

# *Shaping S-Curves*

*Choreographic Process Abstract Book*

**JUNE 14 - 19, 2021**

<https://scurves.uncc.edu/>



## **ABOUT**

What is choreography in Odissi? How does one approach creativity in this eastern Indian dance form that is embedded within curvilinear principles? What is the purpose of the Odissi aesthetic? This event focuses on describing the heterogeneity among the choreographic principles used in Odissi. This art form has historical and contemporary lives in concert practice and in cultural festivals. Focusing on solo/group works, percussive/expressive idioms, religious/spiritual foci, transnational/diasporic performances, as well as political/contemporary interpretations, this conference presents a snapshot of the aesthetic potential in the field of Odissi.

# CONFERENCE ORGANIZERS

## CONFERENCE CONVENOR // KAUSTAVI SARKAR

Kaustavi Sarkar, PhD, Assistant Professor in the Department of Dance at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, is an Indian classical soloist-educator-choreographer. She teaches dance history, dance theory, interdisciplinary making, and technique courses in the department. As the Artistic Director of Kaustavi Movement Center, an India-based organization dedicated to the transnational dissemination of and queer/ feminist research in Indian classical dance, Sarkar has demonstrated scholarly, artistic, as well as organizational expertise. She has represented India in multiple events featuring cultural diplomacy, such as the Commonwealth Day celebrations, and has received coveted national titles in the field of Indian classical dance, namely Singar-Mani, Nalanda-Nrityanipuna, and Odissi-Jyoti. Her research interests lie in performance studies, practice-as-research, digital humanities, critical cultural theory, and religious studies while keeping her performative body at the core.

## CONFERENCE DIRECTOR // ILEANA CITARISTI

Italian by birth, Padmashree Dr Ileana Citaristi holds a Doctorate in Philosophy with a thesis on 'Psychoanalysis and eastern mythology'. She has come to Indian dance after years of experience in the traditional as well as experimental theatre in Europe. Her contributions, besides the many performances and lecture-demonstrations given in all the major centres in India, include articles on Oriya culture published in Indian and foreign magazines, research work for film-documentaries on Odissi and Chhau dances and practical dance workshops for dancers and theatre workers which she regularly conducts under invitation by different institutions in India and abroad. She has given performances in all the major dance festivals in India as well as in Italy, Argentina, Poland, France, Germany, Holland, Denmark, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Japan, USA, Australia, Israel, Spain, Poland, South Korea, Canada, Peru and Portugal.

## CONFERENCE MANAGER // COLLEENA SHAKTI

Colleena Shakti is an internationally-renowned performing artist, teacher and researcher rooted deeply in lineages of classical Indian Odissi Dance, yoga, Indian martial arts (Kalarypayattu) and Rajasthani folk dance. Fueled by the depth of these traditional arts, she has thoughtfully carved her own way in fusion dance projects and cross cultural explorations. Since 2001 she has lived in India extensively training in dance, as well as conducting dance research and collaborating with Rajasthani folk artists from communities such as the Kalbeliya, Langa and Manganiyer. Well-versed in many styles of dance from India and beyond, Colleena's dance background of over 20 years includes: contemporary and classical ballet, folkloric dances (of Egypt and Rajasthan) and classical Indian dance (Odissi and Kathak). She continues to be a dedicated disciple of Odissi dance under Smt. Sujata Mohapatra.

## GRADUATE STUDENT CONVENOR // SRIRADHA PAUL

With an experience for more than twenty years, I chose to be a professional Odissi dancer that emerges from the temple ritual practice of movement. I also have an experience in Indian contemporary dance and performative storytelling. I have performed and given workshops in prestigious platforms across India and abroad (US, Sri Lanka, China, Hungary, London, Bhutan and South Korea). I have conducted dance and performative storytelling workshops in several schools and colleges. Delivered a short lecture-demonstration to the inmates at Cherlapally jail, Hyderabad. I also worked closely with the survivors of human trafficking under the American Centre's performative storytelling project in Kolkata. I am pursuing my international master's in dance Knowledge, Practice and Heritage under Erasmus Mundus Joint master's degree (EMJMD). My research interests are transmission, identities, dance anthropology and Odissi in global context.

## CONFERENCE ADVISOR // NANDINI SIKAND

Imprinted in New Delhi, Nandini Sikand is a filmmaker, dancer-choreographer, writer and cultural anthropologist. Her interdisciplinary work is informed by the fluidity of working between and within the fields of film and media, and dance and performance, in both India and the United States. She has published articles on cinema, performance, *Languid Bodies*, *Grounded Stances: The Curving Pathway of Neoclassical Odissi Dance*, a book on Odissi dance as an embodied form and global commodity. She has made films on the prison industrial complex, immigration, nationalism, sex work, breast cancer, and counter-culture music. She has created performance pieces about the prison system, gender, and the politics of gestural language. She is the co-founder and co-director of Sakshi Productions, a neo-classical and contemporary dance company and an Associate Professor at an interdisciplinary film and media studies program at Lafayette College, PA.



# SCHEDULE

## JUNE 14, 2021

**6:00 pm** | Inauguration by Ileana Citaristi, Arshiya Sethi, and Kaustavi Sarkar

**6:30 pm** | Sharon Lowen

**7:00 pm** | Meera Das

**7:30 pm** | Madhulita Mohapatra

**8:00 pm** | Rahul Acharya

## JUNE 15, 2021

**6:00 pm** | Sharmila Biswas

**6:30 pm** | Sharmila Biswas

**7:00 pm** | Kavita Dwivedi

**7:30 pm** | Parwati Datta

**8:00 pm** | Saswat Joshi

## JUNE 16, 2021

**6:00 pm** | Ileana Citaristi in conversation Devdas Chottray

**6:30 pm** | Madhavi Mudgal

**7:00 pm** | Sharmila Mukherjee

**7:30 pm** | Sarita Mishra

**8:00 pm** | Elena Catalano and Katie Ryan

## JUNE 17, 2021

**6:00 pm** | Open Discussion

**6:30 pm** | Aloka Kanungo

**7:00 pm** | Sujata Mohapatra

**7:30 pm** | Reela Hota

**8:00 pm** | Pravat Swain

## JUNE 18, 2021

**6:00 pm** | Ileana Citaristi

**6:30 pm** | Aruna Mohanty

**7:00 pm** | Rekha Tandon

**7:30 pm** | Sangita Gosain

**8:00 pm** | Kedar Mishra

## JUNE 19, 2021

**6:00 pm** | Ann Dils, Chair of Department of Dance, UNC Charlotte

**6:30 pm** | Aadya Kaktikar

**7:00 pm** | Arpita Venkatesh

**7:30 pm** | Conversations with Nandini Sikand

**8:00 pm** | Project Highlights

*All times in India Standard Time (IST)*

# ABSTRACTS

## TRACK: CHOREOGRAPHERS' WORKING GROUP

### CHOREOGRAPHING TRADITIONAL THEMES

**RAHUL ACHARYA**

The two things that strike me most before any choreography is:

- 1) *Auchitya or a sense of aesthetics*
- 2) *Sahitya or a substantial theme.*

Being trained as an Odissi dancer since inception and having had a vast and indepth exposure to the temple culture at Puri and myriad Hindu scriptures, my thought process is deeply embedded in spirituality. Before prgressing on a thematic work (usually ancient or medieval themes), I explore, possibly all the existing literature available on the concept. I undertake thorough study of the Sahitya that is already available, including

the various versions and their commentaries. The next step involves tailoring the theme within a time frame. This process involves discusions with my Sanskrit Guru, preparation of the script and editing. Then comes the music composition, careful selection of the Ragas, fitting the metre in which the text is written, taking extra care to avoid mispronunciation. With the major portion achieved, I start to work on the dance. Having to choose between choreographing it as a solo piece for myself or for a student. This involves an understanding of the body of the dancer, its limitations and its strenghts. During the process of choreography I take extra care to ensure that I remain within the classical format, not crossing the parameters of the Odissi idiom.

### ODISSI DANCE CLASSICISM, VISUALITY & PERFORMANCE

**MADHULITA MOHAPATRA**

Curvaceous movements, sculptured poses, fluid grace, and impeccable rhythm characterise the extremely beautiful classical dance form of Odissi. With the widest of range movements and expressions, our classical dances are extremely rich in scope & content. These movements & expressions form a very vast and intricate vocabulary. With such a vast vocabulary and having survived through the ages as a tradition, our classical dances have the potential to convey both the timeless & contemporary. Beauty, depth & infinite richness of our classical dances, and their ability able to convey contemporary ideas, have always given infinite freedom for expression of the artistic self. An effective choreography is possible without diluting the essential classical purity of the dance form. We see a lot of commendable classical dance presentations on contemporary themes & ideas by classical dancers these days, beautifully choreographed & presented within the classical framework. In my choreographic works, I try to explore & innovate with movements from

expansive classical vocabulary, to refreshing feel of aesthetic experience & enjoyment. Whereas the dance movements look fresh & innovative, they are deeply rooted in foundations of classical Odissi dance. I try to ensure, any attempt on an experiment or innovation, should not dilute the purity of classical Odissi dance and should be within the classical framework. The three pallavis on ragas Janasammohini, Malhar & Malkauns, I have choreographed in the past, were well received & appreciated. I've worked & presented a thematic piece on the popular story of Savitri & Satyavan, retold in the relevant contemporary context of women empowerment & gender equity. A dance presentation on a Kannada devarnama, Hari Smarane Mado in Odissi style and two powerful dance numbers – Shivam Dhimahi (on Lord Shiva) & Ishwari (an ode to Devi) were admired with good review. My newest offering, Satyam Prema Amaram, an Odissi dance ballet is based on the tragic love story of Mirza & Sahiba, a popular folklore from Punjab region.

## CHOREOGRAPHIC PROCESS

SARITA MISHRA

Choreography, to me, is the visualization of a story/theme/song/Raag (melody)/compilation of rhythmic syllables using multiple cyclic orders, presented through Odissi dance movements using a performer's body and expressions. It is the vision of a choreographer that instructs the production from curating the concept to dance, music, stage, costume and light design.

Every choreography is a choreographic process in itself. The choreographic process is a journey that does not have a permanent destination. As the choreographer's thought process matures, he/she feels the need to bring changes to their creative piece. The choreographer's experience of the art form also plays a vital role in the choreographic process.

During the choreographic process in Odissi dance, we must take the following steps:

- *Inspiration / Concept*
- *Script*
- *Music*
- *Fragmentation*
- *Creating movements*
- *Transition*
- *Flexibility to bring necessary changes*
- *Evaluation*

Mythology and philosophical concepts mostly inspire me to create a piece relating to the human form. A detailed handwritten script helps in the progression of the new piece in a structured way.

- *I source or create music (with the help of a music composer) that reflects my concept. So music follows the conceptual stage.*
- *Fragmenting the script into chunks brings a variety in creating the movements.*
- *Creating or developing movements into dance phrases makes the whole process exciting and challenging.*
- *A smooth transition from one part to the other is necessary for maintaining the aesthetics.*
- *The flexibility of the mind is a mandate to enhance the beauty and bring embellishments to the piece.*
- *Evaluation of the final structure of the work by your mentor/ co-dancer/ critic is extremely helpful.*
- *In addition to the steps mentioned above, I consider 'the audience' during the choreographic process.*

For me, the choreographic process in Odissi dance is all about having a synchronized effect of the choreography, dancer, the costume, the lighting, the design, the stage. All of them need to be coordinated to complement each other.

## EMBODYING TRANSCENDENCE THROUGH AN ODISSI PRACTICE

REKHA TANDON

'Embodying transcendence' is essentially embodying self-awareness and authenticity, both valuable qualities in creating interesting choreography, especially in the context of classical Indian dance within the global arena. It entails having a sustained experience of the self as being free of the boundaries of the body and mind, through movement in time. This has been the end purpose of all the Indian classical dance arts, including of course odissi, through their history.

This presentation is an invitation for self-exploration to an approach in odissi where the yogic/tantric body map becomes the principle point of reference for odissi's curvilinear movements as conscious deviations from an

open, yet deeply grounded central axis (brahmasutra). It also describes adaptations of techniques from kriya yoga underpinned by contemporary meditations and teachings of non-duality. The body's axis is defined by 'three bindus' as reference points for the formations of the postures of chowk, abhanga and tribhanga, experienced as sensations in the body, which can then be retained while expressing odissi's movement patterns as basic steps, arasas and charis, and continued into emotive sequences of text and sentiment. Taking this approach to movement into a creative space provides the ballast for greater and effortless playfulness, while staying within Odissi's classical references.

## **FROM ABSTRACT TO NARRATIVE IN DANCE**

### **ILEANA CITARISTI**

Being a student of philosophy I like to deal with abstract ideas and different interpretations of the same concept. As a dancer I find it very challenging the process of converting a thought into something visual, giving a body and a structure to an image which needs to be converted into an embodied form of expression.

Creating a narrative does not mean necessarily creating a literary text, rather it is more of formulating an itinerary which can express itself at times through music, at times through words, and at times only through dance. Once

## **REFLECTIONS OF AN INNER JOURNEY**

### **REELA HOTA**

Choreography is the expression of one's state of mind. My own choreographies have reflected my quest for existential answers. Lifelong experience in Yoga, dance and monastic life has drawn me to spiritual subjects such as Yoga, Kundalini Tantra, Sanskrit and Veda which I have depicted through my dance choreographies. Each theme has corresponded to a different phase in my life and conversely has had its individual specific effect.

According to Swami Niranjananda Saraswati, the spiritual head of Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, vibrations of music, movement and mantras help to create dynamism and activity in the energy field of the body and mind. Dancing to spiritual philosophy using mantras from ancient scriptures and absorbing the healing sound waves has been a pleasurable way for me to transform the qualities of my mind. Even though traditional choreographies such

the itinerary is formulated it is ready to be handed over to the writer to be converted into poetry and subsequently to the music composer to be translated into music and finally to the choreographer who can give it the final shape by converting it into dance.

The original idea has to remain the guiding principle all through the process as an invisible but tangible thread which is responsible for providing the unifying structure upon which the choreographer can elaborate and create through moving images in space.

as Batu continue to evoke feelings of well-being, it is these thematic choreographies that have affected the qualities of my mind at a deeper level.

Artistically, there has been an attempt to bring newness in the presentation. Collaborative choreographies with Indian and International dance forms include Kathak, Gaudiya Nritya, Manipuri, Classical Ballet and Opera. Experienced creative team such as Pandit Rajan Mishra, Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, Guru Gitanjali Lal, Smt Bijoylaxmi Hota, Maestro Marco Pucci Catena, Maestro Antonio Cocomazzi have been critical to this process.

Drawing from personal experiences, this presentation will focus on how choreography has been an expression of my inner journey, how they have affected me in reverse and what elements have enhanced their effect.



## **ODISSI CHOREOGRAPHY**

### **ALOKA KANUNGO**

Choreography is to use the time and space to best of our knowledge and satisfaction.

Knowledge is acquired by training, learning, experiences and exposures. Satisfaction comes from aesthetics and successful interpretation of our imagination in to action. Time is the rhythmic pattern and space is the stage. This is what choreography means to me.

Again choreography can be:

- *Using movements that are long-established or repetition of what we have learnt.*
- *Trying to explore new poses, inventing movements and establishing them with information from treatises, sculptures, even modification from other art forms.*
- *Giving shape to our vision in a different new dimension, ushering to innovation.*

## **LANGUAGE, LOCATION AND OCCASION – MOTIVATIONS FOR MY CHOREOGRAPHIC PROCESS IN ODISSI**

### **SHARON LOWEN**

Having opportunities to choreograph new work, to play a small part in contributing to moving the Odissi tradition forward and having the live musical accompaniment and friends to support these efforts, were the major factors in my decision to remain in India for over 47 years. As the choreography of Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, the main architect of the revival of Odissi in the last century provided enough repertoire to perform for a lifetime, I only began to create new works independently when motivated by circumstances.

My maiden effort choreographing in Odissi was a Triveni of Odissi-Bharata Natyam-Kathak for the inaugural national broadcast to showcase the state-of-the art Doordarshan Central Production Centre. Choreographing in music of three styles was a delightful challenge and led to my further choreographing in multiple Indian

Usually I conceive a concept, and then work on that. For example “Traya - combination of three” had three presentation First one had three parts tribute to Jaganath, Balabhadra Subhadra, prayer to Bramha Vishnu Maheswar and Trikhandi Pranam. The second part was a Sthayee nritya accompanied by mardala manjira and mridanga exploring the three bend position or tribhangi, in khemta taal. The third one was a Pallavi Mana Samahar – Based on tihais or repetition of bols three times.

In Maharaas and Jugalbandi I tried to blend Odissi with Manipuri. Maharas is based on Krishna Radha story and in Jugalbandi we danced with manjeera to Manipuri Pung exploring Laxmi taal of 35 matras.

In Sthapatya Satya I used Bandha Nritya and Bandha in other performing and visual arts.

Shakti is based on Sabda Nritya and supported by PowerPoint presentation of Ravan Chhaya-a shadow puppet theatre also many props like sticks and cloth.

languages and diverse texts and poetry for Doordarshan national programs promoting as well as specific to the audience or space such as a Surya Mangalacharan for a Solar Energy Conference, Padma Patra Mangalacharan for Tiruvananthapuram, Ganga, Shiva and Hanuman Stutis for Varanasi’s Kashi, Swatch Ganga Utsavs and Sankat Mochan Hanuman Jayanti, and so forth.

Pancha Nayikas of Kalidas was uniquely choreographed for the camera rather than the stage and still regularly screened on Doordarshan decades later. Two major productions have been a Shiva Vivaha with a cast of 40 for the pilgrims to Khajuraho on Shivratri in 10 annual variations and choreographing the irony in Fakir Mohan Senapati’s Chha Mana Atha Guntha within the beauty of the Odissi genre.

## TRACK: GRADUATE STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP

### THE PLÁVANA PROJECT

TAYLOR NEWMAN, MICHAEL BRIAN CURLEE

That art thou. In the silent strokes of the painter, lie the unwritten subtleties of the individual mind. Tathātā. The spaces between the musings of the poet hold the thoughts and experiences that have created an individual. Tatvamasi. Through the light, rhythmic movements of the dancer, live the words that can never be spoken.

How does one come closer to understanding the mind of another? Could it be that through experiences shared, you become closer to I? In our survey, we bring the unique strengths and focus of disciplines, ranging from dance studies to computer science, to create such a shared experience and understanding through the beauty, the epistemology, the embodiment, and the history of an eastern Indian traditional dance form called Odissi, on one hand, and the cognitive embodiment that can be achieved in Virtual Reality, on the other. As noted by Cushman and Ghosh, "Translating knowledge of this art involves a great deal of respect for the art and also a God-like reverence

for the Guru" (Cushman-Ghosh 265) (Cushman, 2012). Through motion capture, VR, and a culturally appropriate and nuanced approach to Odissi, we hypothesize that our interactive experience will show a novel approach to instruction and a better appreciation of the history and culture of the form for the user.

Many recent studies ( (Peng, 2019), (Nostadt, 2020)) have focused on the tactical capabilities of the technological interface when surveying the viability of training in VR. In our survey we propose an approach more directed at the experience of the user. An approach that allows the user to see through the eyes of the historically marginalized temple-dancer or the Mahari, hear her footsteps fall on the stone steps of the medieval Konarak temple, and have the experience of embodied cultural awareness through the words of Odissi dance-scholar, Kaustavi Sarkar.





## **CHHANDA -JHONK:**

### **A DANCE ANALYSIS ON THE INFLUENCE OF BOL'S IN ODISSI DANCE CHOREOGRAPHY**

**SRIRADHA PAUL**

The Ishavaasyam, Odissi dance choreography will be explored through few elements of the phenomenological approach. Here phenomenology refers to the lived experience and the 'transcendental consciousness' to present the particular Odissi piece's choreographic process. The choreography foundation is based on multiple realisation and truths that opened the ground to recognise a world outside ourselves. The relationships and shared experience between the choreographer and the executors are essential to produce any artistic work. During the mechanism, the executor is not just the body of the choreographer's mind but similar to a co-author. It may lead to several negotiations which are part of the

creative journey. Negotiations occur due to the difference in the experience of the executor's body from that of the choreographer's mind. Other factors like the flexibility of muscles, anatomy, appearance, expression, promptness or even age of executor may influence the choreographer's mind. This work will analyse a female contemporary Odissi choreographer cum percussionist-Paushali Mukherjee's work that focuses on each bols or the rhythm's intangible factor by bringing out the essence of each rhythm pattern. Her attempt to translate her interpretation towards the bols of a particular rhythm pattern will be analysed from an executor and student's perspective. It will be investigated through movement analysis.

## **KATHA SURPANAKHA: IDENTIFYING DIVERSITY, COUNTERACTING TRADITION**

**SINJINI CHATTERJEE**

This essay explores the reception of the episode of Surpanakha in Odissi dance. I study Katha Surpanakha, a choreographic work of Odissi dancer Sharmila Biswas which portrays an alternative character of Surpanakha and shifts her position from a typified vamp or demones to a human being, a woman with desire. The importance of this work is two-fold. Firstly, in the context of the contemporary Brahminical Hindutva nationalism of India and increasing communal violence, which propagates the idea of one-nation-one-state, thus attempting to erase the diversity that intersperses the Indian subcontinent, the study of the so called 'other' becomes essential to make them visible. I argue that besides the sexual independency that illustrates Surpanakha in modern receptions, Biswas's choreography visibilizes the other and renders the ideal white Aryan invisible. I elucidate

how the choreographic vocabulary attempts to operate against the epidermal racism that marks Surpanakha. Additionally, I demonstrate how through the portrayal of Surpanakha's despair Biswas acknowledges the wrong doings of the 'ideal man' and reverses shame that was made synonymous with Surpanakha. Secondly, I study how this choreography through the portrayal of Surpanakha incorporates marginalized Oriya dialects and movement practices antonymous to the soft femininity that punctuates traditional Odissi.

Ultimately through these studies, I will illustrate how Katha Surpanakha in its method of addressing 'difference' is at once a simultaneous effort against absorption of diversity and a counteraction of received tradition of Odissi.

