Odissi on Screen: A Meditation on Regional Television
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Abstract

This article aims to interrogate the role of the television screen in creating, re-creating, disseminating, and deconstructing the dancing body. It presents a study of the contemporary landscape of odissi dance, a nationally recognized Indian traditional art form from the eastern Indian state of Odisha, through its on-screen representation. As an odissi soloist, I register, analyze, and interpret screenic data, mainly televised interviews of dancers, live telecasts of dance festivals in Odisha, and performances recorded for the camera in the studios. I focus on content primarily broadcast on the state-owned satellite channel broadcasting in Odia, the official language in Odisha. My position is of a *Sahrdaya,* an observer tutored in the codes and conventions of the art form and critically responsive to the structure of emotion in the presentation. I locate the dancing body across discursive, disseminative, and choreographic renditions. This subjective positioning, I argue, democratizes the expressive ethos of odissi embodiment. Commenting on the contemporary curation of the dancing body by the state network, this essay brings larger questions around the representation of gender, sexuality, caste, and regionalism on the television screen.

Keywords: odissi, regional television, public network, aesthetic reception, *Sahrdaya,* Advaita Vedanta

Introduction

Indian dance practices maintain a historically significant connection with television, building a measure of cultural consciousness that presupposes aesthetic judgment—one that is deeply ingrained within social hierarchies across class, caste, gender, sexuality, and regional identity. Built on grounds of education, information, and entertainment, state-owned television has made available its archival content since 1970 for educational purposes. On technical grounds, untrained camerawork often cut out the dancers' hands and feet, and failed to capture poignant facial expressions in the weekly half hour of telecast by national programming from the Indian capital of New Delhi. In addition to the central government owned broadcasting, there are seventeen regional satellite channels. Regional and national television have not always presented a monolithic voice. In her extensive research on dance in Indian media, dance scholar, Pallabi Chakravorty notes that "to counter the cultural domination of Delhi, regional centers like Calcutta Doordarshan reformulated the propagation of the national narrative and identity formation through their own vernacular versions of high culture."

Furthermore, the private funding of channels holds commercial interests in exploiting dance, emphasizing degrees of viewership and popular appeal. The profusion of reality television in India today presents an eclectic microcosm of Indian and international dance forms, where the dramatic, acrobatic, and spectacular appeal of the dance occludes the organic oeuvre as propagated by the state-owned network that historically prioritized classical Indian dances as high culture. In her book-length inquiry on the cross fertilization of Hindi movie industry with its song-and-dance-sequences and dance competitions held on reality television, *This Is How We Dance Now! Performance in the Age of Bollywood and Reality Shows,* Chakraborty theorizes this phenomenon as a democratic maneuver. She argues that the commercial avenue has allowed for technological acquisition and dissemination of knowledge in the arts while noting its democratic ethos and welcoming its opportunities for class mobility. This neoliberal trend of literal and metaphorical spatial and social mobilization through the creative potential and an imaginative dream-

come-true ethos of visual spectacle painting larger-than-life characters colors dance on contemporary Indian television. Televised medial transmission of movement has historically featured elitist dance practices through gradations for different pay-scales representing a select few dance forms. Contemporary trends have complicated this convention by busting existing myths about cultural monoliths and creating new conventions that are both technologically and commercially motivated.

This article focuses on contemporary aesthetic trends in the field of odissi dance, an eastern Indian traditional art form from the state of Odisha (also a recognized classical dance), through its representation on regional television channel DD Odia, the state-owned entertainment channel in Odisha. Odissi is known for its curvilinear folds and circular geometries evoking the oceanic appeal of the Bay of Bengal that washes the shores of Odisha. The Odishan coastline continues to feature in odissi's presence on screen. This connection was made clear in the presentation of *Satyam Shivam Sundaram,* a self-proclaimed Broadway-style ensemble piece created by choreographer/ performer Saswat Joshi for the celebration of DD Odia's foundation day. Joshi's company, *Lasyakala Dance Vision* presented cultural iconography from Odisha through embodied tableaus while a series of moving images were projected in the backdrop. The song accompanying the dance felt contemporary with technologized beats departing from the traditional music repertoire. In Joshi's real-time telecast of live performance of odissi movement in front of projected imagery of Odishan landscape, a live audience frames the concert style performative ethos although a larger online audience appreciates, engages, comments, and interacts through the social media loop. There is a strong feedback loop across social media and Odia television that is outside the scope of this essay.

Here, I position myself as an odissi dancer in this negotiation of bodies and screens, aesthetics and sensibilities, and, finally, in conventions and their departures. As an observer, I am cued to decoding the intricacies of the art form while being moved by its emotional seduction. In that capacity, I am a *Sahrdaya,* meaning the one who relishes the presentation through its emotive content, often connecting the narrative and the embodied elements that communicate and deliver a certain sense of meaning that is finally co-created by the viewer. This subjective positioning, I believe, democratizes the expressive ethos of the odissi embodiment making emotive, metaphorical, poetic, and discursive contextualization. Expression is defined across the physical, the verbal, the emotional, and the visual representation. Conventional modes prioritize the emotional at the cost of the remaining three. With the camera's pedantic intrusion focusing on close-ups of the face, the hands, the feet, and other dynamic elements of the body, there is aesthetic attunement towards the entirety of the dancing body as opposed to having a lop-sided onus of meaning-making on facial expression.

My methodology rests within a dialectic of active deconstruction and recuperation of aesthetic theory undergirding the dancing body caused due to the tension between live performance and screened performance. Highlighting this experienced tension segues to surfacing the constructed nature of meaning-making in movement always already inflected by the medium under consideration. My research focuses on screenic dissemination of odissi movement since 2021. I focus on looking at online archives of odissi dance, mainly on *You Tube,* of DD Odia that was launched in 2009. To supplement my viewing, I also analyse programming connected to odissi, mainly through interviews of dancers on private channels, namely, Kanak TV (launched in 2009) and Prameya News7 (launched in 2015). Through this research, I build upon my existing research on changing discursive trends in the field of South Asian dance studies during and after the Covid-19 pandemic published in an article-length inquiry, "Chhapaka: Toward Online Embodiment and Discursive Shifts in Indian Dance." Through *Chhapaka,* a sling-shot movement unique to odissi, I portray how movement is disrupted and disrupts apparently seamless online pivots from live dancing to the screen. In this essay, I extend my analysis primarily to the screenic interface noting the

disruption of traditional logic and embodied construction due to the visual collage, where the odissi body becomes a referent to, and a tool for, a wider political, cultural, economic and gendered agenda. Yet, the trained viewer actively resists the neoliberal manipulation of the dance experience. In this article, I primarily argue that screenic glamorous intrusions become a ground where the neoliberal economy interacts with and disrupts traditional logic; for example, one's unquestioned surrender to the teacher. In the light of this mediated interface, traditional frameworks and narratives of dance are forced to consider the changing face of transmission, reception, and dissemination of odissi's movement economy.

Below, I first position myself as a trained dancer where the dance-codes undergird my reception of movement on screen. I theorize my screenic reception across an aesthetic attunement between the performance and the observation. This culturally situated aesthetic construction is influenced by camera-choices and digital editing although there is active subjective resistance to this spectatorial disruption. The screenic interventions and intrusions disrupt the status quo of automatic ascribing of high culture to odissi. Through my position of the *Sahrdaya* and its affiliated attention to being and becoming alongside the physical and the metaphysical, I foreground the materiality of movement, which does not assume a prior hierarchy. Rather, it resists odissi's differential stratification through sheer discomfort, one that entails my losing control over the aesthetic experience. After my subjective and theoretical positioning, I focus on DD Odia's treatment of odissi dance across dissemination of festivals, curated performances in its studio, and as oral histories through its emphasis on interviewing artists, educators, administrators, and scholars on a regular basis. Commenting on the contemporary curation of the dancing body by the state network, this essay brings larger questions around the representation of gender, sexuality, caste, and regionalism on the television screen through a democratic exploratory ethos.

Choreographic Positioning

I trained primarily in Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra style in Kolkata under Guru Poushali Mukherjee and then, in *Srjan Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Nrityabasa* in Bhubaneswar (capital city of Odisha), which was founded by Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra on September 3 1993.I savor the artistic meaning-making of the choreographic activity in concert dance as well as on television in my kinesthetically empathic viewing of movement that is further processed in my subsequent studio practice. My savoring is labor intensive, which is triggered by the optical, but chiselled further, with subsequent intellectual, physical, emotional, and kinesthetic processing and absorption, in turn making it a cyclical affair. In this sense, I am a *Sahrdaya,* meaning the one who appreciates the arts across its semantic and expressive components identifying with the technicalities and performative faculties of dance. Watching a live composition in a festival is a multisensory, immersive, poetic, literary, philosophical, spiritual, and performative act for me where the moving body is a palimpsest of textual, musical, emotive, and geometrical theatrics. From this subject position, I qualify the term *Sahrdaya* as it relates specifically to odissi dance.

Sahrdaya originates in Sanskrit literature involving both the theatrical and the literary. Etymologically speaking, *Sahrdaya* consists of *Sa* and *Hrdaya. Sa* refers to a sense of harmonization and *Hrdaya* means to carry away, reflecting on the communion of the intellect, the sensate, and the empathic registers. According to Sanskrit scholar Vidya Mishra, *Sahrdaya* is one who diffuses "being in becoming" where the dichotomy of the physical and the metaphysical is done away with at the aesthetic juncture. Tenth century philosopher and aesthetician Abhinavagupta in his famous commentary on Indian aesthetics, entitled *Abhinavabharati,* notes that the *Sahrdaya,* having been acculturated in aesthetic exposure, creates the reflection of poetic emotions in the mind. In his research on Abhinavagupta "Theatrics of Emotion: Self-deception and Self-cultivation in Abhinavagupta's Aesthetics," philosopher Sthaneswar Timalsina talks of simultaneous introspective and intersubjective breaching across the performer and the audience as well

as the performative worlds imagined, conjured, and enacted. "A dialogue between the spectator and the performer at the level of the heart is initiated in this performance, which breaches the boundary of hearts and allows multiple hearts to be one." Further, the *Sahrdaya* assimilates these emotions becoming one with the felt emotional tenor of the character. Finally, stable, universalized, and aestheticized emotions are triggered in the *Sahrdaya* who occupies a space further blurring authorial production and spectatorial reception.

In order to understand the experiential capacity of the *Sahrdaya,* one needs to establish the aesthetic episteme. Here, I borrow from the philosophical tradition of Advaita Vedanta that proposes a non-dual understanding of existence. It proposes that the empirical reality of our self as an individual is due to ignorance of our real nature, which is indivisible-immaterial-absolute-consciousness that appears as transactional reality like a rope appears as a snake as illustrated in the *Studies in Advaita Vedanta: Towards an Advaita Theory of Consciousness* by author Sukharanjan Saha. While the ontological status of reality is a much-debated topic and beyond the scope of this study, for the purposes of this text, it is instructive to note that the theoretical lens of Advaita Vedanta might provide a measure of aesthetic attunement for the viewer. Viewership in this case observes, associates, and assimilates the performative content on one end. On the other side, it entails a sensate, intellectual, introspective, empathic, and kinesthetic processing of the subject matter only to eventually de-identify the subject-object association into the non-dual whole. In this way, hearts and emotions, subjects and objects, and ideas and movements all merge into an aesthetic of indivisibility with the prevailing of one absolute consciousness. On these grounds, the aesthetic reception of the arts proposes to point the individual self to its nondual consciousness. It is in this higher consciousness, the *Sahrdaya* becomes united with the performer beyond the confines and the imperatives of empiricism. Although the experience from the performative occurs at the transactional plane, it has the potential to transcend material reality to attain the blissful state of what Abhinavagupta refers to as aesthetic rapture. As a practitioner of Advaita Vedanta, this epistemological grounding situates my aesthetic reception of odissi movement. In this essay, I am not interested in deconstructing my subjective grounds of experience within the domain of Advaita Vedanta. Instead of making experiential claims of subjective resonance, I resort to the textual underpinnings of nondual philosophy to ground my analysis of dance-spectatorship.

In his book review of Saha's *Studies in Advaita Vedanta,* Ramprasad Chakravarthi cautiously reinforces Saha's claim about the role of Advaita Vedanta in questioning social hierarchies. However, centuries-old exclusionary tactics of Brahmanical philosophy makes this point moot. Yet, there is a degree of sameness inherent in the *Sa* prefix of *Sahrdaya.* This positioning potentially complicates and brings to light conservationist practices in the field of odissi dance. In the online report, "The Question of Caste in Odissi Dance," cultural theorist and poet Kedar Mishra writes that the genesis of odissi dance has not been in the hands of Brahmins (higher castes) although caste hegemony continue to be in practice and needs necessary pushback. In my acculturation of movement, I have experienced the kinesthetic contours of odissi as those represented by a married Odia woman. Through received narratives during classroom teaching in *Srjan,* I have heard how Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra would keenly observe Odia femininity that would filter into shaping his choreographic aesthetic. One could interpolate that such a maneuver unequivocally enforces the gender binary essentializing along the lines of gender and sexuality. Yet, Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra was himself the paradigmatic bearer of such cultural embodiment. He has been iconic in his depiction of the feminine *Chali* or gait with footfall followed by a soft hip sideways deflection and a sequential spinal undulation. This imitation of a feminine gait by a male-identified dancing body already complicates the presentation of gender and sexuality. One can bring this discussion to a conversation around gender and caste specificity especially with the intertwining of identities with the notion of perfection; Anurima Banerji notes caste specificity in the description of the women's gait. Born

in a Bengali Vaidya family, I must note my own privileges of class and caste to easy access to formal and aesthetic education. While interviewing odissi dancer/ scholar Rohini Dandavate, I was again reminded of the regional specificity regarding the volume of expressivity that simultaneously is a function of Odishan culture, gender, sexuality, and caste. Her comment on gestural specificity according to regional influence is a poignant note on how movement is shaped and formed in the dance as a direct push-and-pull of Odishan landscape, ethics, and cultural ethos. All in all, I hope to note that as the *Sahrdaya,* I am in tune with the historical, social, political, and economic forces at play. Recognizing difference while resisting hierarchy remains at the center of this viewership embedded within indigenous philosophical, epistemological, and aesthetic grounding.

Choreographic appropriation of the term requires contextualizing meaning-making across the various components of the creative and cultural production. In traditional odissi productions, there is a confluence of poetic verses, rhythmic syllables, melodic notes, gestural vocabulary, postural technicalities, and production elements such as costumes and jewelry. The choreographer works closely with the script-writer and the rhythm and music composers to create the piece that then is presented by a trained dancer. In this transmission of movement, the role of the script-writer is to collate existing material or create new verbiage that provides textual basis and scripted flow of the dance work. This literary activity is simultaneously interspersed with choreographic and musical—both melodic and percussive—interventions. The creation process of a piece, in this case, distributes the authorial subjectivity from a singular author to multiple creators of text, movement, and music. The performance, either solo or ensemble, adds a whole new layer of meaning-making as the theatricality of the work reaches the *Sahrdaya* who is then able to both assimilate within and distance from the content through sensorial, perceptive, kinesthetic, emotional, and experiential registers.

The informed spectator who is acculturated in this aesthetic episteme, is able to generate a deep interest in the produced creative moment resulting in an intense identification outside the individual self, allowing for a merging of the consciousness with the performer. The *Sahrdaya* is supposedly able to generate a total communion of the performative through being and becoming and finally, realizing a blissful state of aesthetic rapture, a state of complete dissolution of individuated subjectivity with its emotions and object-oriented knowledge and merging with the aesthetic in a higher state of consciousness. Trained in Bharatnatyam, German dancer Johanna Devi writes about her choreographic experiments with Advaita Vedanta in which she explored movement from a state of absolute mental tranquillity. In her solo *waves* (2013), she generates "movement without focusing on shape, technique and aesthetics but rather on a resting state of the mind that can be described as emptiness or stillness." Across a similar poetic, metaphorical, and metaphysical appeal, the choreographic arc of each movement in odissi often resembling the oceanic waves in their quality of anticipation, preparation, manifestation, and eventual dissolution, emulates the interpretive process of a *Sahrdaya*.

What happens to the *Sahrdaya* in a study about dance and technology? Technology presents an opportunity for kinesiological abstraction. Through graphic exposition of the intricacies and complexities of movement, it allows for a comprehensive, comparative, and contextualized understanding of the dancing body. In a study of southern Indian Kathakali dance and motion capture technology, Biju Dhanapalan notes how digital technology can "unravel and decipher the complex kinetics." The quantitative—graphical, numerical, statistical, and visual—derivatives can be useful in analyzing biomechanics or visualizing kinesthetic trajectories of the dancing body towards building an integrated digital archive with high-definition video, multichannel aural accompaniments, and motion capture technology. The aesthetic attunement of the *Sahrdaya* is *Vidagdha* or emotionally wrought. This comes often with locating the self within the expressive repertoire of the dancer. But, the self's desire is co-

created in the consumer culture driven programming on television where the dancing body is presented side-by-side with screenic interventions—either live or edited. Dissemination of curated dance festivals in Odisha often infuses other content—interview of a bureaucrat, advertisements promoting tourism in Odisha, showcasing Odisha's territorial landscape alongside its faith-based infrastructure—during the choreographic rendering. Odisha chooses to brand itself as *India's best kept secret* continuing an exploratory-discovery mindset reminiscent of coloniality. Dance fits into this feminized vision of the gendered positioning of the cultural.

The dancing body on screen is framed within the logic of technology, liberalization, globalization, markets, and consumer culture. The intimate encounter of the art and the agentic individuated reception is punctuated by camera angles and video editing. As I navigate the shift of live movement to the television screen, I need to contextualize the receptive economy. Chakravorty recognizes the conflation of desire and dance across the transition from the live body to the screen, which she theorizes as a transition from "rasa" to "remix." While "rasa" refers to the aestheticized emotional tenor of traditional Indian art, it broadly conjures the complex terrain of aesthetic theory imbuing literature, performing arts, visual arts, and spirituality. "Remix" refers to the remixing of older song-and-dance sequences with contemporary ethos, techno-beats, state-of-the-art software, and a culture of editing. Chakravorty notices how the emotive aesthetics have become historical relics concluding that "the search for an aesthetic modernity in India is the story of the recontextualization of 'desire' and the 'desiring subject.'" I take Chakravorty's cue to investigate this process of reframing, recontextualization, revisiting, and revamping of both the desired object and the desiring subject. Not so focused on desire as such, Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram's analysis of song-dance sequences in Tamil movies from southern India identifies screen dance principles, such as playing with memory and materiality, that cultivate and shape audience imagination.

I am arguing that the *Sahrdaya's* appreciation of the *Angik* or physical expressivity although wrapped up within the seductive glamor of screenic intrusion, infuses liberatory logic. The camera's close-ups on hands and feet are particularly instructive as they force attention away from the dancer's gaze. Materiality of gesture, either demonstrated through finger detailing or via energetic extensions of the ankle, foreground an embodied resonance. This is not abstracted via emotional logic or textual—narrative, prosaic, poetic, or prosodic—parameters. The move away from the textual opens up the possibility of reflecting on the intersubjective materiality of performative reception. The receiver potentially brings her physicality—intersectional presence across class, caste, gender, sexuality, and regional identity—in communion with her perception of the same analytics of the observed. The performative is no longer just the artistic content. Rather, the focus on embodied materiality makes space for the autobiographical signature. This maneuver is not available to the traditional *Sahrdaya* who conventionally abstracts the performed through the performative content and similarly subjectively resonates only with the abstraction. On screen, however, the locus on the *Sahrdaya* lies in the profusion of the *Angik* as opposed to the *Satwik* or the emotional. But, gestural mapping through the hands and the percussive explorations through the surfaces of the feet gain precedence in a hodge-podge collage of screenic intrusion for which there often is no aesthetic logic to the broadcasting choices, given the real-time nature of programming. The viewer is forced to create meaning of the movement framed within the larger topographical, sociological, political, economic, and cultural conceptualization. Competing narratives make the construction of an overarching narrative of dramatic intensity bleak. This definitely reduces the status of odissi from its initial conceptualization of *high art*, *high culture*, and reminiscent of social elitism.

The dance becomes an embodiment of the regional life with its performative imagination, when, say, odissi movement is directly followed by a government sponsored awareness initiative about conservation of turtles in Odisha's famous Chilka Lake. Although odissi's national status as a technically challenging art

form gives it cultural value, its embeddedness in the regional topographical landscape of Odisha is largely exploited by public broadcasting. Below, I look at three modalities of screenic intrusion of the conventional jewelry-clad female dancing body as I examine the role of state broadcasting in bringing out oral histories, in curating programming, and in disseminating important festivals in the state of Odisha.

Gestural Efficacy: Locating Gesture on Televised Interviews

It is not surprising to see an array of *Kotki* and *Bomkai* saris from Odisha handloom paraded by odissi dancers in the morning shows on both state-owned and private-funded Odia television networks. Performance and pedagogy are woven intricately with one another in the lives of successful dancers who are celebrated across television. Surya Prakash Upadhyay in his book chapter "Neoliberal Capitalism and the Emergence of Corporate Hinduism in Urban India," argues that religion serves and is served by political and economic interests and is a two-way street where the spirituality of the Hindu gurus continue to remain a strong influence. Indian dancers have taken the role of new age gurus where the art becomes a medium to transmit cultural, moral, and ethical values. However, the alignment of aesthetic values with that of the majoritarian Hindu mold remains mandatory for someone to enjoy screen time to begin with.

Although televised interviews of dancers provide a glimpse into their creative process, the primary takeaway continues to reinforce hierarchy in dance pedagogy. Pedagogical transmission of aesthetics, values, kinesthetics, and bodily practices prioritizes a concentration of control by the educators. This takes the form of apprentice-learning that takes pride in differentiating itself from secular transmission of knowledge. Rather, the dancer is supposed to completely surrender to the art, the teacher, and the cultural codes and conventions marking the aesthetic field of transmission. Respect is considered sacrosanct and the loss of respect, as deemed by the teacher from the disciple, continues to have social ramifications where the student is boycotted from the class. This model of training is far from the auspices of contemporary models of education where the dancer is able to acquire knowledge for a price in the marketplace or even free of cost through open-source mechanisms.

The irony lies in the lack of synchronicity of the screened show. The interviewee is presented in the glitz and glamor with numerous photographs, highly edited performance reels, ensemble productions, and association with political patronage. This is far from the perception of austerity in this knowledge-transfer from the teacher to the taught. The dancer is showcased as a successful career-builder who has made it to fame through sheer determination. Access to information and to power continues to dominate success although the narrative of complete surrender to the mentor as the marker of success is featured, replicated, and propagated. So, the juxtaposition of the neoliberal with the pedagogical sacrosanct does not read as organic. When the interviewee speaks about dedication, surrender, egotistic dissolution, diligence, sincerity, devotion, internalization, and patience, to me, even as the *Sahrdaya,* there is a disjuncture. These values are definite additions to the students' tool-kit. However, the shining make-up on the interviewee's faces and their words of spiritual surrender falls flat and seems lop-sided. Words become less important while the interviewee's gestural usage draw my attention. Their gesticulation, to me, is far more interesting given years of sharpening of performative skills in gestural communication, than their hackneyed reminder of territoriality plaguing the field of odissi.

During Padmashri Kumkum Mohanty's interview, she physically shared body movement. In this interview, Mohanty noted the research behind Odissi Research Center's publishing of the two volumes on odissi technique. While verbally sharing, I could see her demonstrate how deflection of the rib cage as opposed to the folding of the side body established as hallmarks of odissi grammar, also borrowed spatial alignment from the Benesh School of notation. During the research of *The Odissi Path Finder*, sixty static poses were

named, such as *Birama* (pause), *Shikhandika* (one-legged balance), and *Chibukamandana* (holding the index finger next to the chin), by a committee of experts who debated and deliberated over a long period of time to come to a consensus that the poses had, what Mohanty called, "organic links with physical features." Undoubtedly, these are valuable nuggets of historical and pedagogical significance in Indian dance studies.

First a prominent odissi artist and then a celebrated bureaucrat leading Odissi Research Centre in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, Mohanty, undoubtedly has contributed to standardizing dance education in odissi as an administrator. Her gestural sharing on the television screen piqued my viewership as a *Sahrdaya.* Instantly attuned to her aesthetic transmission within her postural meaning-making, I could register the primacy of the *Angika*—the realm of physical expressivity. The entire literature on *Sahrdaya,* in particular, and Sanskritized aesthetic theory, in general, value literary activity. The expressive element of the embodied—physical materiality abstracting the ecological domain in which it is embedded—was a reminder to expand Sanskrit poetics beyond the literal and the verbal. Her postural intrusion alongside her comment regarding movement's connection to physical representation was also a reminder that knowledge in the dance is a co-construction across the Odishan landscape, textual remnants in Oriya and Sanskrit, and finally, scholarly/ creative interpretation/ analysis of all these multiple linguistic, embodied, and ecological elements.

But, seamless aesthetic attunement is periodically disrupted by screenic logic. The role of the television host is necessary in framing these oral history narratives. The interviews are embedded across a multiplicity of activities. Video excerpts from previous performances bring a visual reference to what the interviewees share about past experiences. These sessions are often interspersed with song sequences by a live musical ensemble where again the apparent monotony of musician's craftsmanship is interspersed with departures into Odishan geographical locales and natural beauty. The program is steered by the host across the invited guest and intermittent programming. "Hello Odisha" presented on the state owned DD Odia telecasting from Cuttack, an important city in Odisha. The host for this morning show varies from show to show. Unlike Don Cornelius' star power in his nationally televised show "Soul Train" that promoted African American culture and artistry, "Hello Odisha" draws its star-value mainly from its invited guests. Popular odissi performers, namely Sujata Mohapatra, Iliana Citaristi, Meera Das, Gajendra Panda, Durga Charan Ranbir, Nazia Alam, and Leena Mohanty are a few names featured on television. Similar programs interviewing artists can be found on privately owned Odia-language cable and satellite channels such as Kanak News and Prameya News7. "Breakfast Odisha" is another morning show on Prameya News7. The language used to introduce and address dancers continues to draw parallels among spiritual seekers and movement practitioners. In her interview on "Breakfast Odisha," the host addressed Kumkum Mohanty as a *Jogi,* meaning one who surrenders material possessions. As a state-government bureaucrat working to standardize the teaching and learning of odissi, Mohanty shared how she published two volumes of Odissi technique with in-depth research and consultation with cultural leaders from Odisha.

I describe below how Indian television continues to map neoliberal agenda onto existing hierarchies of knowledge transfer complicating preparatory modes of aesthetic transmission that are in the purview of performing arts disciplines. Odissi repertoire starts with an invocatory prayer to Jagannath, the presiding deity and ends with a salvific note as the dancer seeks liberation from the material world. In the neoliberal marketplace, perhaps it can be compared to the new-age "'salvation wares,' to be sold in the market and promoted through television channels and other forms of media." This is a traditional modality of being but nevertheless is prioritized in neoliberal marketplaces where odissi is bought and sold, marketed and insured, and overall patronized as an elite form by the federal and state governments as a conglomeration

of spiritual, cultural, and artistic practice, nevertheless, aligned with political power and majoritarianism. Furthermore, it disguises the propaganda machinery that the ruling Hindu majoritarian government foments and rekindles on a periodic basis in the garb of aesthetic education and philosophical acuity. Recent clashes in the eastern Indian state of Manipur were allegedly state funded by the Hindu far right organizations leading to sexual exploitation and excessive rioting. Social theorist Purnima Mankekar argues how broadcasting accomplishes a slippage between (upper-caste) Hindu and Indian culture enabling the "growing hegemony of Hindu nationalist discourses of cultural purity predicated on the marginalization, if not demonization, of Islam and Christianity, and the exclusion of lower-caste struggles for social justice."

The Gendered Space of Curated Programming on Indian Television

The screen renders possible certain types of viewing practices that do not just present or represent the moving body as is, but rather, curate it for the viewer. Further, curatorial choices of broadcasting continue to transact in the neoliberal economy offering its own screenic intrusions and spectatorial disruption through the political field apparently as an antidote to commercial interests governed by market economics. Gendered viewing and pedagogical transmission premise curatorial decisions of both solo and ensemble works on television. The televised presentation of *Chakrabyuha*, a choreography by Bichitrananda Swain and performed by an all-male repertory group called the "Rudraksha Foundation", on DD Odia glorifies masculinity through combative power. "Rudraksha Foundation" prides itself on demonstrating that "men can dance like men even in the sensual, sublime, and sculptural dance form of odissi." Gender binary holds strong in the physicality as well as the emotive capacity of the ensemble even while inviting innovative choreography skills and body kinetics. As a counterpoint to this, DD Odia's curation of the primarily female ensemble presentation of *Chausathi Jogini* by the Odishan dance company namely, "Odishi Nrutya Natika" glorifies sixty-four incarnations of the powerful goddess. These dances vary in terms of subject matter. However, the camera angles also frame the definition, perception, organization, and negotiation of power. The technical strengths of the two presentations are not equal. Rudraksha's technical abilities are at a higher caliber than those of "Odishi Nrutya Natika," which is more of a community celebration having the younger generation dance side by side with mature adults. However, I choose these videos as representative of the curatorial dimensions of odissi on television where the selection process is either arbitrary or all-inclusive, preceded by an audition process in which curatorial criteria are not publicly available. Below follows an analysis of the two televised presentations of *Chakrabyuha* and *Chausathi Jogini* commenting on the interplay of movement and gender curation by the screen.

The piece *Chausathi Jogini* celebrates multiplicity of the female form as established at the Chausathi Jogini temple in Hirapur in Odisha. The dance piece has the same name as the temple. The dance is strewn with sculptural iconography as individual dancers organize themselves in ways that visually correspond to the respective goddess at the temple. Divided into sections with musical—melodious, percussive, and lyrical—variations, it enlists the entire gamut of the goddess' iconography. The dance starts with an invocatory prayer to the goddess and ends on the celebratory ethos. Throughout the persona and the characteristics of the changing incarnations—*Ugrachanda, Kausiki, Shakambari, Bhadrakali, Durga, Matangi, Kali*, and *Shivadyuti*—influence the changing choreography and emotive landscapes. While *Matangi* and *Shivadyuti* are of a softer hue, *Kali* and *Ugrachanda* bring out the grotesque. The dance-drama features a soloist at the center while the ensemble rearranges in multiple tableaus and spatial arrangements to communicate the notion of strength, beauty, and power. It is instructive that although the burden of reproduction is not imposed onto the goddess, the piece ends on the note of praising the mother. The choreography ends with heralding the goddess's sixty-four incarnations as the divine mother, invoking the mother from

Hirapur, and glorifying the mother. The original lyrics of the song are "*Chausathi Jogini Ma, Hirapurabasi Ma, Jai Jai Ma*", noting the specific architectural and sculptural references to the temple. The role of the mother is reimagined as the powerful protector who takes on the grotesque. The camera work is far from instructive in this work as wide shots and close-ups often miss the essence of the choreography. Curated programming on television does not seem to require previous rehearsals with camera personnel as evident in the random capture of shots based on real-time decisions and creative discretion. One dancer in the ensemble stood out in the entire production given her power and zeal in depicting the grotesque. Focusing on her, the camera proved that the feminine, as depicted by the teacher, could very well be complemented by her student, who embodied vigor and rigor. This also actualized the previously discussed principle of *Sadhana Chatushtaya* where the mentor and the mentee are captured in a single shot.

Byuha denotes deployment of troops in formations in a tactically favorable situation where the weaker army might win. The creation of *ChakraByuha* is one such strategic military deployment of troops to kill the protagonist, Abhimanyu, who is from the Indian epic *Mahabharata*. *Chakrabyuha* is riveting in its use of percussive combinations to show the creation of the *Byuha* and combative episodes between Abhimanyu against an array of enemy troops. The piece starts and ends on a quiet, contemplative, meditative, and expressive note where the story is laid out through emotional registers. Dialogical conversations—involving the training of Abhimanyu with his father Arjuna and between Arjuna and his friend, the all-knowing omniscient Hindu male god Krishna—added a dramatic element to the choreography. Physicality of the war occupied the last third of the dance with aerial movements, bold combative gestures, and the climactic attack of Abhimanyu. Camera zooms on the individualized expression of the various character portrayals from the epic made the viewing experience very pedantic. The viewer in the live performance of an ensemble, has the option to focus on multiple onstage happenings—spatial formations, relationships across artists, gestural articulation, footwork etc. But, in such a framed viewing, the viewer is made to experience the tragic ending of Abhimanyu as an emotionally charged experience. The piece is scripted in Odia and ends with the words "Samsara Neeti Porae, Ke Kichi Bujhi No Paraye" (translated by me as nobody understands the cause-effect relationship of everyday experience in our lived experiences of material existence). The negation of cause and effect where the empirical is claimed to be a mere appearance of the nondual infinite remains a non-dual concept. Materiality is being done away with although in differential standards.

The subject matter in this case is predominantly male. Mention of a female character happens at the very end when Subhadra, Abhimanyu's mother is mentioned only having given birth to the protagonist. Just the name-dropping of a woman simply instrumentalizes her body and gender whereas the male counterpart enjoys power, status, glory, and martyrdom. Undoubtedly, this piece is about male bravado and masculinity. But, it is also about progeny. Abhimanyu's training with his father, who is considered the perfect warrior in the *Mahabharata,* prioritizes the notion of masculinity not just as display but as continuity. This idea is replicated in the televised presentation of the performance where the alternation between the singular dancing body and wide-angled shots with multiple dancers preface that notion of the Ur man as the harbinger of progeny. Women's bodies are invisibilized as well as irrelevant and only useful for their reproductive value. But the true meaning and purpose lies in generational knowledge-transfer from the father to the son, so that the son carries forth his duty to protect his army from defeat even though he succumbs to death. So, the reproduction of victory at the cost of his death continues to put the onus of historical and generational continuity on one gender. The abrupt end of this broadcasting and a quick follow-through with the DoorDarshan logo, which also looks like a *Byuha,* that is a circular maze-like construct, reiterates for me, how reel life connects with lineage and progeny, the onus of which lies with the male gender.

In a comparative discussion of *Chakrabyuha* and *Chausathi Jogini,* the gender binary remains intact noting a lack of progressive gender politics in broadcasting decision-making. Further, *Chausathi Jogini* characterizes the feminine in a docile avatar—one that is deeply rooted in upper-caste female representation and policing. UK-based artist/scholar Alessandra Lopez y Royyo in her documentary entitled *Performing Konark, Performing Hirapur* based on the work of odissi teacher Guru Surendranath Jena, argues that Jena challenged prevalent notions of femininity in odissi. Exploring anger and disgust, often regarded as unfeminine, Jena's odissi was transgressive and not widely popular. Despite bridging the differential across the gender binary, the male and the female monoliths continue to dominate the audience's perception. Dancing like a man and producing the man technologically where the woman is invisibilized or exists only in her upper-caste persona as a second fiddle, continues to populate the horizon of televised screenings of odissi dance. I cannot help but notice the power dynamic in curatorial choices of broadcasting, as well as in curating the dancing body on screen, along gender and caste hierarchies—one that my spectatorial disruption as a liberatory *Sahrdaya,* is hardly able to recover from. In the next section, I turn to music and dance considerations when examined alongside screenic intrusions.

Public Dissemination of Constructed Antiquity

Temple-dancing died down in Odisha, as was true in the rest of the nation, when Odishan temples—Konark sun temple, Mukteshwar temple, Rajarani temple, and Dhauli Peace Pagoda—became huge tourist attractions due to their dance and music festivals. The showcase, for a live audience as well as for a much larger online audience in real-time, presents artistry of the highest artistic caliber with state-of-the-art lighting arrangements among other impeccable concert production elements. Konark Dance Festival, Mukteshwar Dance Festival, and Dhauli-Kalinga Mahotsav are some of the prominent festivals that are held every year in Odisha with live broadcasting by the state-owned channel DD Odia.

Konark Dance Festival commenced in 1986. Dancers perform in an open-air auditorium that overlooks the Sun temple of Konark. The Department of Tourism produces this extravaganza in early December and promotes this event as a tourist attraction during which elaborate displays by Odisha's craftsmen are set up, including the International Sand Art Festival at Chandrabhaga Beach. This entire event is a tourist attraction where Odisha's cultural heritage is presented. Similar to this event, the Dhauli Kalinga Mahotsav takes place in February, providing yet another opportunity for a collage of music and dance. Here, the audience is able to enjoy the festival in Dhauli hill-top with the brightly lit Peace Pagoda in the backdrop. This festival is jointly hosted by the state government and Orissa Dance Academy, a premier odissi institution in Bhubaneswar. While Konark and Dhauli are in the outskirts of Bhubaneswar, Mukteshwar Dance Festival has occurred in the city center since 1984. It is yet another event organized by the Ministry of Tourism promoting odissi dance in the heart of the capital city of Odisha. The state broadcasting network telecasts in real time these three festivals for the broader public. The experience of viewing a live performance is very different from seeing the same on television. In this section, I analyze the live telecast of 2020's Konark festival, Orissa Dance Academy produced *Shivam Dhimahi,* an all-male ensemble number choreographed by Guru Aruna Mohanty accompanied by a live orchestra consisting of singers, percussionists, string instrumentalists (*Sitar,* violin), flautists, keyboard players, and *Manjira* (a pair of metal cymbals) players.

Odissi could possibly be considered an exercise in visualizing music. Accented choreographic motifs have a definite beginning, a lilting flow, and a concluding stasis. The kinesthetic pauses are usually marked by the percussive registers. The gestural interface draws inspiration from the melodic making the movement a visual representation of music. But, the dance does not only pay tribute to music. Rather, it has textual, poetic, thematic, and choreographic overlays that cannot be captured by the musical notes or the

percussive beats alone. The visual aesthetic sometimes occludes the aural layering. When the dancer performs on recorded music, the dance is the only visual referent. However, often in live musical accompaniment, movement and the corresponding musical intonation can be recognized simultaneously making the viewing experience a perfect blend across dance and music. It is a delight to see the coinciding of the percussive thrusts on the *Mardala* (two-headed drum) and the accented footwork while the lilting upper body emulates the melodious flow.

The live telecast of this performance is skewed since it prioritizes movement in dance over that of the percussive and string instrumentation. The musical ensemble is rarely featured in the fifteen-minute-long piece. There were the usual close-ups and wide-angle shots of the dancers creating a visual spectacle of able-bodied vigor in an all-male ensemble. Visual spectacle of this masculinity overturns the presupposition of music as the male progenitor of dance. In the twelve-piece musical ensemble, there was only one female artist, vocalist Nazia Alam. Nazia had no role in *Shivam Dhimahi.* She was a part of the other composition, *Eka Prosna* that Orissa Dance Academy presented in this festival. While *Shivam Dhimahi* was markedly masculine, *Eka Prosna* was primarily demarcated as feminine; a discussion of *Eka Prosna* is outside the scope of this essay.

The gendered presentation of Orissa Dance Academy at Konark Dance Festival also complements the gendered perception of the dance and music dialectic. Typically, male accompanists create the music for female dancers. In my embodied *Sahrdaya* viewership, this dialectic went through some serious reckoning. The visuality of the telecast prioritizes dance as the primary bearer of the music. Intermittent glimpses of the primarily male musical ensemble delivers the promise that the dance is manifesting the aural texture. The kinesthetic and the choreographic gains a gendered primacy in the masculine that is usually the domain of the sonic. This happens irrespective of the actual gendered identities of the dancers and the musicians.

In this process, there is an overturning of this dialectic. The gender of the dancers becomes irrelevant as the gender of the dance is brought to bear. The dance assumes a masculine dimension whereas the music a feminine tenor. This dichotomy is still problematic given its upholding of the gender binary. Interspersed with tourism advertisements where a female new-age tourist roams freely on the beaches, in the forests, among the mountains, and the plains or a young couple visiting the wide array of Odishan temples present a conservative, heteronormative, and exclusionary ethos that clearly disregards gender-bending practices in Odisha's own history with the Bhakti movement. Reflecting the modality, motivation, purpose, and receptivity of live telecast, as the *Sahrdaya,* I meditate upon the significance of television in the dissemination of dance.

Conclusion

There is a national and international odissi dance community and its on-screen (social media, video-broadcasting networks, film, television etc.) and off-screen (traditional live performance) presence are flourishing. Yet, its academic curiosity remains suspect. It has not seen what media scholar David Looseley calls a "discipline-busting cultural studies approach." While Looseley refers to lack of academic attention to French popular culture, his comment can be insightful in this context. Reconfiguration of artistic disciplinary boundaries by historical and sociological dimensions can counter the lop-sided emphasis on aesthetics that often is representative of certain trends either in building or in dissipating socio political hierarchy. It can be safely assumed that academic deconstruction aims at critiquing and dissipating top-down systemic power imbalances. This critical exercise also, according to Loosely, provides cultural legitimacy. For my purposes, I am interested in creating discursive structures essential to analyzing odissi

movement ecologies and economies. But, unlike Looseley, I am not curious about odissi's legitimacy in regional, national, and international circles. It's meditative quality onstage proves its inherent affective, technical, and performative structures that provide opportunities of introspective meaning-making for the practitioner. Yet, I question odissi's negotiation with democratization—one that is directly related to the experience of the *Sahrdaya* intersecting with screenic intrusions. The screenic *Sahrdaya* through embodied resonance can counter top-down pernicious differentials along axes of gender, caste, religion, and nation. Their empathic reception of movement grounds within difference—one that recognizes the flow of thought, emotion, postural gait, gestural clarity, and energetic detailing—while battling with conventional nationalist or neoliberal agendas. The screenic collage complicates unilateral reading of the odissi movement through Sanskrit poetics or neoliberal commerce. Rather, camera work and edits return the viewing experience at the intersection of cultural analytics of movement codes and conventions, gender, sexuality, caste, region, and the nation. Return to the body inspires active engagement with energy, movement, and a physical experience with the movement. This, I conjecture, is the key point in screenic intrusion into odissi's status quo leading to the democratization of high culture on screen.

I critically reflect on the presentation of odissi on state-owned television by looking at how camera work at times affirms and at times overturns ideas around traditional precepts, conventions, and modalities embedded within the worldview of the dance, making space for its interpretive domain. The reception of the dancing body by a trained subject through the screen versus the live performance questions gendering of music and dance, regionalism/nationalism agendas, and the interaction between the dancing body and the land, cultural identity, tourism, and neoliberal economy. The indigenous concept of *Sahrdaya* perseveres in this receptive domain visualizing two distinct vectors: 1. how the dancing body becomes the ground on which the interplay between traditional and neoliberal economy takes place, and 2. how spectatorship is disrupted through the use of screenic intrusions and how this is linked to the idea of democratization of high culture on screen.

Physicality of gestures, materiality of bodies, and the juxtaposition of aural-kinesthetic constructs allow the *Sahrdaya* to move away from the textually emotive to the *Angik,* or physical expression*.* This maneuver of attributing visual primacy to the physical domain is, in my opinion, a screenic intervention, one that is perhaps arbitrary, but nevertheless poignant in terms of presenting the dancing body— creating it in its grotesque or in complex maze-like formations, re-creating it in televised interviews and commercials, deconstructing the body through partial captures, and disseminating it alongside new-age faith-based cultural tourism. However, in the contemporary political climate, complete co-optation of this dancing body by the Hindu right diminishes its aesthetic or epistemological possibilities; a conversation that is outside the scope of this article.

Reception of the choreographic via the mediated adds an interpretative dimension between the receiver and the creator of the creative act. The secondary layer in the case of historical portrayal of odissi dance on television declares a gap between the convergence of the dance and its live appreciation. Odissi prioritizes and anticipates reception within the folds of its dancing body as well as its highly communicative face. Its frontal dimension distributes power between the dance and its reception, given the kinetic pauses, as if the dance itself has built-in check-in time with the viewer. The receiver is also acted upon by the varying patterns of the dance with its infinite layering of information—the creative, the poetic, the musical, the choreographic, the real-world resonances, and the imaginative. The receiver has the prerogative of meaning-making, although, remaining under the superior authority of the live act. With the televised, the process of reception is framed under the sway of camera work, studio scenography, discursive interventions, and neoliberal disruptions. The camera close-ups draw attention to the visually attractive and appealing or even the grotesque. Generic studio backdrops rarely address the subject

matter of the choreography presenting a distraction rather than aiding the dance. Sudden disruptions promoting tourism or commercial interests further disrupt attentive viewing. In closing, I suggest the complex interpretive lens provided by the television on dance puts more emphasis on visuality in the meaning-making process whereas the traditional *Sahrdaya* is perhaps able to stay within the conservative hierarchical worldview of the kinesthetic, the emotive, and the affective although the visual referent is woven away from verbal to a more physical materiality.

Biography

Kaustavi Sarkar, Assistant Professor, is a dancer-choreographer-educator-scholar. Sarkar has been performing and teaching *Odissi*, for over a decade while pursuing a career in US academia. She has taught at Kenyon College and holds a Ph.D. from The Ohio State University (OSU) in Dance Studies with interdisciplinary research interests in digital humanities, cultural studies, queer studies, and religious studies. Sarkar's first book 'Dance Technology Social Justice: Individual and Collective Techniques of Emancipation' published by McFarland Publishers explores the potential of Odissi in experimentation with dance-technology and as a mode of social justice. She is working on a second monograph in contract with the University of North Carolina Press called 'Shaping S Curves' which explores the theory, practice, and philosophy of Odissi dance. Sarkar is a leader in her field as the founder of the journal 'South Asian Dance Intersections' (SADI) and the 'Dance and Community Research Institute' (dNc), which is an arts-education, arts-consultancy, and arts-entrepreneurial project bringing artists, educators, and leaders together for systemic change. She also serves as a Regional Director for American College Dance Association.

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