Das style, as well as the multiple understandings of the vision of Guru Debaprasad Das by the community of his followers, the habitus theory alone may remain inadequate. The

production and staging of choreographic works in this style in different international locations, as outlined in my examples in this chapter, responds to socio-cultural contexts specific to those locations. I argue that to create a framework for a stylistic lineage system in which the living tradition plays a significant role, Bourdieu's habitus theory, with its emphasis on the cultural product as a function of the socio-cultural environment, when partnered with Stanley Fish's theory of multiple interpretive communities, is an apt model for accounting for the heterogeneity and transnational presence. Fish's interpretive communities theory is useful for interpreting the heterogeneity of existing interpretations of the philosophy of Guru Debaprasad Das by his followers within Odisha and India within the context of the larger lineage.

In her book *At Home in the World: Bharata Natyam on the Global Stage*, O'Shea asserts that she seeks to provide a "genealogy of multiple meanings" taken on by Bharata Natyam choreography (x). O'Shea believes that the Bharata Natyam form is characterized by multiplicity, as opposed to conformity to the parameters set during the revival (O'Shea 2007, x), and she equates choreography with the notion of "decision-making," or essentially, strategy (O'Shea 2007, 10). By this definition then, all Bharata Natyam choreography is seen as conscious and deliberate choice, and tradition is mediated by this decision-making process. O'Shea states that she is interested in locating individual agency in the practice (O'Shea 2007, 12), whereby the individual practitioner and choreographer is invested with the agency of choreographic choice during the performance of Bharata Natyam and choreographic engagement with it, as opposed to a totalizing discourse on Bharata Natyam, which tends to subsume individual expression

through the form into the larger revivalist rhetoric and history. Applying O'Shea's lens to the case of the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi, I find that while this branch of Odissi shares some general characteristic features that characterize it as a particular style of Odissi, the community of practitioners within the lineage is a heterogeneous "interpretive community," a feature which I argue, has contributed to its position as an often marginalized and "misunderstood" style of Odissi. Romila Thapar, in "The Tyranny of Labels," asserts that "labels, where they may include a variety of activity and experience, tend to force interpretations into a single category so that the infinite shades of difference between them disappear"(Thapar, 3). Perhaps then, it is the absence of a single monolithic category that leads to the confusion regarding the connotations of the term "Debaprasad Das tradition." The word "Debaprasad Das tradition" is not used in a singular sense by the different choreographers within the lineage, and many understandings of the "Debaprasad Das tradition of Odissi" coexist simultaneously. I argue that it is this absence of a monolithic image of this form of Odissi, along with its challenges to the dominant Jayantika-established codes on Odissi, which have contributed to its marginalization in Odissi discourse and the international performance arena.

Conclusion

From the short three-minute pieces created during the late 1950s for Indrani Rahman's touring repertoire to the incorporation of elements of this Odissi style in international

Fringe Festivals around the world, the creative work within the gharana is marked by heterogeneity. This has been both propagating as well as limiting for the spread of this lineage of Odissi. The incorporation of English language narrative introductions, and the dialogue with twentieth-century theatrical innovations have furthered the propagation of the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi by making it more accessible to a larger and wider audience. At the same time, the heterogeneity within the lineage makes it difficult to create a monolithic sense of this style of Odissi, in order to consolidate its identity as a distinct style.

While within Odisha, a greater rigidity is observed in terms of adhering to one's stylistic school of Odissi, in centres away from Odisha such as New Delhi, there is more variety in dancers' repertoires and professional dance experiences in terms of the repertoires practiced and performed. International companies such as the Sutra Dance Theatre of Malaysia and Trinayan Dance Theatre of New York City also experiment more widely with the rearranging the traditional repertoire pieces of the lineage. However, despite the widely varied interpretations of the philosophies of Guru Debaprasad Das within the lineage, the community is united by its sense of being committed to the philosophies and repertoire of the late Guru Debaprasad Das.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This dissertation examines the embodied philosophies of the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi, the twentieth-century history of this lineage, as well as how the second and subsequent generations of choreographers and practitioners of the lineage continue to engage with the philosophies of the founder guru. I have argued that Guru Debaprasad Das's vision of Odissi dance, as manifest in his technique and repertoire, both embodies the Oriya nationalist ideals which provided the impetus for the Odissi revival of the 1950s and resists its heavy emphasis on eastern coastal Oriya culture by including movement heritages from western Odisha. In my theoretical framework, I have drawn upon Pierre Bourdieu's habitus theory, and have argued that Guru Debaprasad Das's vision of Odissi was deeply informed by the Oriya nationalistic movement, which had gained momentum since the late nineteenth century in coastal Odisha and was the socio-cultural environment in which Guru Debaprasad Das created his work.

Scholars such as Mathieu Hilgers view Bourdieu's habitus as non-deterministic, and accommodating towards individual agency. Hilgers argues that Bourdieu's habitus allows for an infinite number of behaviours arising from the same habitus, and that in Bourdieu's theoretical model, the habitus itself is "a relationally malleable entity" (737) which is "constantly modified through the experiences which constitute it" (737). I approach my theoretical framework through this understanding Bourdieu's habitus, and find that the work and vision of Guru Debaprasad Das also resisted the tendencies of Oriya regionalists to focus solely on the representation of coastal Odisha in a dance form symbolic of the state of Odisha. This would perhaps also accommodate phenomena such

as a second generation of Guru Debaprasad Das lineage gurus, such as Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, arriving from landlord families to learn Odissi dance, whereas dance was not considered a respectable profession for men, and was not seen as furthering the interests of the landowning classes. I further contend that to analyze the current transnational presence of the lineage, Bourdieu's habitus alone remains an insufficient framework, and draw upon Stanley Fish's theory of multiple interpretive communities, arguing that the Debaprasad Das lineage today enjoys multiple understandings of the vision of the founding guru by his followers.

My awareness of stylistic differences and the heterogeneity of approaches within Odissi was triggered through my experiences in dance class, especially during the moment of transition when I moved from my regular class in the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi in New Delhi, India to an Odissi dance studio in the United States where the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra style of Odissi was taught. One of the first differences pointed out by my teacher in the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra style was that my spine was too straight, and needed to be more curved, in order to execute the “more classical” upper torso movements more fluidly. Accustomed to a more minimalistic upper torso movement, I began to inquire into the movement vocabulary of the Debaprasad Das style, which, during the early years of the twenty first century, had not been very visible in the eastern United States.

My research on the topic has also coincided with the increased visibility of this style of Odissi, especially outside of India. The last decade has been instrumental in the rise of a new generation of soloists of this style of Odissi, as well as some major tours

and performances by some of the major companies practicing this style. The Debaprasad Das stylistic lineage of Odissi is united by a sense of belonging to a distinct lineage-branch of Odissi, even while there may exist a number of distinct “interpretive communities” within the larger community of Debaprasad Das style practitioners of Odissi. My inquiry extends into the movements and philosophies that are characteristically distinct to this community of practitioners. The linearity of the spine, through its link to the postures of Odishan tribal and folkloric dances, as well as the pillar worship rituals of tribal Odishan cultures can be seen to embody Guru Debaprasad Das’s philosophy of embracing movement practices of folkloric and tribal Odishan cultures into Odisha’s classical dance form.

I find that the term Odissi itself underwent a semantic shift during the twentieth century. While Odissi was initially a term used to denote a musical genre believed to have originated in the state of Odisha, David Dennen’s research, as I point out in Chapter 2, hints that in the late 1940s, it was increasingly used to refer to the dance, as well as the emerging dance community in Cuttack in the early 1950s. The crystallized historical moment for the term “Odissi” representing a singular identity during this era was in 1954, when it was used to describe the dance performance of Priyambada Mohanty at the Inter-University Youth Competition in New Delhi, a location distant from the state of Odisha, where the dance originated. Throughout the 1950s there were attempts on behalf of the individuals associated with revitalizing the “lost” Odissi dance to codify it and fashion the dance into a singular entity. This attempt was embodied in the work of the Jayantika organization, based in Cuttack, the then-capital of Odisha state. A second semantic shift

occurred with the departure of some of the key Jayantika members, including Guru Debaprasad Das, at which point, “Odissi” could no longer be used to refer to a unified whole, but came to symbolize a conglomerate of distinctive voices.

This second semantic shift, from “Odissi” referring to a singular dance style in the 1950s to an umbrella for distinctive dance styles from the 1960s onwards, has often been overlooked by scholars. In addition, proponents and gurus from the Jayantika-affiliated styles, especially the style of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, continued to propagate the rhetoric of Odissi as a singular, monolithic dance form. It is this monolithic construction of Odissi dance in scholarship and rhetoric that this dissertation also addresses.

As I state in my Introduction, Benedict Anderson, in his attempt to define nation and nationhood proposes that the nation is an “imagined political community,” arguing that it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know all their fellow nationals, and yet “an image of communion” exists in each of their minds (Anderson 6). I have argued that the gharana ideology within the classical Indian arts embodies a number of characteristics of Anderson’s theoretical formulation of the “imagined community”. While differences in philosophies, artistic and pedagogical practices may exist within the same gharana, the gharana itself exists by virtue of shared validation by its members. My theorization of the semantic properties of a gharana draws upon three factors: these include the history of the specific lineage, its distinctive stylistic vestiges and peculiarities, as well its current practice. I offer a theorization of the Debaprasad Das gharana, or lineage of Odissi dance through the lens of these three factors.

In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I have detailed the cultural and historical contexts in which the Odissi revival of the 1950s was positioned. In Chapter 3, I chronicle the life and work of the late Guru Debaprasad Das as well as the work of two of his most distinguished students who were instrumental in transmitting his repertoire and techniques to the subsequent generations.

The pan-India twentieth-century classical Indian dance revival displays a strong case for the use of “history as strategy,” and conversely, “strategic history.” During the revival phase of most of the eight classical Indian dances, historical narratives depicting uninterrupted continuities with dances traditions dating back to antiquity were constructed. These histories often strategically featured the erasure or manipulation of the histories of specific artistic communities. Davesh Soneji, in his study of the lived experience of the *devadasi* temple dancer community of southern India (2012) examines the topic of devadasi over the past two hundred years through “slippages, fissures and movements,” which he identifies as characteristic Foucauldian theorizations of discontinuities in historical narrative (*Unfinished Gestures*, 3). In Odissi historiography, as I point out in Chapter 2, I find that the *maharis*, or the devadasis of the Jagannath temple of Odisha serve almost exclusively as the strategic links between the twentieth-century practice of Odissi and antiquity. The primary characteristic associated with the mahari dance is its ancient origins, as opposed to its living traditions. Odissi historiography until the first decade of the twenty first century, does not address the complexities of the 1950s revival. Soneji, in his Introduction to *The Bharatanatyam Reader*, points to a similar lack of critical historical writing about Bharatanatyam

("Introduction" xii).

The second and third chapter of this dissertation seek to address this gap in historical narrative, of the histories of individuals associated with departures from the Jayantika line of Odissi, especially with regards to the work of Guru Debaprasad Das. In the second chapter, I provide a brief history of the rise of Oriya nationalism in the late nineteenth century, and the strong emphasis placed on the Oriya language within this movement. The chapter adds as a foundation for establishing the socio-cultural habitus in and against which Guru Debaprasad Das developed his distinct style and vision of Odissi.

In the fourth chapter, I examine the embodied philosophies in the technique and repertoire of this style. I examine aspects such as the political implications of Debaprasad Das's departures from the Jayantika style of Odissi, including his investment in movement traditions from western Odisha, as well as his investment in Oriya regionalism, manifested through his choice of Oriya language songs for his repertoire. Following Mathieu Hilger's call for a more complex understanding of habitus, especially one in which the habitus also accommodates individual agency, I locate Guru Debaprasad Das's resistance to the traditional emphasis of coastal Odisha in representation of a dance form emblematic of a state through his inclusion of western Odishan movement practices in his repertoire and technique. In the chapter, I also analyze the use of specific themes in the repertoire pieces of the Debaprasad Das gharana. Soneji, in his account of the devadasi performances and quotidian life, argues that repertoire can be conceived or imagined as a "living site" of memory (*Unfinished Gestures* 17). He historicizes the salon or the public performances of the devadasis with a characteristic performance genre, that

of the often-erotic *javali* songs (*Unfinished Gestures* 72). Soneji points to how the devadasis' association with the javali songs propagated associations of the figure of the devadasis with moral decay. In Chapter 4 of the dissertation, I assert that Debaprasad Das's affinity towards movement traditions of tribal populations of Odisha, as well as ritualistic movement traditions from western Odisha, both of which have historically been culturally marginalized in Odisha, may have led to a further marginalization of his style of Odissi. The body and corporeal experience, which were my first points of reference in observing the distinctions between the two styles, play a key role, in both my understanding of the history of this style, as well as its distinctive vestiges.

Lastly, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 engage with the "living tradition" of the Debaprasad Das gharana via participation-observation of various contexts in which this lineage of Odissi is performed and taught today. I argue that the living tradition is an inextricable part of the concept of a gharana, and accordingly also of gharana studies. I base my study of the "living tradition" of the Debaprasad Das gharana based on fieldwork in Odisha and New Delhi in India, during which I was a participant-observer engaged in taking classes, performing and teaching this style of Odissi.

The project of this dissertation is to articulate a theorization for the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi, as well as to offer a framework for theorizing artistic lineage-branches. In this theorization, I have drawn upon Bourdieu's theory of the habitus. In *The Field of Cultural Production*, Bourdieu emphasizes that the work of art must be related to the social condition of its production (33). While Bourdieu writes primarily concerning literary production, I find that in the studies centering on stylistic lineages, of which this

dissertation is an example, an approach invested in the social network and interactions behind the production helps locate the socio-political backdrop against which the specific stylistic voice was developed. In the context of this dissertation, I have employed the habitus theory to locate the historical socio-political conditions in which Guru Debaprasad Das created his choreographic repertoire. Bourdieu's habitus theory is also an efficient model for developing a framework for describing such stylistic lineages due to its flexibility in accommodating individual agency. The gharana system of Indian classical arts is deeply rooted in the individual visions of the different founder members. In the case of Odissi dance, each of the three pioneering gurus associated with the 1950s Odissi revival shared similar socio-economic conditions, and yet developed distinct choreographic voices and repertoires of Odissi. The ability of Bourdieu's theory of habitus to accommodate the individual agency thus makes it further applicable in creating a framework for gharana studies.

However, I also argue that when the artistic creators and artistic work travels outside of its region of production, or is produced and circulated transnationally, such as the current international presence of the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi, Bourdieu's habitus theory remains insufficient. The Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi, and by extension, any lineage of dance which has its roots in a localized sphere and expands to a large, transnational community, can be more effectively theorized through an approach which involves Bourdieu's habitus theory in dialogue with Stanley Fish's theory of interpretive communities.

In the following section, I point out that the Debaprasad Das lineage has been

largely marginalized within scholarly discourse on Odissi, in its visibility within the global Odissi community as well as in representation within Indian classical dance forms within the international dance community, especially since the late 1980s, after the demise of Guru Debaprasad Das.

Dancing on the Margins: The Debaprasad Das Style of Odissi

This study was initiated to investigate what the term “Debaprasad Das style” may mean, and thereby to offer a theoretical approach for understanding what a gharana or stylistic lineage within the styles of Indian classical dance, and ultimately, the Indian classical arts, may entail. As discussed above, my dissertation suggests an understanding of gharana based upon three factors; the history of the lineage, the embodied stylistic vestiges and philosophies of the particular stylistic branch, and thirdly, the work of present-day practitioners of the lineage. In this section, I examine the location of this style of Odissi within Odissi scholarship, as well as rhetoric, and point to how this rhetoric places this style closer to the periphery than the centre of an established and often essentialized notion of classical Odissi dance. I also examine how there is an increased porosity in the historical demarcators that marked this style as distinct from the more “mainstream” branch of Odissi, ultimately complicating the identity of the gharana.

bell hooks, in *Marginality as a Site of Resistance*, posits that “to be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body” (hooks 341). She states that in her attempt to theorize marginality, she worked to identify marginality as more than merely a

site of deprivation, arguing that it was also a site of radical resistance (341). Locating a style, in this case, of a dance form in the margin as opposed to the centre, necessitates an engagement with an established “centre” of the discipline, whose boundaries may or may not be porous. Historically, the Odissi dance style, which emerged out of the seminars of the Jayantika organization, which had come together to establish norms and standards for a codified Odissi, has been considered the mainstream “Jayantika style” Odissi dance. The Jayantika organization during the late 1950s enjoyed the membership of each of the three pioneering first generation Odissi gurus: Guru Pankaj Charan Das, Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, and Guru Debaprasad Das. It also included theatre directors such as Kalicharan Patnaik, and scholar-practitioners such as Dhirendranath Patnaik, who were instrumental in shaping Odissi’s praxis and researching its historical roots. The Jayantika organization is largely credited for the development of Odissi dance during the late 1950s, after “Odissi” was accorded classical Indian dance status by the Delhi-based Sangeet Natak Akademi. Here, hooks’ association of the space of the margin with resistance is critical to a discussion of the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi. Dinanath Pathy, in *Rethinking Odissi*, titles his fourth chapter “Jayantika: Dissident Voices- Pankakcharan, Debaprasad and Minati Mishra.” By including the name of Guru Debaprasad Das among the “dissenters” from Jayantika, he establishes Jayantika as the “central” direction of Odissi, and Guru Debaprasad Das as among the resisters of the Jayantika discourse and codification attempts on Odissi. Pathy, along with other scholars and connoisseurs of Odissi, locate the incident over the naming of the second piece of the five-part Odissi repertoire as the specific incident which caused a rift in ideology of

Jayantika members and these specific choreographers.

The marginalizing of the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi was augmented by the fact that most of the song selections of the expressive dance pieces, involving interpretation of song lyrics via dance, were in the regional Oriya language, as opposed to the more accessible Sanskrit, which would have been understood throughout India. Guru Debaprasad Das was known for a more regionalist approach in his choreography, borrowing from regional folk dances, ritualistic dances, as well as tribal dances, while the Jayantika branch of Odissi was emblemized by the choreographies of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, who invested in animating temple sculpture-inspired poses, as well as rhythmic explorations set to the *pakhawaj* percussion. The style of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra attracted not only viewers but also students from across India, as well as international students. On the other hand, while the style of Guru Debaprasad Das was taught at the Odisha state-sponsored academic institution Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalay, most of the practitioners came from within Odisha itself, thereby somewhat hampering the spread of this style throughout India.

That the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi remained marginalized throughout the second half of the twentieth century is highlighted by a number of facts. In scholarship, the style and work of Guru Debaprasad Das has remained acknowledged, but marginalized. An instance of this literal marginalization appears in Sunil Kothari's volume on Odissi dance, where the style of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra is described in detail, while the work of Guru Debaprasad Das is described in a short paragraph. In addition, as I point out in the Introduction, Kothari's experience of travelling to the

Kumbhari village in Sambalpur for research on the ritualistic sabdaswarapata tradition, during which he was accompanied by Guru Debaprasad Das, appear only in the footnotes to his chapter on the sabdaswarapata tradition, as opposed to the main body. It was only in the first decade of the twenty-first century, with the publication of authors such as Ananya Chatterjea, Dinanath Pathy, and Alessandra Lopez y Royo, that the focus shifted from an essentialized history of Odissi dance to the existence of multiple styles of Odissi.

While, as I have pointed out above, this style of Odissi was among the voices that diverged from a mainstream “Jayantika” Odissi during the late 1950s and early 1960s, the marginalization of this style attained a peak during the decade of the 1990s and the early years of the first decade of the twenty first century, with the somewhat decreased visibility of this style on the theatrical dance stage in both India and the globe due to the demise of Guru Debaprasad Das, and the absence of an immediate successor. However, at the same time, the decade of the 1990s was also a fertile time for the creation of a number of signature pieces in the repertoire of the Debaprasad Das lineage by second generation choreographers. In addition, a number of prominent soloists from this lineage were trained during the 1990s, and have become internationally visible performers of the style in the present decade.

hooks suggests that there is a struggle to maintain this marginality, in essence, this “otherness.” In Chapter 4 of this dissertation, I point to some of the means by which the distinct “otherness” of the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi has been maintained and furthered by the work of its practitioners of the second generation and subsequent generations of the lineage.

In the following section, I argue that the known distinctive markers delineating the boundaries between the Debaprasad Das tradition and the other lineages within Odissi have become somewhat more porous over the first decade of the twenty first century, further complicating an easy identification of dance styles within the Odissi canon.

Breakdown of Stylistic Delineators

As outlined in Chapter 4, one of the characteristic features of the Debaprasad Das branch of Odissi is the use of the *sabdaswarapata* ritualistic tradition from western Odisha in the choreographed Odissi repertoire. The identification of the *sabdaswarapata* inserts as a demarcating factor of the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi is further complicated currently as a few choreographers of the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra lineage have also choreographed repertoire pieces quoting the *sabdaswarapata* inserts. For instance, Sharmila Biswas, director of the Odissi Vision and Movement Centre, based in Kolkata, has choreographed a piece titled *Shiva Parvati Shabda*, which she performed as a solo in the International Odissi Festival 2003. The piece has subsequently also been performed as a duet by dancers of her ensemble. The piece is dominated largely by form-based movements set to a repeating abstract lyric *thom thei* and accompanying melody which itself is reminiscent of the gotipua tradition's repertoire piece *Sthayee*, on which the *Bada Sthayee* of Guru Debaprasad Das was based. The piece features *sabdaswarapata* inserts, which are accompanied by expression-based dancing. *Sabdaswarapata* inserts dedicated to the god Shiva, and his consort Parvati are recited alternately in the dance's musical

score, with form-based “cushioning” sections in between. The first sabdaswarapata insert is dedicated to the god Shiva, and is preceded by a few movements describing the physicality of the god Shiva, before proceeding to the next Shiva sabda. Incidentally, the initial lyric chant for the first sabdaswarapata insert is the same as the lyric chant used in the piece *Ganga Taranaga (Shiva Mangalacharan)* choreographed by Guru Debaprasad Das, although the choreography differs.

Biswas, a former student of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, is a second generation choreographer of the Kelucharan Mahapatra style. While her movement vocabulary is typical of the Kelucharan Mahapatra style, with the characteristic wave-like movements of the upper torso, in her choreographic approach, Biswas is invested in much of the subject matter which has traditionally been the speciality of the Guru Debaprasad Das lineage. These include regional traditions, rituals and folk movement practices of Odisha. However, it is also significant to note that while the sabdaswarapata chants, and accompanying movements in choreographies of the Debaprasad Das style are done usually in a fast tempo, with rigorous, percussive movements, the sabdaswarapata chants in Biswas’s repertoire pieces are characteristically slower, and the movement is somewhat more fluid in both its execution and transitions, as characteristic of the Kelucharan Mahapatra style of Odissi.

Kolkata-based artist Aloka Kanungo, also schooled and seasoned in the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra gharana of Odissi, has choreographed a *Dasamahavidya* piece, engaging with the sabdaswarapata chants, like Sharmila Biswas. The chants used in her choreographies, however, are somewhat faster and more percussive, but her movement

vocabulary, like Biswas, remains in the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra style of Odissi.

The *Dasamahavidya* subject has traditionally been an area of interest for choreographers and practitioners of the Guru Debaprasad Das style of Odissi due to both its scope for sabdaswarapata inserts, as well as its subject of the ten Tantric goddesses, many of whom are terrifying visions of the feminine, and believed to have originated as tribal cult goddesses. As I point out in Chapter 4, the Debaprasad Das style is choreographically invested in the indigenous cultures of Odisha. Three major choreographers of the Debaprasad Das lineage, including Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, Guru Gajendra Panda, and Sujata Mishra have choreographed their own distinct, celebrated pieces on the *Dasamahavidya* subject matter. Ileana Citaristi, a prominent Italian dancer belonging to the Kelucharan Mahapatra lineage has also choreographed on the *Dasamahavidya* theme, but her choreography does not include sabdaswarapata inserts. Thus with the second generation of choreographers of the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra lineage, the choreographic subject matter in subject to movement influences extends to areas which have been the identifiers of the Debaprasad Das lineage.

Another piece I would like to point out is *Utsaha Yogini*, a solo dance piece choreographed by Anandi Ramachandran, a student of the late Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra. The piece is thematically based on goddesses in the battlefield, and depicts the goddess in fierce, warrior-like movements, as opposed to the feminine prototype represented by the *pativrata* ideal pointed out by David Kinsley. Ramachandran asserts that she sees the piece as embodying the *vira rasa* (mood of bravery), of the nine moods described in the *Natyashastra* treatise regarding expressive moods in theatrical

performance. While she envisions the battle-thirsty goddess as embodying the *vira rasa*, the late Guru Debapraad Das, and Guru Durgacharan Ranbir consciously associated their characters with the *raudra rasa* (mood of anger and fury). Guru Surendranath Jena, who choreographed on themes centred around the goddess sculptures at the Hirapur Chausath Yogini temple ground (a temple ground dedicated to sixty-four goddesses), employs the *vibhatsa rasa* (the mood of the grotesque and repulsive) to emote similar female characters. Thus while choreographies emerging out of the different lineages of Odissi may focus on the same theme or parallel themes, distinctions remain in how they theorize the choreographic material in terms of the *Natyashastra*.

Rahul Acharya, a celebrated male soloist of the third generation of Debaprasad Das style dancers, who often gives workshops, has been consciously attempting to address the socio-artistic rift between the Odissi lineages of Guru Debaprasad Das and the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra. While remaining a student of Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, who is the most visible proponent of the Debaprasad Das style, he has often worked in professional collaborations with Guru Ratikant Mahapatra, the son of late Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra and the current director of Srjan, the institution and company founded by Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra. In 2009, Acharya performed a piece, titled *Ardhanareswar*, a traditional piece from the repertoire of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, in San Francisco. For this performance, he wore an Odissi costume in the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra style as well, with the fan-like portion of the costume featured towards the side, rather than down the centre of the pants. Acharya has also taught workshops at the Srjan institution in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. The close friendship and professional

association between Acharya and Ratikant Mahapatra is often viewed by the larger Odissi community as a move towards bridging a long-standing rift between these two lineages of Odissi.

In addition, Sujata Mohapatra, the daughter-in-law and celebrated disciple of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, has been frequently invited by the Trinayan Collective, to teach workshops for Trinayan dancers who were mostly trained in the Guru Debaprasad Das style of Odissi. Currently, a fluidity thus pervades the Odissi identity in the ‘diasporic’ Odissi community. Acharya’s performance of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra’s *Ardhanareswar* in San Francisco, and the Trinayan organization hosting frequent workshops and also recruiting dancers from the various lineages of Odissi shows a conscious move towards acceptance of the other lineage of Odissi while remaining within the larger umbrella of the Debaprasad Das lineage. Srjan company dancer Kaustavi Sarkar danced as a company member and associate with Trinayan during her stay in New York City. Trinayan’s professional dance training programme accepts dancers previously trained in any of the styles of Odissi, although the focus of its training programme is the Debaprasad Das style.

Part of the credit of the acknowledgement of multiple styles of Odissi may be attributed to the international Odissi festivals, which serve to exhibit the various styles of Odissi. In addition, the web presence of the proceedings of these festivals has furthered the accessibility to the different styles of Odissi performed at these large-scale events. Initially, it was the diasporic Odissi community that had come together to organize these festivals. Currently, multiple annual international festivals coexist, often within the same

performance season, usually in December, and sometimes extending through to February. Some of these continue to be funded by the diasporic Odissi community while others are funded by the Odisha government's tourism department. In the following section, I examine the role of these festivals in both providing visibility for the various schools and stylistic branches of Odissi, as well as for creating a sense of a unified Odissi community

An Odissi “Fraternity”: The “Odissi” Identity

In her dissertation, Nandini Sikand notes that the Odissi community is a heterogeneous community, with members holding diverse views on a range of issues such as repertoire, approach towards *riyaz* or practice, relationship with the guru, as well as the framing context of the performances. Dinanath Pathy, in his book, points to the numerous choreographic voices which have emerged over the last fifty years, since the Odissi revival, and argues that a “rethinking” and new understanding of Odissi is required. Ananya Chatterjea calls for a similar rethinking of Odissi history which is inclusive of the different branches and traditions within Odissi. Alessandra y Royo’s scholarship examines the distinct stylistic and philosophical voice of Guru Surendranath Jena. How then can Odissi dance be defined? How is a community formed around the idea of an imagined “shared” idea of Odissi dance that is inclusive of the different interpretations of Odissi? What were some of the unifying factors in the historical understanding of twentieth-century Odissi dance? In this section, I analyze some of the ideas and causes underlying a unified sense of “Odissi dance” and “Odissi community.”

Benedict Anderson contends that a nation is imagined as inherently limited (Anderson 6), and having finite, even if elastic boundaries (Anderson 7). The pioneering Odissi revivalist choreographers, as well as choreographers of Odissi today, have historically had different choreographic approaches towards Odissi dance, but they all ultimately identify as Odissi dance artists, suggesting that there is a common formulation they perceive as being “Odissi dance,” regardless of their approach in viewing this formulation and its boundaries. Anderson suggests that the members of the community perceive their community as a whole:

Finally, it is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship (Anderson 7).

I argue that in the case of Odissi dance, it is partly the need to distinguish itself as a dance form distinct from the other seven forms of classical Indian dances, especially Bharatanatyam, that leads to the fictive idea of a unified Odissi identity. Historically, Odissi revivalist scholars claimed legitimacy based on the *Natyashastra* treatise, which acknowledges the existence of a genre of dance which it classifies as *odra-magadhi*³³, named after its geographic region. I argue that this is perhaps the singular most unifying theoretical basis underlying Odissi as an “imagined community.” Regardless of the particular stylistic approach, each of the stylistic schools of Odissi dance identifies with being a dance form originated in the state of Odisha, or essentially, the ancient region of Odra-Magadha, which the *Natyashastra* identifies as the home of the Odra-Magadhi dance form.

³³ The term *Odra-Magadha*, used in *The Natyashastra*, refers roughly to the geographic territory which would correspond to the present-day Indian states of Bihar and Odisha. *Odra-magadhi* would imply “that which is from Odra-Magadha.”

The choreographic voice of most of these choreographers engages with some notion of Odishan dance, ranging from a choreographic engagement with sculptural iconography of dancing figures found on temple walls, as in the case of the revivalist choreographer Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, to engagement with ritualistic dance practices, as in the case of Guru Pankaj Charan Das, who was invested in the temple dance tradition, and Guru Debaprasad Das, who was interested in the ritualistic sabdaswarapata traditions from western Odisha, to an engagement with the temple architecture and local worship practices, as in the case of Guru Surendranath Jena, to bridging Odissi dance research with *Natyashastra*-based dance scholarship in Bharatanatyam, as in the case of Guru Mayadhar Raut's work. Even in the work of contemporary practitioners and choreographers of Odissi dance, there is a reference to either the Odishan dance traditions themselves, or references to and quotations from different aspects of Odishan dance as envisioned by the revivalist scholars, in areas such as costume, movement vocabulary and staging conventions.

A sense of an international Odissi community and essentially an "Odissi family" is fostered by events such as the international Odissi festivals which bring together the community, and by the existence of online forums in which communication between dancers is fostered. The first International Odissi Festival was organized in 2000 in Washington D.C in the United States by the organization Indian Performing Arts Promotions Inc (IPAP). The festival was a three-day event which featured a large number of performances as well as seminars and lecture-demonstrations and presentations by seasoned Odissi dancers. Celebrated Odissi artists and accompanists were invited from

India for the event. These included the then-surviving first-generation gurus, such as Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, and Guru Pankaj Charan Das. Large Odissi institutions such as the Orissa Dance Academy were also invited, as were prominent performers of Odissi from the 1960s, such as Minati Mishra. A second festival of similar scale followed in 2003, also held in Washington D.C. The third International Odissi Festival was held in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. This festival was on a larger scale than the two preceding IPAP-sponsored festivals; it was co-sponsored by the Government of India's Ministry of Culture as well as the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and the Sangeet Natak Akademi. The festival involved an unprecedented number of performers, and in addition to Odissi, also featured the mahari dance and gotipua dance as separate categories linked to the Odissi dance heritage. Another large-scale International Odissi Festival was held in 2011, also in Bhubaneswar.

Simultaneously, Bansi Bilas, the organization headed by the Mohanty family, who have had a long-standing association with the late Guru Debaprasad Das, has also organized international Odissi festivals. These are generally somewhat smaller in scale, and have usually been held at the Kamani Auditorium in New Delhi. The 2006 Odissi Festival organized by Bansi Bilas was dedicated to the memory of Guru Debaprasad Das. The 2003 festival featured the launch of the late Guru Debaprasad Das's Oriya-language *Nrutyasarani* manuscript published posthumously as a book.

Perhaps due to the association of Bansi Bilas with the late Guru Debaprasad Das, his work and style were represented to a greater extent in the Bansi Bilas Odissi festivals than in festivals during the early years of the IPAP-organized festivals, which were held

on a larger scale. The first and second IPAP Odissi International festivals were held in North America, and consequently, featured a large number of North America-based practitioners, who were largely proponents of the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra style of Odissi, with the exception of the New York City-based Trinayan Collective, and Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, who had been invited from India. With the move to India, the festival incorporated many more practitioners from the Debaprasad Das lineage. Currently, the International Odissi Festival consciously attempts to represent each style of Odissi.

The performances and proceedings of the Odissi International Festival 2011 were posted on the Odissi Archive website, with accompanying notes and annotations describing the performances. Mentioned, along with the notes, are the details of the stylistic branch of Odissi that the performing dancer hails from.

Another medium responsible for popularizing the notion of multiplicity within Odissi is the online Odissi e-groups, which have nurtured a sense of a “global Odissi community.” Some of the popular e-groups include the Facebook Odissi group, the Odissi Yahoo forum, and the Odissi Google group. These groups feature daily postings by members regarding upcoming events, discussions on various topics, and responses to performances. Through these public discussions, practitioners from different lineages of Odissi are brought into dialogue with one another, leading to networking and awareness of different stylistic communities within the larger Odissi community. This is a marked departure from the early years of the first decade of the twenty first century, when Odissi was seen as synonymous with the figure and personality of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra.

The public availability of videos from different styles of Odissi on the Youtube video hosting site have also contributed to this. In addition, there are also electronic discussion groups devoted exclusively to the Debaprasad Das lineage, such as the Guru Debaprasad Das Gurukul group on Facebook. Membership in this group comprises mostly of individuals trained in and practicing the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi. Anderson, in his theorizing of imagined communities, postulates that print culture enabled people to imagine themselves and "relate to others in profoundly new ways" (36). I argue that the rise of electronic social media and forums performs a similar function in "linking fraternity" (Anderson 36). Through providing platforms for expression of ideas and dissemination of information, the online social media networking via listserves, Facebook pages, blogs and websites enables practitioners of different Odissi dance lineages to communicate and engage with each other. Ultimately, the fostering of the international Odissi community over the last few years, both electronically as well as through international festivals, has promoted the visibility of more marginalized styles of Odissi, such as the Debaprasad Das style.

I have argued earlier that the visibility of the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi has also been bolstered by the emergence of soloist performers of this style over the last decade. At the same time, the Debaprasad Das gharana today cannot be identified according to the same criteria of distinctions as fifteen years ago, due to the evolving choreographic approaches of Odissi choreographers from the other styles of Odissi. Thus the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi, while enjoying a newfound visibility on the international arena, continues to have a complex identity with regards to its relationship

with the Odissi “centre” and developing choreographic voices within the Odissi canon.

Areas of Future Inquiry

While this dissertation provides a brief history of the Debaprasad Das lineage, this remains a potent area for further exploration. My history of the life and work of Guru Debaprasad Das is not comprehensive, as it lacks detailed information on his work in the decades of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Further study of the theatrical landscape of Cuttack district of Odisha during the 1920s, and popular regional theatre in eastern India in general during the 1940s and 1950s would not only help fill these gaps in the history of the Debaprasad Das lineage, but also help understand how nationalism during the 1940s and regionalism during 1950s were manifested in popular cultural expressions. A history of theatrical productions between 1920s and 1950s in urban centres, such as Cuttack, in eastern Odisha, would help chart the strategic selection of elements from regional theatrical and popular performing arts into Odissi dance, further pinpointing to the framing of “classical dance” as propagated by the Odissi revivalist scholars.

Another area of study which would enrich the field of Debaprasad Das lineage study as well as the study of lineage-branches of dance in general would be the representation of different cultural groups within these stylistic lineages. In this dissertation, I have argued that one of the distinct characteristic features of Guru Debaprasad Das's lineage is the inclusion of movement heritages from Western Odisha into his repertoire. However, I have not been able to address the complexity of this representation. At present, there are a number of districts in the region comprising Western Odisha. These include Sambalpur, Kalahandi, Bolangir, Boudh, and Sundargarh.

In this dissertation, I have presented Guru Debaprasad Das's borrowings from the temple of Vajreshwari in Kumbhari village of Sambalpur, and his leanings towards the indigenous dance forms native to "western Odisha." However, it is not known whether his repertoire also covers dance forms from western Odisha outside of Sambalpur.

I mention this with respect to current political developments in western Odisha. The culture of Sambalpur has enjoyed a relatively higher visibility within Odisha as compared to the other districts of the region. Digambar Patra's article on the politics and protests behind Sambalpuri being named as the official language of the Kosal region or western region of Odisha by Sambalpur University in 2013 points to the complexity of cultural representation within Western Odisha itself. Patra also indicates that it was the song "Rangabati" which gained statewide popularity over the radio in the early 1950s which led to a statewide interest in folk music of Sambalpur. The article also highlights the complexity of identities claimed by the widely heterogeneous communities within western Odisha. A more detailed study on the nature of representation of western Odisha within the repertoire of the late Guru Debaprasad Das would contribute to a more complex understanding of representation within his lineage.

In addition, while I have traced the choreographic and pedagogical work of two of the most prominent followers of the Debaprasad Das tradition, namely Guru Durgacharan Ranbir and Guru Gajendra Panda, there are a large number of active second generation choreographers of the Debaprasad Das style, residing primarily in Odisha. Further research on their choreographic and pedagogical contributions to the lineage, as well as their work in maintaining and transmitting this style of Odissi remains another area of

research potential, as does the work of diasporic groups practicing this style of Odissi. In this dissertation, while I offer a visual analysis of some of the works of Ramli Ibrahim's Malaysia-based Sutra Dance Theatre, the work of the company in Malaysia, especially in the context of its mixed-race cast, and its thirty-year long association with the Debaprasad Das gharana of Odissi makes the company a potent site for ethnographic study on the diasporic identity of not only the lineage, but also of Indian dance in general. The company's frequent tours to Europe, North America, South East Asia, and India would also make a case study for the transnational flow of Odissi dance.

Other areas for further study on Odissi dance and Indian dance in general would include links between a transnational Hare Krishna community and Indian classical dances such as Bharatanatyam and Odissi in the diaspora. Such studies would make significant contributions to the area of religion, particularly in spirituality and dance in the diaspora.

The last four years have seen a rise in scholarship in the area of contemporary Indian dance. Ketu Katrak's study of the choreographies of the California-based Post Natyam Collective is a nod in this direction, along with Ananya Chatterjea's study on the choreographic work of the choreographer Chandralekha. Both these scholars share in common their focus on choreographic innovation in the work of Bharatanatyam-trained choreographers. Examination of these aspects of dance with relation to Odissi and other classical Indian dance forms would further contribute to research on dance, identity, "authenticity" and "innovation" in the diaspora. In addition, the last few years have also seen a rise in studies on cosmopolitanism in culture, especially in the arts. This is

especially visible in the work of scholar Nikos Papastergiadis, who studies cosmopolitanism in the field of cultural production, maintaining that there is an emerging trend of “globally oriented artistic practices,” which require a new conceptual paradigm adequate for representing the mobilities and mixtures that constitute the social context of art (2012, 12). He contends that “artists are knowledge partners in the theories of cosmopolitanism and innovators in the modes of global belonging” (2012: 10). The effects of such cosmopolitanism on diasporic dancers and choreographers of the Debaprasad Das gharana, as well as Odissi in general, would further contribute to scholarship on diasporic dance identities and cosmopolitanism in the arts.

Ultimately, this dissertation was conceived from a need to theorize a framework for defining a lineage-branch of Odissi. I argue that the lineages of Odissi, and Indian classical dance in general can be defined with respect to their history, including the life histories and memories of their founders, the philosophies embodied in the stylistic vestiges of the tradition, and the “living tradition” or the contemporary modes of teaching-practice-performance-creation by artists within the gharana. While remaining a strong proponent of Oriya regionalism, Guru Debaprasad Das’s vision of Odissi dance encompassed traditions representative of both eastern and western Odisha, in a departure from the work of other revivalist choreographers and scholars of Odissi, who remained focused on eastern, coastal Odisha in their vision of Odissi dance.



I. Tribabhanga: the S-shaped position which is the distinctive and iconic posture of Odissi dance. The three bends are located in the knees, the hip and the upper torso, which is deflected to the side in opposition to the direction of the hip bend.



II. Chowka: The square-shaped position of Odissi dance, inspired by the posture of the deity of Lord Jagannath at the Jagannath Temple in Puri, Odisha. The knees and elbows are bent at ninety-degree angles.



III. Hamsasya Mudra: One of the *asamyukta hasta mudras* (single-handed hand gestures). In this gesture, the index finger touches the thumb.



IV. Katakamukha Hand Gesture: One of the *asamyukta hasta mudras* (single-handed hand gestures). In this gesture, the index finger and middle finger touch the thumb.



V. Manoj Pradhan, one of the dancers of the Nrutyayan ensemble, traveling in costume to the performance venue at the Hingula Festival, Angul, Odisha (2012).

Glossary of Terms

Abhanga: A slightly askew position commonly used in the Odissi dance movement vocabulary. The position involves the hip being pushed to a specific side, and this position is strongly associated with femininity, grace and beauty.

Abhinaya: In Sanskrit, the term denotes acting or expression. The term is also used specifically in the context of the treatise *Natyashastra*'s classification of the dances to denote dance in which the choreographic emphasis is on the expressive aspect, often in conveying a specific emotional mood to the audience, or in telling a story.

Abhinaya Chandrika: A fifteenth century treatise on the performing arts authored in Orissa by Maheswar Mahapatra. The treatise includes elaborate details on the hand gestures, foot positions, gaits, bodily movements and other aspects used extensively in dance traditions, and was an important text for reference during the Odissi revival of the 1950s, and continues to be an important reference today for choreographers of Odissi.

Abhinaya Darpana: Sanskrit treatise on theatrical performance, credited to Nandikesvara, and believed to date to 200 ADE.

Adityarchana: Verses in praise of the sun. This is also an ensemble piece choreographed by Guru Durgacharan Ranbir.

Akhada: traditional gymnasia or centres of physical training for young men.

Ashtashambhu: A celebrated repertoire piece specific to the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi, and celebrates eight manifestations of the Hindu deity Siva, based on verses by Tamil poet Venkatmakhin. The term *ashta* refers to "eight" and Shambhu is another name for Siva.

Balgopalastaka: Sanskrit verses in praise of the childhood of the Hindu god Krishna.

Bandha nritya: This term literally refers to "acrobatic dance" in the context of dances from Odisha. The term can be used to refer to either (a) acrobatic movement units inserted into a dance piece, or (b) a repertoire piece comprising mainly of acrobatic movements.

Bani: Literally translates to "voice." In the context of usage in association with a dance form featuring numerous styles, a *bani* or voice, is another way of denoting a stylistic branch.

Batu: The second part of the five part repertoire as specific to the repertoire of the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra style of Odissi. The battu composition is similar to the *sthayee*, its counterpart piece in the other Odissi styles, in its choreographic structure and intent.

Bejuni: Local witch-doctors or female shamans in villages in Odisha. They often oversee childbirth or are responsible for various rituals associated with dispensing of evil spirits in the village.

Bhagawati: Sanskrit word meaning “mother,” usually used in reference to mother goddesses.

Bhakti: Refers to “devotion,” usually used in context of spiritual devotion. The Bhakti movement was also a popular Hindu religious movement from the thirteenth century onwards.

Bhava: In the theories of performance outlined in the *Natyashastra* treatise, *bhava* is the emotion performed by an actor or dancer.

Bhaunri: The Oriya language term used to denote “turns” in Odissi dance.

Bhramari: the Sanskrit term used to denote “turns” in Odissi dance.

Bhumi pranam: A short movement sequence, usually performed at the beginning of dance class, dance practice, or a performance, as a symbol of respect to the earth, as the dance usually involves footwork and feet stamping rigorously on the ground. This is a feature of most forms of classical Indian dance.

Chandi Purana: Oriya language text dedicated to the Hindu goddess Chandi, written by Oriya poet Sarala Das in the fifteenth century.

Chhau: movement practice from the region of Orissa, West Bengal, Bihar regions of India. The larger movement practice of Chhau is divided into three regional categories, each with distinct qualities. These include Seraikella Chhau, from the Seraikella region in Orissa, Mayurbhanj Chhau from the Mayurbhanj region in Orissa, and Purulia Chhau from Purulia.

Chowka: One of the two primary positions of Odissi dance, the *chowka* position is the grounded, square position in which the knees are bent at ninety degrees, with the feet turned out, and the arms are bent at ninety degrees at the elbows and held parallel to the ground.

Dakhini: literally denotes “southern,” especially referring to “south Indian” in style.

Danda: A folk dance form from Orissa.

Darpani: A pose described in the Indian performing arts treatises such as the *Natyashastra* and *Abhinaya Chandrika*. The term *darpan* refers to mirror, and the pose *darpani* is an imitation of looking into a handheld mirror.

Dasamahavidya: A cluster of ten goddesses, central in Tantric lore. These goddesses include a number of goddesses strongly associated with blood, mutilation and death, as well as more benign goddesses. The ten goddesses are: Kali, Tara, Sodashi, Bhubaneswari, Bhairavi, Chinnamasta, Dhumavati, Bagala, Matangi, Kamala.

Deshi: One of the two classifications of art in the *Natyashastra* treatise, *deshi* refers to the local and the folk tradition, as opposed to *margiya*, which denotes the classical.

Devadasi: is the term used to refer to women who were traditionally bound to the deities in the temples. Their duties in the temples often included singing and dancing for the temple deities, as well as other daily and seasonal rituals.

Dhoti: draped garment worn by men in many parts of India. It is draped around the legs to resemble pantaloons. The styles of draping differ, based on the region.

Durga Puja: Annual Hindu festival, usually held around the autumn time and harvest season, commemorating the victory of the goddess Durga over the demon Mahisasura.

Ganesh Vandana: Invocation to the deity Ganesha, the remover of obstacles, and patron deity of auspicious beginnings.

Geeta Govinda: Sanskrit language lyrical poem centered on the relationship between Radha and Krishna of Hindu mythology and folklore. It was written by poet Jayadeva in the twelfth century.

Gharana: Urdu language word used to denote “family.” The word is traditionally used to refer to a stylistic lineage in North Indian classical music, as the student was often seen as a member of the teacher’s household by virtue of his living with the family of the teacher, and performing duties in the household.

Ghungroo: bells worn around the ankles by classical Indian dancers, to accentuate and highlight skillful footwork.

Goithi chali: A characteristic gait used in the Debaprasad Das style of Odissi. It features a twisting walk with the dancer shifting weight to the heels, and placing one foot in front of the other.

Gomastha: a class of “middlemen” who acted as the liaison between the British and local Indian craftsmen.

Gopi: The *gopis* are the traditional cowherdesses and milkmaids of Vrindavan in the tales of Krishna found in popular lore. They are often depicted iconically in Hindu art and folklore as surrounding the figure of Krishna.

Gotipua: a movement tradition from eastern coastal Odisha, which features pre-pubescent boys dressed in the garb of young girls and danced. Their dance repertoire often characteristically featured an acrobatic component.

Guruji: A term used to refer to or address one’s guru or teacher.

Gurukul: The traditional Hindu system of learning in which the student lived with the family of the teacher, and performed duties in the household of the guru, in exchange for education.

Guruma: literally translates into “guru-mother.” The term guru indicates teacher, and ma indicates “mother.” The term is usually used to refer to the wife of the guru, who is seen as the “mother” of the *gurukul*, or extended family of the guru, which includes the students.

Guru-shishya parampara: The pedagogical mode of transmission in the traditional Hindu system of learning which emphasizes the one-to-one teacher-student relationship.

Hamsasya Mudra: A single-handed hand gesture from the *Natyashastra*. The mudra involves the index finger gently touching the thumb while the other fingers remain flexed widely.

Hanuman Chalisa: hymnal poem, authored by the poet Tulsidas (1497-1623), and dedicated to Hanuman, the celebrated monkey-devotee of the deity Rama from the epic Ramayana. The poem has forty verses.

Jatra: A rural Indian theatrical performance genre which includes music, dance as well as scripted and improvised theatre. Jatra troupes often tour across villages.

Javali: Musical genre in the Carnatic musical system from southern India, often featuring songs with erotic or playful lyrics.

Jayantika: The organization which was formed in 1958 in Orissa, for the purpose of codifying Odissi. Members of the organization included dancers, choreographers, musicians, artists and scholars on dance and Oriya theatre. The Jayantika organization was based in the city of Cuttack in eastern Orissa.

Kali: A goddess from the Hindu pantheon who is depicted in popular Hindu iconography as being dark-skinned, roaming cremation grounds, wearing a garland of human heads and a girdle of severed human hands around her waist.

Karana: is used to refer to a “unit of movement” in the *Natyashastra*.

Kalishi: Female shamanistic practice from villages in western Odisha, in which the woman enacts and is believed to be the embodiment of the goddess, and is worshipped as such by the villages.

Krishna: Popular Hindu god, and a central figure in the epic *Mahabharata*. He is usually depicted as being blue-complexioned and is believed to be the ninth incarnation of the god Vishnu.

Lakshya Sindoor: A celebrated repertoire piece of the Debaprasad Das lineage of Odissi. It pays homage to Ganesh, the Hindu deity associated with auspicious beginnings and seen as the remover of obstacles. The piece is categorized as a *mangalacharan* piece, or a piece performed or learned at the beginning of the Odissi repertoire.

Lalitya: literally refers to “softness” or “grace”, associated with the female form.

Mahabharata: Sanskrit epic which chronicles the battle of Kurukshetra. Its authorship is credited to the sage Vyasa, it is believed to be the longest and most complex Sanskrit epic.

Mahakali Dhyana: Invocation to or meditation upon the Hindu goddess Kali.

Mahari: In Orissa, the female temple attendants were called *maharis*, and this term is especially used to refer to the devadasis attached to the Jagannath temple. They were officially wedded to the temple deity.

Mancha Pravasha: Literally translates to “entry on the stage,” this event, usually a solo performance by a dancer, spanning from an hour to two hours, is seen as a rite of passage which marks the performer’s debut as a dance professional, and the end of their training as a student.

Mangalacharan: first item of the five-piece Odissi repertoire. It comprises of an elaborate entrance onstage, an obeisance to the earth, an invocation to a deity (*ishta deva vandana*), and finally, an obeisance to the audience (*sabha pranam*).

Mardala: The Odishan variant of the north Indian pakhawaj drum. The instrument is used to provide percussion accompaniment for Odissi dance.

Margam: The full repertoire of a classical Indian dance form.

Margiya: refers to “classical;” one of the two classifications of art in the *Natyashastra*.

Mayurbhanj Chhau: traditional movement practice from the Mayurbhanj district of Orissa. This was primarily practiced by male practitioners, and includes rigorous movements and jumps, and is believed to be of martial origins.

Medha Nritya: A ritualistic and popular movement tradition native to the Puri region of Orissa. This tradition is usually performed by troupes of male performers, who often wear huge masks. The narratives of the performances are based on popular Hindu folklore and mythology.

Meena Nayana: repertoire piece composed by Guru Debaprasad Das to a poem written by the Oriya poet Bhagirathi Das. The piece is categorized as an abhinaya or expressive dance piece.

Moksha: Fifth item of the five-part Odissi repertoire. Moksha means liberation, and this dance is usually a high-tempo form-dominated dance, culminating finally into a slower, more controlled, expressive invocation to a deity or the animation of a verse from the Hindu scriptures.

Nabarasa: in theories of theatre as outlined in the *Natyashastra* treatise, *nabarasa* refers to the idea of nine sentiments. The term “naba” refers to “nine,” and “rasa” refers to “sentiment.” The nine sentiments outlined in the *Natyashastra* are *sringara* (love), *veera* (bravery or valor), *adbhuta* (wonder), *bhaya* (fear), *vibhatsa* (disgust), *karunya* (sorrow), *raudra* (anger), *hasya* (humour), and *shanta* (peace). *Nabarasa* was also the name of a repertoire piece choreographed by Guru Debaprasad Das, highlighting the nine rasas in different episodes from the epic Ramayana.

Namami Vignarajatwam: A specific invocation to the deity Ganesha.

Nata: is a term in both Sanskrit and Oriya language, used to refer to dance, or theatrical performance in which movement is a primary component.

Natyashastra: Sanskrit treatise on the performing arts, dated between 200 BCE to 200 ADE.

Nayika: Sanskrit word for “heroine” or “female protagonist.”

Nritta: refers to form-based dance, devoid of expressive or storytelling aspects. The choreographic emphasis in *nritta* is on the movements themselves.

Nritya: A combination of *nritta* (form-based dance) and *abhinaya* (expressive dance).

Nrutysarani: The Oriya manuscript written by Guru Debaprasad Das, and published posthumously. The manuscript works as a manual, documenting different dance movements, poses, gestures, as well as aspects of costuming.

Odhni: garb, usually consisting of a long piece of fabric, used as a cover over a blouse. Its use in everyday clothing, as well as costuming, is seen as a sign of modesty of the female wearer.

Odra-Magadhi: Refers to the region covering present-day eastern Odisha and neighboring regions in Bihar and Jharkhand. The term “Odra-Magadhi” was used in the *Natyashastra* to denote dances practiced in this region.

Osakothi: Ritualistic mural painting tradition from southern Orissa, usually done by women and families during autumn.

Pallavi : Third item of the five part Odissi repertoire. The *pallavi*, like the *sthayee*, is also a form-dominated dance. *Pallavis* are based on specific musical raagas or families of notes. *Pallavi* literally translates into “flowering,” and as the dance progresses, the choreography explores the raaga through different rhythmic lenses.

Parampara: literally translates as “tradition”

Pataka: The first mudra from the single-handed hand gestures in Indian classical dance. The term refers to the plain flexed palm, with all the fingers held closely together.

Radha: consort of the god Krishna, in Hindu folklore.

Raga-rupa varnana: danced description of the personification of the raga or family of musical notes. The attributes of the “persona” of the raaga are described through the lyrics, which are interpreted in the dance.

Rasa: In the theory of performance outlined in the *Natyashastra* treatise, *rasa* is the emotional responses evoked in the audience by a performer’s performance. There are

nine rasas outlined in the *Natyashastra*. These include are *sringara* (love), *veera* (bravery or valor), *adbhuta* (wonder), *bhaya* (fear), *vibhatsa* (disgust), *karunya* (sorrow), *raudra* (anger), *hasya* (humour), and *shanta* (peace).

Ratha Yatra: Major annual religious festival in Odisha, featuring a chariot procession, held annually during the early part of the monsoon season. The three central deities from the Jagannath temple at Puri are carried on these chariots.

Raudra Rasa: One of the nine rasas outlined in the *Natyashastra* treatise's theories of rasa (sentiment) and theatrical performance, *raudra rasa* refers to the sentiment of rage or uncontrolled anger.

Riyaz: an Urdu-language term referring to “daily practice” or “discipline.”

Sabdās: chanted verses of the sabdaswarapata ritualistic movement tradition from Sambalpur in western Orissa.

Sabdaswarapata: Ritualistic movement form originating in Sambalpur in western Odisha. The ritual involves the practitioner performing a rigorous movements animating the accompanying chants in praise of a selected deity.

Saptamatrika: A group of seven Hindu goddess deities. *Sapta* refers to the number “seven” and *matrika* translates to “mothers”. This cluster comprises of the goddesses Brahmi or Bramhani, Vaishnavi, Narasimhi, Varahi, Indrani, Maheswari, and Chamunda.

Salwar kurta: A north Indian garment for women, consisting of a loose shirt, and pantaloons. The garment is now worn throughout India, and often used as dance class wear, due to the mobility of the legs afforded by the pantaloons.

Sari: Draped garment worn by women throughout India. The garment consists of seven yards of fabric, which is draped in different styles, according to the region. Some regions of India, such as Maharashtra, traditionally have nine-yard saris, in place of the standard seven-yard length.

Saura: A tribal-ethnic group from Orissa. This tribal group is also sometimes called the *savaras*, and is known for its painting style.

Sepoy: an English version of the Hindi/Urdu term *sipahi*, or soldier. The term *sepoy* was used specifically to denote soldiers of Indian origin hired by the British forces in colonial India.

Shahijatra: A ritualistic dance form performed in public in eastern Orissa, usually performed during the early summer period. The performance features male performers wearing huge masks depicting the faces of gods.

Shaiva: sect of Hinduism centered around the deity of Siva, one of the three gods of the primary Hindu trinity of Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the preserver, and Siva, the destroyer.

Shakti: concept of the “divine feminine” in Hinduism. Shaktism is also a Hindu sect centered around the philosophy and worship of the divine feminine.

Shikari: translates as “the hunter.”

Shilpa Shastra: A series of Sanskrit treatises centered around the discipline of architecture.

Shiva: One of the gods in the primary trinity of Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva in Hinduism. Shiva is the deity associated with destruction.

Slokas: verses from Sanskrit texts, usually recited or sung during rituals. A number of classical dance pieces are choreographed to slokas from different texts.

Shayee-Antara: musical structure form found in the repertoire of North Indian (Hindustani) classical music, comprising of the chorus and stanzas.

Sthainata or Sthayee: “Sthai nata” or “sthayee” is the second part of the five-part Odissi repertoire. It is primarily a form-based dance. The term “sthayee” is also used to refer to the dominant mood of an expressive piece.

Suryastaka: eight-verse poem in Sanskrit in praise of the sun. This is also a celebrated repertoire piece choreographed by Guru Durgacharan Ranbir.

Swara varnana: description of a musical note, as depicted through dance gestures.

Tandava: Sanskrit word denoting “rigorous movement,” often associated with masculinity and vigour. *Tandav* and *lasya* (grace) were the two classifications of dance outlined in the *Natyashastra* treatise.

Tantra: sect of Hinduism centered around a specific set of philosophies which include, but are not limited to goddess worship, practice of activities otherwise considered taboo in mainstream Hinduism, such as consumption of meat, wine, association with corpses.

Tantra shastra: Tantric scriptures, documenting the tantric doctrines as well as tantric practices.

Thakurani Jatra: Ritualistic festival from Behrampur in southern Orissa. The festival is centered around a public procession of women carrying a pot on their head. The pot is symbolic of the “Thakurani” or the goddess.

Tribhanga: One of the two primary positions of Odissi dance, the tribhanga position is the sinuous, S-shaped position involving “three bends,” at the knees, the hip, and the upper torso in opposition to the direction of the hip.

Vaishnavism: sect of Hinduism devoted to the god Vishnu and his incarnations.

Vibhatsa rasa: One of the nine rasas outlined in the *Natyashastra* treatise’s theories of rasa (sentiment) and theatrical performance, *vibhatsa rasa* refers to the sentiment of disgust or revulsion.

Viniyoga: Refers to the different contexts in which a hand gesture (*mudra*) can be used.

Vira rasa: One of the nine rasas or sentiments outlined in the *Natyashastra*, the Vira rasa refers to the sentiment of valour or bravery.

Vishnu: One of the gods in the primary trinity of Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva in Hinduism. Vishnu is seen as the material preserver of the universe, and as the preserver of order as well.

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