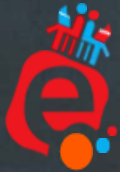


SUB: PERFORMING ARTS (DANCE/THEATER)

Production of Courseware



- Content for Post Graduate Courses

PAPER 7

**MODERN DANCE AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN THE WORLD
AFTER 1960. (USA, EUROPE, SEA)**

**MODERN EXPERIMENTS IN INDIAN CLASSICAL DANCE,
NEW WAVE AFTER 1930, UDAYSHANKAR AND
LATER CONTEMPORARY, CREATIVE ARTISTS**



PAPER 7

MODULE 31 THE PATH BREAKERS

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ज्ञान - विज्ञानं विमुक्तये

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Paper 7

Module 31

The Path Breakers



PAPER 7

MODERN DANCE AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN THE WORLD AFTER 1960 (USA, EUROPE, SEA)

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MODULE 31 THE PATH BREAKERS

Manjusri Chaki Sircar was born on 28 August, 1934 at Murshidabad. From there she came to Pabna, which is now in Bangladesh. She migrated Calcutta after the Partition of India. Her autobiography, 'Nrittarasechitta mama / नृत्तरसेचित्त मम', was published in the year 1999. In the centenary celebrations of Bethune College in the year 1949, where she was a student, she danced in the role of Yaksha in Kalidasa's "Meghdoot." From 1951 to 1953 she was in Presidency College, Calcutta. There, as a student of Bangla literature, she was deeply influenced by the works of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. It was round about this time that she got an opportunity .to see the dance of Martha Graham. This was a source of great inspiration to her. In her final year at Presidency College, she came into close contact with Debabrata Biswas famed for his excellent rendition of Rabindra Sangeet. He used to sing in a style which was his very own as opposed to the rigid style of music in existence at that time. This inspired her to compose and choreograph dance pieces in her own inimitable style and form, to the accompaniment of Biswas' vocal singing. The dance form created by her was later called 'Navanritya.' Some of these

inimitable pieces done by the duo are: "Oheysundaramori'mori, / ओहेसुंदरमोरी मोरी" "Neel digante / नील दिगन्ते," "Jethejetheeklapathe / जेथेजेथेएकलापतेपाथे".

While qualifying for her master's at Calcutta University, she composed a number of dance ballets and took up the lead roles. Between 1953 and 1961, she danced in the role of 'Shyama' in the dance-drama of the same name, under the direction of Bal Krishnan Menon.

Armed with a Master of Arts degree she launched on a career of teaching, first as a lecture in South City and, later at Baharampur College. In 1958, Manjusri married Dr. Parbati Kumar Sircar and left the shores of India where she earned fame as a soloist with her new creations. She earned a doctoral degree in anthropology from the Columbia University. After returning to India in 1980 she choreographed and presented 'Rudramadhur / रुद्रमधुर' and 'Meera Nriyakatha / मीरा न्रित्यकथा'.

On 15 August 1983 she established 'Dancer's Guild' along with her daughter, Ranjabati Sircar, to usher in a new age in dance. 'Dancer's Guild' would create a new idiom for modern dance, while remaining deeply rooted in the classical dances of India. The name 'Navanrihya' took shape at this point in time. In the year 1994, Manjusri Sircar got the Sangeet Natak Akademy Award. Besides this, she has won the Uday Shankar Award as well as the Shiromani Award.

Her productions such as 'Sarala', 'Tomari Matir Kanya' (based on 'Chandalika), 'Tasher Desh' (later renamed 'Kon Nutaneri Dak') are from the works of Rabindranath Tagore. Among her memorable

choreographic works one may mention 'The War Drum', 'Aranya Amrita / आरण्य अमृता ', 'Krauncha Kama / क्रौंचा काम ' and 'Yugasandhi / युगसंधि'. As the artistic director of 'Dancer's Guild', Manjusri Chaki Sircar has travelled far and wide with her troupe. Mrityika / मृत्तिका — an institution of dance designed by her to pursue the fine arts unhindered. She died on 6th June 2000.

In annals of Indian dance, Uday Shankar inspired many to learn and interpret Indian dances. As his base became Bengal and he lived there, it inspired generations of dancers and dance lovers.¹

One such talent that arose in late 80s was Manjusri Chaki-Sircar and her daughter Ranjabati. Manjushri began her work in creative dance during her years at Presidency College in Kolkata. She was best known at that time for her innovative interpretations of the songs, dance dramas, and poetry of Rabindranath Tagore, which developed entirely outside the parameters of Santiniketan and the traditional Rabindra style, which was a mix of many styles. Gurudev invited many gurus to come stay at Santinektan so each brought something to the table. Manipuri gurus brought Manipuri, Kathakali brought traditions of Kerala.

Manjushri spent several years in Nigeria and the United States and evolved as a soloist presenting innovative work alongside the classical dance forms Bharatnatyam, Manipuri, and Orissi. She also founded a dance organization in New York with her students. She admitted in Columbia University to study anthropology. Receiving

her doctorate there, she began to apply these studies to her work in the form of dance. Since founding Dancers' Guild in 1983, she worked work with contemporary group choreography. Some of her best-known works are radical reinterpretations of Tagore dance-dramas. Due to her extraordinary achievements in the field of dance, she has been awarded by the Shiromani Puraskar, the West Bengal State Academy Award, the Uday Shankar Award, and the Sangeet Natak Academy Award. She created a new dance vocabulary and direction, which her daughter Ranjabati followed and built upon.

Ranjabati Sircar was born in 1963 on March 24 in Nigeria and grew up in the United States. She graduated from Jadavpur University in Calcutta and trained in classical and folk dance in India. She sought, however, a creative synthesis of modern dance from the West with classical Indian traditions.

She did not only help take her mother's idea of Navanritya further (it is an idea not s style she insisted) but also enhanced it with her further explorations in dance. In 1990 she participated in the International Choreographers Workshop of the American Dance Festival in Durham, N.C., and in 1992 she founded the South Asian Dance Youth Company, which won her the London Dance and Performance Award.

Ranjabati also had deep concerns for cause of women's rights and feminism and reviewed famous works in new light. Chitrangada is a good example. Or Tomar Maati Kanya. Caught between the old and the new, the traditional and the contemporary, the established and the unacknowledged, is the world of modern Indian dance. The question before its practitioners is, what part to take from the old to

give it an "Indianess" and what part from the new to add to it, to make it "new". Attempts in this genre has gone on for decades, starting with the father figure of Uday Shankar, who took the first steps in a frenzy of revivalism and resurgence of Indian arts.

Ranjabati Sircar stood in between all of them, stylistically. There is a concern with tradition, as much as contemporary structure; there is a use of classical traditions, and random dance movements, and an independence of dance language.

In items she chose, one showed her use of a Chhau leg with Bharatanatyam hasta, Kathakali eyes and Kalari gait to convey a shivering Shiva and frigid, frozen love scenes. Her Ganga Aavartanam piece at best, reflected her use of Navanritya in a traditional story and had little freshness to offer.

Thereby leaving one to ponder what was new about it in terms of treatment, content or form. In the second piece, Fable, there was a freshness in approach, although Ranjabati is more theatre than "new dance" and she is a better narrator than a choreographer. The tale is simple, of a beautiful love child, whose annihilation by the devil is a return to elements. Although Ranjabati has a tall, physical presence, she lacks a commanding, engaging presence as a soloist. Her dance ability both in form and in structure, is yet to mellow and reach meaningful or professional artistry. Caught up between the two worlds her Navanritya shows signs of being stillborn.²

Ranjabati died on Oct 24 1999 due to personal reasons. Her mother died soon after not able to bear the loss. The sudden demise of two left the idea and form forlorn. A good idea was being formed in

modern Indian dance and the death of daughter followed by mother made this form die a premature death.

With them gone, the whole movement of search for new direction the Navaritya floundered and soon the style and its adherents became part of history.

Such is Indian dance history that after a long time some serious talent comes which understand traditions of east and west; technology and art; form and soul and tries to merge the three into a seamless work. Navaritya remains an important milestone in annals of Indian dance.

Veenapani Chawla

Veenapani Chawla was benchmark in dance-theatre. She was unique: as trained theatre person she used dance and thus made lasting impressions through her productions. She had worked as a teacher at Bombay, was a journalist with Times of India and has co-authored a book “Early Indian Political History” for Orient Longman. From 1979, she has devoted her life to theatre, acting, directing and finally founding her own company Adishakthi / आदिशक्ति in 1984. A Greater Dawn, Impressions of Bhima, So What’s New, Khandava Prasdha Agnihooti are some famous works directed by her. In 1997 she received a one-year grant from the IFA for the project A Dialogue between Koodiyattam, Nangiar Koothu and Contemporary Theatre under their Arts Collaboration Programme. Brhannala was the result of the collaboration.

The process of Veenapani's work is long drawn, notes her associate Vinay Kumar. "The germination period is longest! This certain period went up to a year or more ... since her subjects and research and subsequent productions were not a reflection or reaction to the times or to a social reality of that time. Primarily the concept or the seed idea that was generated by Veenapani prior to the start of her new work was always connected to her own philosophical moorings that governed her life and thought processes. It can be cumbersome to even think that the early ideas she generated could even go any way near the conceptual level of what we called the traditional notions of theatre/performance, etc.

But here she does an amazing diversion that I think has always been complimentary to her working processes. Once the seed idea was in her hand, she immediately put her attention to the creation of the physical or oral language of the play that encapsulated the seed idea in terms of aesthetics.

Once enough language was there, she was able to play around with images [that were created by the physical language] that fed back to her seed idea . This visual representation of her idea in a physical form [not in a linear way, rather with very impressionistic visuals] allowed her to make the idea and form to evolve hand in hand from here onwards.

So when we talk about the working processes of Veenapani, with the idea that the creation of a vocabulary too, becomes very important for her, we need to know that it was decades of studying and investigating these processes; and investigation is what finally

took the shape into what is now the distinct Adishakti training method .

Planning a production: That's exactly the point where she did not want to work with the conventional notions of planning and meeting a deadline for the work to be presented. She shifted from Mumbai to Pondicherry so that she could work with actors who were in residence , and her work is not centred around just productions but also around the creation of a methodology for actor training and an investigation into ancient knowledge systems that can enrich our contemporary lives. And this process demanded an enormous amount of time and patience. When she felt that the product had achieved its target in all the above mentioned categories, it was only then that she was ready to open up the work for public performances. But a great length of thought went into identifying the resources /gurus [performance forms, music, puppets, etc.] so that the next year or we could work closely with that guru to understand his or her form.

As I mentioned earlier, the methodology of teaching created by Veenapani and Adishakti is fast becoming one of the most sought - after training methods in India and abroad, clearly from a performer's point of view. She was able to create tools that allowed the performer to look at the entire creation of emotions [that is vital for of any performer] in many more different ways.

From actors and dancers to management consultants who participated in Adishakti's training programs they are now applying this set of tools in their respective fields, the tools that create the entire emotional graph using breath, body centres and chakras.

Major productions and products of Adishakti: Adishakti's second chapter started with Veenapani attempting to create an impossible production --- to make a play out of Sri Aurobindo's epic poem "Savitri / सावित्री". This was the first major departure she made from her earlier practice of making plays out of pre - written texts that were euro - centric in nature.

From Savitri onwards, Veenapani went on to make seminal and path breaking productions such as Impressions of Bhima, Brhannala, Khandavaprastha, Ganapati, The Hare and The Tortoise, and The Tenth Head. All these plays are counted as major influences of the current contemporary theatre and dance in India. Two days before her untimely death, she completed her concept note for her new play called "Sita / सीता". Her main contributions creating a methodology for training performers takes years and generations to complete, but within 25 years of her work and research, she was able to find and perfect a performer training method that was contemporary but at the same time one which had its roots in almost 2500 years of Indian performance research and history her lifetime's search for a neutral energy creating physical form made her study Kalaripayattu a martial arts form from Kerala. Her extensive work and its transformation into a performative practice made this form to be accepted by other practitioners of Dance, Theatre and other discipline.

Her vision of an seminal institution that facilitate multi disciplinary dialogue is materialized in the form of the adishakti theatre lab and performance space in Pondicherry and later became one the most significant institute in the country. Her engagement with Indian myth

and the way she unpacked this myth in the modern realm is unmatched in the performance practice in India finally a creative genius who able to blend her spiritual practice with her creative practise whose importance will be felt in the coming years.

Gowri Ramnarayan was born to family of writers, with Kalaki being her grandfather and M.S.Subbulakshmi being her aunt. She learnt dance as most Tamilians do! And music came naturally to her. But her flair for writing and literature was inborn, this she became critic and deputy editor of The Hindu, madras and contributed significantly to arts writing. 2000 onwards, she returned to her live for theatre and has created many dance-drama productions that are dance-theatre, using Natyashastric inputs.

Gowri says:”As a student of Kalakshetra, Chennai, I grew up watching the miracle of dancers turning into heroes, villains, gods, demons, clowns and saints -- in Rukmini Devi’s dance dramas. Reliving their epic lives, I realized that theatre can make us grasp matters human and nonhuman, emotional and ideational, in our blood flow and pulse beat.”

She avers” Rukmini Devi’s work was part of the national renaissance, a search for cultural identity. But when I began my work India had other needs. We face huge ethical dilemmas in our socio-political and spiritual lives. How does art help us face and resolve those modern day dilemmas? Is art relevant at all in our daily lives? These questions had always troubled me as a writer on the arts, and led to hands on experiments in theatre, and founding Just Us Repertory with like-minded artistes. “

“Why theatre? Because it is a composite art form, blending both performing and plastic arts. With team work as its mantra, theatre is a communal, not a personal experience, not self indulgent, but a socio-spiritual quest. I have used modern techniques to blend drama, poetry, dance, music and the visual arts, creating new work that explores the realities of today, as also the staggering weight of historical, political and literary pasts which theatre must engage to represent the complexities of modern existence. “

In 10 years Just US has produced 18 such multi-genre works. It has chosen subjects which interest them to write mostly original scripts, but have also adapted poems and fiction, traditional and folk songs. For example, juxtaposed verses from Vyasa’s Mahabharata and Arun Kolatkar’s long poem “Snake Sacrifice” to create Sarpa Sutra / सर्प सूत्र, a dance theatre work where an old myth mirrors today’s horrors- terrorism, ethnic cleansing and environmental depredation.

Yashodhara looks at the single mother and abandoned wife of Gautama Buddha, who asks, “Why didn’t my husband share his thoughts and explain his mission to me?” Making her an artist, a painter, was to empower the woman to find her own insight and liberation.

Aham Sita / अहं सीता (I, Sita), traces Sita’s evolution from a naïve ingénue to a mature woman, each crucial episode introduced by other women in the Ramayana – Urmila / उर्मिला, Ahalya / अहल्या, Surpanakha / सूर्पनखा, Mandodari / मंदोदरी. Each has her own take on Sita, conflicting and contrastive. These multiple perspectives add

dimensions to Sita while also giving full scope to both dancer and actor. Fire and Ash recontextualises a pre-historic icon as a contemporary metaphor, through dance, music, verses in 6 languages, and large contemporary paintings commissioned for the work. My focus? Male and female, Siva unites power with compassion. As mountain god he protects the environment. Artiste and seer, Siva images creativity as the means of survival and transcendence.

The dancers and musicians who work with her are those who enjoy the process, evolve with the work, and find insights in learning together. “I began with big casts and spectacle, but now I trust minimalism and intimacy. I like intriguing props, especially when a bit of cloth, a fan, a flower, or a clay lamp, launches many meanings. It is presumptuous to say that my work has made a difference. All I can say is that working with a team of artistes from many disciplines has made a difference to me. It makes me realize that we have to take individual and collective responsibility for everything that happens in the world. Together, we assert our right to question, to justice, to human values and to freedom. To be a theatre artiste is to fulfil a major duty. We ask questions.” holds Gowri Ramnarayan.

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