FACULTY OF ARTS AND PHILOSOPHY

The Position of *Rasa* in Dance in Contemporary India

An anthropological approach

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Foreword and Acknowledgements

This dissertation was written for the fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in South Asian studies. I was engaged in researching and writing this dissertation from November 2017 until August 2018. Establishing a topic was not a difficult task for me, as my main interest will always go out to dance. For this specific research question, I built on the topic of my bachelor's dissertation. It was further specified under the guidance of my co-promoter Dr. Ayla Joncheere, who was also always there for reading first drafts of my chapters and giving feedback on my work. Even though my research was challenging at times, I enjoyed working on it from beginning to the end. And fortunately, both Prof. Dr. Eva De Clercq and Dr. Ayla Joncheere were always available to answer my questions. Therefore, I would like to thank both of my supervisors for their amazing guidance and support.

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Introduction

In this dissertation, I will be exploring the position of the concept *rasa* in 'classical' as well as contemporary dance in India today. Because *rasa* was often perceived to be a crucial element in Indian dance performances by ancient and modern scholars alike, I decided to further pursue this subject and find out which position *rasa* held among 'classical' as well as contemporary dance practitioners, how it was most commonly conceptualized, and how relevant *rasa* still is today. Much ink has been spilled on what *rasa* is in theory, but how important is *rasa* in contemporary dance practice? Does *rasa* remain a concept, or does it still live in the art forms it supposedly defines? For this purpose, I travelled to New Delhi to conduct semi-structured interviews with dancers and dance teachers alike, to gain further insight into how they conceptualized *rasa* and how present the concept was in their dance practice.

When researching the position of *rasa* among contemporary as well as 'classical' dancers in India today, and how *rasa* is most commonly conceptualized by these dancers, two observations stood out: that *rasa* had attained a somewhat political character, and thus held a quite controversial position. Furthermore, *rasa* was almost unanimously perceived to be universal and omnipresent, and more often than not *rasa* was eventually equated to 'emotion.' To identify the reason why *rasa* became politically charged, I will discuss its appropriation by postcolonial nationalism, and further examine *rasa* from the anthropological perspective of identity politics. I will also explore its perception as universal and omnipresent by contextualizing *rasa* within anthropological accounts on emotion.

In the first chapter, I will introduce the concept *rasa*, by giving a short historical overview of how the meaning of the concept evolved over time, and by culturally contextualizing the concept. I will illustrate how the conceptualization of *rasa* is not invariable and static, by shortly introducing two common debates: what the location is of *rasa*, and the number of *rasas*. Then, I will continue by contextualizing how *rasa* is most commonly conceptualized in contemporary scholarship on Indian performing arts.

In the second chapter, I will discuss my methodology and give an account of my fieldwork in India. I will start off by discussing my first impressions, after which I will continue to introduce my respondents, elaborate on my interviewing methods, and share my experiences of conducting fieldwork with a partner.

In the third and fourth chapter I will propose an explanation as to why *rasa* became politically charged, and why *rasa* was most likely perceived to be universal and omnipresent. In the third chapter, I will start off by contextualizing postcolonial nationalism in India, and move on to explain how *rasa* was appropriated by postcolonial nationalism by giving an overview of the recent socio-political history of dance, from 1892 until this day. I will finish the third chapter by discussing

current identity politics in the performing arts, and how identity politics defined certain gender issues as well as other problems such as discrimination inside as well as outside of India.

It is important to note that to keep my language as gender neutral as possible throughout this thesis, I will be omitting pronouns where possible. Where I saw no option to omit pronouns, I will be using plural pronouns for singular subjects such as ‘they,’ ‘them’ or ‘their’ as per accepted conventions of gender neutral writing. These are not grammatical errors. Gender is, however, revealed when I consider it to be relevant for the research or in the footnotes with background information on my respondents, along with other characteristics such as profession and age.

In the fourth and final chapter, I will propose an explanation as to why *rasa* is most likely perceived to be universal and omnipresent by contextualizing *rasa* within anthropological emotion research. I will first elaborate on the perception of *rasa* as universal and omnipresent by my informants, and how *rasa* probably came to be equated to ‘emotion’ by many of them. After this, I will continue by giving a theoretical framework of universality claims and emotion studies. Here I will also explain how *rasa* was incorporated in many anthropological overviews of emotion studies. I will also discuss how the incorporation of *rasa* in overviews of emotion studies generated misconceptions. Then, I will finish by proposing an alternate approach of *rasa* within the framework of emotion studies.

1. Introduction of the concept *rasa*: historical and cultural context

The definition of *rasa* has been the subject of many discussions from its first use in Vedic literature until this day. Philosophers are in constant debate about how to define *rasa*, about what the vision was of various philosophers throughout history, and how *rasa* fits into the discourse of Indian art aesthetics.[1] Many scholars have attempted to clearly define *rasa* and through time it has become the tendency to view *rasa* as defined by philosopher Abhinavagupta (c. 1000) as the dominant definition, but there are many more great thinkers and a lot of commentaries and scriptures where *rasa* is defined in different ways. Truly understanding *rasa* is about intertextuality. Not only written texts but also performed texts have to be experienced and interpreted, and depending on who is interpreting, the meaning could change.[2] *Rasa* is a concept that can only become clear through context. Not just *rasa* itself, but also many characteristics of *rasa* have been subject of discussion. For instance the location of *rasa* (or in other words: who experiences *rasa*) or the quantity of *rasas* have been subject of many heated debates.

1.1 Etymology and context

The word *rasa* has been derived from the Sanskrit root *ras.*, which in its literal sense means 'to roar,' 'yell,' 'cry,' 'sound,' 'reverberate,' 'to praise,' 'to cry out loudly,' and 'scream aloud.' The Sanskrit dictionary 'Monier Williams' also gives 'to taste,' 'relish,' 'to feel,' 'perceive,' 'be sensible of,' 'to love,' and 'to desire to taste.'[3] The earliest meaning of *rasa* according to 'Monier Williams' is 'sap of plants.'[4] How *rasa* should be translated varies from treatise to treatise. The word *rasa* was first used in Vedic literature (1500 BCE - 800 BCE).[5] The *Nāṭya-Śāstra* states in its first chapter that it has taken the word *rasa* from *Atharvaveda*:

> 1.17 jagrāha pāṭhyamṛgvedāt sāmabhyo gītameva ca,
> yajurvedādabhinayān rasānātharvaṇādapi.

He took the Pāṭhyam (recitals) from the Ṛgveda, Gītam (music) from the Sāmans; Abhinayas (histrionic and gestural representations) from the Yajurveda and the Rasas (sentiments) from the Atharvaveda.[6]

[1] 'Art aesthetics' is a Western discipline, there is no exact parallel to art aesthetics in Sanskrit traditions. But because there is a lot of overlap between Western art aesthetics and the Indian study of aesthetics, I will use art aesthetics to refer to this field of study. Pollock 2016: 3.
[2] Coorlawala 2010: 5.
[3] Barlingay 2007: 88; Monier Williams Sanskrit dictionary.
[4] Cuneo 2013: 51.
[5] Flood 1996: 37-39.
[6] *Nāṭya Śāstra* ed. 2003: 2.

Later on, with the introduction of the Upaniṣads (900 BCE - 300 BCE)[7] the meaning of *rasa* underwent its first transformation and became important as a concept. Influenced by philosophy the meaning of *rasa* became more abstract, and was now used as 'essence, essence of everything, essence of the universe.'[8] *Rasa* as the central concept in Indian art aesthetics was first introduced by the dramaturgical text the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*. There *rasa* was defined as 'essence of drama.'[9] The exact date of when the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* was written is unknown. Mason states that the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* already had an important position before the 6th century, and according to Pollock the text was most likely written before the start of the Common Era.[10] There is also no clarity about the author of the text until this day. There are two approaches for scholars to discuss the author. One is referring to the text as composed by many authors (which is the most likely scenario according to Pollock).[11] But most authors attribute the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* to mainly one author, most commonly known as Bharata. The name 'Bharata' is supposedly an acronym for three important components of Indian performing arts. 'Bha' in this context stands for *bhāva* or emotion, 'ra' for *rāga*, the melodic structure of music and 'ta' for *tāla* or rhythm.[12]

1.2 Introduction of a selection of debates on *rasa*

For a better understanding of the constant debate surrounding *rasa*, I would like to give a short introduction into two important discussions that are relevant to the performing arts. To introduce these debates I have mostly used the work of Sheldon Pollock. The first important discussion about *rasa* revolves around its location, or who experiences *rasa*. After that I will give a short introduction into the debate of how many *rasas* there are. I will use these two examples to illustrate that *rasa* does not have just one definition.

1.2.1 The location of *rasa*

The opinion of the 'earliest authorities' was that *rasa* was confined to the literary work, in the actor or the character.[13] According to Pollock, *rasa* in the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* refers to the activities of the artist and not of the audience or the experience of the audience. Pollock also states that *rasa* in this text refers to an emotional state that will arise in the character when the different aspects of drama will be brought together successfully in the performance.[14] This was the dominant perspective until Bhoja, the ruler of the Paramāra dynasty (1025-1055), who wrote two important commentaries on

[7] Flood 1996: 37-39; Cuneo 2013: 51.
[8] Thampi 1965: 75.
[9] Barlingay 2007: 88.
[10] Mason 2006: 70; Pollock 2016: 6) .
[11] Pollock 2016: 6.
[12] Pintchman 2007: 182.
[13] Abhinavagupta uses the word 'earliest authorities' to refer to the earliest use of *rasa* in the context of performing arts and literature, starting from the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*. Pollock 2016: 74.
[14] Pollock 2016: 9.

the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* that challenged the commonly accepted definitions.[15] The first revolution in the study of aesthetics came when Bhaṭṭa-Nāyaka (c. 900) started viewing *rasa* as emotional response in their commentary on the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, the *Hṛdayadarpaṇa*. This author defined *rasa* as a state of complete devotion, or in Bhaṭṭa-Nāyaka's words 'absorption.'[16] Bhaṭṭa-Nāyaka had an enormous influence on Abhinavagupta.[17] The second big revolution in the conceptualization of *rasa* came in the late 1500s because of the rise of *bhakti*, or in the words of Pollock 'religious devotion.' At first glance it might seem that the approach of the earliest authorities became prevalent again since *rasa* was again placed in the literary work, but there were some changes. Before 1500 religious scriptures were not considered 'literature,' but because of the popularization of these texts they gained more attention as well as influence.[18] In the early modern period (after 1500) the Vaiṣṇavas of West Bengal started to redefine the concept of *rasa*, and placed it in the context of *bhakti*. *Rasa* was again a characteristic of the character in the literary work, but the question now became who the character was. The discussion lied in whether the characters were the *bhaktas* in stories about Kṛṣṇa, or the *bhaktas* from daily life. Finally they concluded that *rasa* was a property of both, starting the process of 'theologizing' *rasa* and its discourse.[19]

The location of *rasa* thus becomes a matter of analysis. Pollock states that there are two ways of analyzing *rasa*. When analyzed internally, *rasa* is a representation of human behavior. The characters will express a certain basic emotion, and while analyzing it will be questioned whether this analysis is a good and convincing representation. Externally the emphasis is on the reaction of the audience to these representations. *Rasa*, as previously stated, depends on the perspective. Either *rasa* is a characteristic of the text, a characteristic of the audience, or is confined in the exchange between the two. This becomes clear through the metaphor of eating. Flavor (*rasa*) exists both in the recipe (the work of art), the person who is eating (the spectator), and in the act of eating (the exchange between the two).[20]

[15] Pollock 2016: 74, 15-16, 110-113.
[16] Pollock 2016: 15-17, 18-19, 144.
[17] Pollock 2016: 80, 87.
[18] Pollock 2016: 21-22.
[19] Pollock 2016: 23.
[20] Pollock 2016: 25-26.

1.2.2 The number of *rasas*

The next important debate I will shortly introduce is the quantity of *rasas*. The classical list that is given in the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* are *śṛṅgāra* (the 'erotic' *rasa*),[21] *hāsya* (the *rasa* of comedy), *karuṇa* (the empathetic *rasa*),[22] *raudra* (the *rasa* of anger), *vīra* (the heroic *rasa*), *bhayānaka* (the *rasa* of fear), *bībhatsā* (the *rasa* of disgust), and *adbhuta* (the *rasa* of wonder). Corresponding with these eight *rasas*, the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* lists eight *sthāyī bhāvas* or 'stable emotions,' in the same order: *rati*, *hāsa*, *śoka*, *krodha*, *utsāha*, *bhaya*, *jugupsā*, and *vismaya*.

In the prose part after stanza 31, the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* defines *rasa* as a combination of *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas* and *vyabhicāri bhāvas*. These three basic elements combined produce *rasa*.[23] In the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* it is written that the *vibhāvas* are the cause of emotion. They make it possible to have emotion or even determine the emotion. The *anubhāvas* are the effects of the emotions. They can be voluntary as well as involuntary reactions, from sideway glances to a lover to sweating. According to the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, in theater the *anubhāvas* are the gestures of the actors.[24] The *vyabhicāri bhāvas* are defined as transitory emotions, but in the list of 33 *vyabhicāri bhāvas* there are physical reactions as well, such as nausea and tiredness.[25] According to the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, the *vyabhicāri bhāvas* differ from the *sthāyī bhāvas* because they are 'short in nature.'[26] Within the list of 33 *vyabhicāri bhāvas* there are eight *sāttvika bhāvas*. With the *sāttvika bhāvas* there is more emphasis on psychological response, they are considered psychophysical reactions. The difference lies in crying of pain (a *vyabhicāri bhāva*) and crying of sadness (a *sāttvika bhāva*).[27] The *sthāyi bhāvas* manifest themselves through the transitory emotions. According to the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* transitory emotions may come and go, but the *sthāyi bhāva* remains constant.[28] Sometimes it is difficult to determine the difference between the *sthāyi bhāvas* and *rasas*. According to Abhinavagupta the difference lies within the fact that the *sthāyi bhāvas* are *laukika* or 'worldly emotions,' while the *rasas* are *alaukika* or 'aesthetic emotions.'[29]

In a performance, daily life situations are aestheticized.[30] For example, there could be a scene depicting a married couple, where a dancer embodying a lover is impatiently waiting for his husband to return home. He is eagerly standing by the door, refusing to leave the one place from where he can keep an eye on the horizon to see whether his husband is coming or not. It is midday, the sun is burning on his face. His gestures, the *anubhāvas*, are indicating that he is wiping the

[21] How *śṛṅgāra* should be translated exactly is heavily debated, as the *śṛṅgāra* is the most controversial *rasa*.
[22] According to Pollock a better translation would be the 'tragic *rasa*.' Pollock 2016: 27.
[23] Cuneo 2013: 54.
[24] Higgins 2007: 45.
[25] Pollock 2016: 8.
[26] Thampi 1965: 75.
[27] Pollock 2016: 8.
[28] Chaudhury 1965: 4.
[29] Cuneo 2013: 65; Gargi 1962: 12.
[30] Coorlawala 2010: 6.

sweat of his forehead. This sweating is caused by the intense heat of the sun, which is the *vibhāva*. While waiting for his beloved he transits through many emotions, like joy that he will be returning to him soon, anger that he is late, anxiety and worry because something might have happened to him, etc. These are the transitory emotions or *vyabhicāri bhāvas*. Because he misses his husband so much, he might even start to cry, which is a *sāttvika bhāva* or psychophysical response. All these passing emotions arise from him being in love, which is the stable emotion in the scene or the *sthāyī bhāva*, in this case *rati*, to which the corresponding *rasa* is *śṛṅgāra*.[31]

As previously mentioned, the definitions given by the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* are up for discussion. The ruler Bhoja for example strongly disagrees with the classical list of eight *rasas* given by the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, as can be read in verse 7 of the introduction of the *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa*:

> The conventional wisdom that the term "rasa" refers only to the heroic, the fantastic, and the remaining six has come out of nowhere and is hardly more than a superstition, like the belief that banyan trees are haunted by goblins. It has only been accepted because of the world's usual intellectual conformity, and our intention in this work is to put it to rest.[32]

In chapter 11 of the *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* Bhoja continues to challenge the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, and criticizes the text's definitions of *rasa* and the *bhāvas*:

> If desire and the other stable emotions are to be counted as rasas when they achieve full development, then what crime are joy and the other transitory emotions guilty of that they should not get the name rasa, since as emotions they are no different from desire and the rest? If it is because they are supposed to be ephemeral, then, pray tell, how long do fear, grief, anger, amusement, and the other "stable" emotions really last?' [615] […] There is actually no warrant for a division into eight stable emotions, eight psychophysical responses, and thirty-three transitory emotions, since the function of any one of these factors can be executed by any of the others. A given emotion can be now stable, now transitory; in fact, depending on the circumstances, all can be stable or transitory emotions or even "sensitivities," that is, psychophysical response, because they all derive from the mind, and sensitivity is nothing but an unobscured mind. It is also foolish to assert that it is only a stable emotion that becomes rasa through its conjunction in any of the transitory emotions [616], since you can find the same conjunction in any of the transitory emotions, such as joy and so on.[33]

After the classical list of eight *rasas* was introduced by the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, many other philosophers attempted to introduce new *rasas*, for example the *śānta rasa* or the *rasa* of peace proposed by Abhinavagupta. Varying from philosopher to philosopher, the number of *rasas* could vary from one single *rasa*, like for example in the work of Bhoja (1025-1055) who viewed *śṛṅgāra* (the *rasa* of love) as the base of all *rasas*, to an infinite number of *rasas*, as was the case in the work of Rudraṭa (c. 850) and Bhaṭṭa-Lollaṭa (c. 825).[34] Rudraṭa defined *rasa* as 'an emotion that can be tasted

[31] Coorlawala 2010: 6.
[32] Pollock 2016: 119-120.
[33] Pollock 2016: 120-126.
[34] Pollock 2016: 74, 86, 111.

(*rasanād*),' and since all emotions can be tasted (or in other words: experienced), the number is endless.[35]

1.3 *Rasa* in Indian performing arts: an introduction

After reading about the many debates on *rasa* the question arises of how these theories actually influenced Indian performing arts in practice, and which theories had the most influence. First of all, it is important to further define 'Indian performing arts,' since 'performing arts' in India does not completely correspond with what performing arts are in the Western sense of the word. For example, from a Western perspective it could be stated that 'classical' Sanskrit theater is danced, or that poetry is sung.[36] To a Western spectator it could be confusing to differentiate between theater and dance, or between poetry and music. This is because in Indian arts there was no division in the art forms that correspond with English. In the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, performing arts were defined as drama/ theater, poetry, dance and music.[37] It is also written that 'poetry' is the basis of drama and that the text which is written for performance is the 'drama' itself.[38] Pollock proposes to speak of cultural domains when referring to Indian performing arts: poetry (*kāvya*), drama (*nātya*), and music (*saṃgīta*), which includes vocal music, instrumental music, and dance.[39] I will further challenge the categorization of performing arts and dance in chapter four, in my segment on universality claims.

Because there are so many theories and opinions on *rasa*, it is not always clear which interpretation by which philosopher was most commonly taught and how closely it was followed. At first glance it seems that the theories of Abhinavagupta are the most popular, but many scholars and dance teachers do not clearly contextualize which philosopher's theory they are using, so it cannot be said with certainty that this is the case. Since the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* many concepts have been defined and redefined, many scriptures on the arts have been written and rewritten (and have gotten lost as well), and theories and scriptures may appear and reappear side by side.[40] It is not always clear where the practitioners got their information from, and the performers are often vague on what the sources of their knowledge are. Often performers refer to historical manuals (*śāstra*) to prove the historical roots of their art forms.[41] According to most scholars, practice came before the scriptures, although according to Coorlawala many performers assume that their practice was derived from the scriptures.[42] In my own fieldwork, however, I found this was often not the case. Many of my respondents told me that practice came before the scriptures, and that the scriptures are based on centuries of practice.

[35] Pollock 2016: 85-86.
[36] Pollock 2016: 26.
[37] Pollock 2016: 26.
[38] Stoler Miller 1984: 17.
[39] Pollock 2016: 7.
[40] Coorlawala 2010: 5.
[41] Coorlawala 2010: 5.
[42] Coorlawala 2010: 5.

In any case it can be said with certainty that the *rasa* theory according to the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* had an enormous influence on the formal characteristics of Indian performing arts. The text gives very detailed instructions about every aspect of theater and how to correctly apply these instructions so that *rasa* will be created, from costumes to make-up to stage design, all of which are often followed into the very last detail. But how the theories of *rasa* influenced the experience of the audience or of the performers has not yet been researched.

Coorlawala drafted a summary of the conventional process of generating *rasa* based on praxis and the principles listed in aesthetic texts and manuals. According to the research, a poet, director, performer or playwright has two major tasks when composing a work of art: the determination of the thematic mood or *sthāyī bhāva* and the development of complex, multi-layered narratives that intensify the dominant mood. When determining the *sthāyī bhāva* it has to be kept in mind that this mood will dominate the entire performance. Different dance forms prefer different *sthāyī bhāvas*, for example Buddhist dance dramas would prefer the *sthāyī bhāva* of peace to predominate.[43]

The concept of *rasa* also supposedly influenced the relation between performer and audience. From the perspective of the performer it became important to play into the sensitivities of the audience, while under influence of Abhinavagupta the ideal spectator was expected to keep distance from the performance. This way the relationship between performer and audience became a very dynamic, but also very complex one. The relation between performer and audience again becomes a matter of location: where is *rasa* located and how does it influence the performance or the experience of a performance?

As with *rasa*, there are two ways to analyze performing arts: from the perspective of the performer, and from the perspective of the audience. About the perspective of the performer there is very little research. The paper which came forward most on the subject was one by Coorlawala: *It Matters For Whom You Dance: Audience Participation in Rasa Theory* (2010). Theories about the perspective of the audience started as early as the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*. This is again a topic that is heavily debated.

According to Coorlawala there are two main problems when performing Indian performing arts. The first problem is that not everybody knows the concept of *rasa*, and the second problem is that not everybody reacts in the same way, although the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* defines what the reaction of an ideal spectator ought to be. Ideally a spectator would be educated and trained in the theories of Indian art aesthetics as given in the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*. Only when a spectator is able to correctly apply the instructions of the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, she or he will be able to judge a performance correctly. In this way, ideal spectators would all react in the same way, by applying the instructions given in the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*. The question arises whether context should be given at the start of an Indian

[43] Coorlawala 2010: 5-6.

performance, as many Indian performers do. This could form some problems in itself, like for instance that it will feel too didactic to the audience, or the attempt to give a short introduction into Indian art aesthetics could lead to an oversimplification of Indian art aesthetics or the art form itself. It also raises the question of the accessibility of art, whether one should be educated to be able to enjoy art or whether art is accessible to anybody who is interested.[44]

In Indian performing arts the performer could also choose to perform for a non-physical audience, a personal loved one. The performance will be danced inwardly. This way the performer develops an independence from the physical audience. This personal loved one is a visualized spectator or *rasikā* (somebody who experiences *rasa*) who can 'see' all the intensions and the mental state of the performer. The personal loved one thus becomes a meta-spectator.[45] In the *Śiva-Sūtra* (c. 9th century) it is stated that for a well-trained performer the inner senses are the audience on the deepest level (the level of the 'self'). A complex state of mind arises where a dancer is both detached and involved in her or his own performance. The gaze of the inner spectator is close but not necessarily the same as the meta-gaze of the loved one.[46]

About the perspective of the audience the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* writes that it is very important that there is distance between performer and the audience.[47] This is further elaborated by Abhinavagupta according to whom a spectator who identifies too strongly with the performance or with the performer cannot reach to the experience of *rasa*.[48] This philosopher lists seven obstacles that an ideal spectator must overcome in the *Abhinavabhārati*.[49] These seven obstacles are: being incapable of finding the performance convincing, overly personal identification (distance between performer and audience is of the essence), absorption into one's own feelings (one should experience the aesthetic emotion or *rasa* instead of the worldly emotion or *sthāyī bhāva*), incapacity of the appropriate sense organ, lack of clarity within the play, lack of a dominant mental state, and doubt about what emotion particular expressions are meant to convey.[50] Only the elimination of these obstacles makes it possible to experience *rasa* according to Abhinavagupta. When spectators are too involved in their own emotions, the performance cannot be experienced to the fullest, and therefore the experience of *rasa* cannot be reached.[51]

[44] Coorlawala 2010: 17.
[45] Coorlawala 2010: 19-20.
[46] Coorlawala 2010: 20.
[47] Mason 2006: 76.
[48] Mason 2006: 76.
[49] Mason 2006: 76; Higgins 2007: 49.
[50] Higgins 2007: 49.
[51] Higgins 2007: 49.

2. Methodology

Before going deeper into my methodology, I would like to take a moment to clarify how I will be defining 'contemporary' and 'classical' dance throughout this dissertation. I would like to follow Royo's conception of the two terms. Royo states that parallel to West, 'classical' is often juxtaposed with 'contemporary.' Within the Western context, 'Indian contemporary dance' is often understood to mean 'non-traditional' or even 'anti-traditional,' setting up an oppositional relationship between 'traditional' or 'classical,' and 'contemporary,' taken to refer to an engagement with modernity. These 'contemporary' dance forms are viewed to move away from 'classical' models, but often they do not completely renounce 'classicism,' but simply reimagine it.[52]

Currently, nine dance forms are listed as classical. In chapter three on *rasa,* postcolonial nationalism and identity politics I will be challenging this list. For the purpose of my research, however, the 'classical' dancers which I interviewed all practiced dance forms occurring on this list: *bharatanāṭyam*, *mohiṇī aṭṭam*, *kathakalī*, *kucipuḍī*, *kathak*, *sattriyā nṛtya*, *maṇipurī*, *oḍisī* and *chhau*.

2.1 First impressions

While planning my field work, I considered two approaches to conduct my research. Either I would work in amateur or semiprofessional dance schools and conduct research through participant observation, or I would arrange semi-structured interviews with professionally educated dancers in the form of open interviews with a topic list. As a contemporary dance practitioner myself my initial interest went out to research through participant observation. My plan was to choose one or two schools which offered contemporary dance as well as 'classical' Indian dance forms and start out by taking classes and getting to know the teachers and fellow students on a personal level.[53] I wanted to gain firsthand knowledge through my own experience whether *rasa* was a part of the dance classes, and if so, how *rasa* was most commonly interpreted and how it was taught to the students. For the second part of my research I wanted to compile a topic list and interview teachers as well as students from the school or schools where I participated to get a deeper understanding of how they viewed *rasa* and whether it corresponded with the teaching methods. For the interviews I was also planning on going to two additional schools so that I could gather sufficient data.

When I first arrived in India I started by contacting different schools. The Natya Ballet Centre in New Delhi was a good case study for my research project: they offered contemporary as well as a multitude of 'classical' dance forms. The first week there I participated in the classes as a student,

[52] Royo 2003: 1.

[53] Some schools label their contemporary classes as 'Indian contemporary dance.' I prefer to omit the prefix 'Indian,' as it implies that 'contemporary art' is something which belongs to the West, from which contemporary art originating from a different part of the world is inherently different, and that 'contemporary art' is the measure against which all contemporary art not originating from the West needs to be compared in order to be successful. Contemporary art is contemporary art, regardless of its origin.

and while introducing myself and my research I already had a couple of open conversations with students as well as teachers. I became better acquainted with an *oḍisī* teacher, who at that time was working in a public school as a sports and dance teacher, and was organizing a classical ballet performance with the students there. According to the curriculum it was mandatory to introduce the children to Indian as well as 'Western dance styles.' Multiple non-Indian dance styles were overgeneralized as being 'Western' dance. Under this umbrella term, classical ballet was often viewed as the root representation of 'Western culture,' next to numerous other popular styles from outside of India, such as the Latin-American style 'salsa.' I have observed this to be re-occurring in other dance schools in India as well. That *oḍisī* teacher had opted to teach the students classical ballet as a Western dance of choice. Having never studied classical ballet, the teacher had derived the technique from YouTube videos. During the *oḍisī* class at Natya Ballet Centre the *oḍisī* teacher had asked me to demonstrate some basic movements from classical ballet. As the teacher had seemed impressed by my performance, I was invited to further guide the students to get in better shape for the performance. Having a basic knowledge of classical ballet I agreed to give them some pointers. When arriving at the public school, it turned out that the class consisted of over a hundred students, between ages 9 and 11. I had to instruct them using a microphone and observing them group by group. After the class I sat down with the *oḍisī* teacher for *chai* tea, and we had an informal conversation on *rasa*, dance, and *guru-śiṣya-paramparā* teaching methods.

Through these interactions I was able to establish a first impression of the position of *rasa* among amateur and semiprofessional dancers. In my initial impressions from first conversations with amateur students from four classes (*chhau*, *oḍisī*, *kathak*, and contemporary dance) the knowledge and understanding of *rasa* was very vague and to the students seemingly not of crucial importance for their dance practice. Studying dance in amateur and semiprofessional settings as well as in a professional setting is mainly practice oriented, and *rasa* is a highly theoretical subject which did not seem to be emphasized in the amateur and semiprofessional setting very much. When I asked simply about *rasa*, some students were only able to understand what I was referring to when it was specified as *navarasa*, the nine aesthetic emotions described by Abhinavagupta, followed by the statement that this was something which they remembered from their basic school education, not from their dance education. From my first impression the concept of *rasa* was viewed among amateur and semiprofessional dancers as something that was not inherently necessary to proceed in their dance careers.

Among amateur and semiprofessional teachers the understanding of the concept also seemed to be more vague than I expected. When asked about *rasa* it seemed like the teachers I spoke with initially attempted to reproduce what they had seemingly heard left and right, because when asked about *rasa* into more detail or when asked to explain certain statements further, many teachers

tended to contradict themselves. This mostly occurred when they tried to explain to me whether it is necessary to know the theory of *rasa* to experience it. One *bharatanāṭyam* dancer for example explained to me at first that you have to know and understand *rasa* theory to express or experience it. According to this dancer, a student has to grow into being able to express or experience *rasa*, as the subject is so vastly complex. I was told that it cannot be understood when you're still a child or when you have not reached maturity yet. But when I asked a little bit later whether *rasa* could be understood by people that do not know about the *rasa* theory, the dancer answered:

> Yes, it is the same for everybody, everybody will understand the same emotions. Symbolically they might not understand, this can be different, but in the end emotions are the same. Maybe the way of expression will slightly vary from person to person. But feelings are universal, you cannot separate them.[54]

Something similar occurred in an interview with an *oḍisī* dancer. This dancer told me that a foreign audience is not capable of grasping *rasa*:

> If they do not know our culture, if they do not know the mythology, they do not understand anything. Sometimes they can, but mostly different cultures from ours do not understand. Those who generally know, can appreciate the beauty of the dance and the emotions and expressions.'[55]

After that the *oḍisī* dancer moved on to tell me that *rasa* is present in everybody in a sleeping state, and is aroused when *rasa* is properly conveyed. I was told that *rasa* is present in every art form as well, also outside of India. I was given an example of classical ballet, that when classical ballet dancers are jumping, the *rasa* of love may be conveyed. I was told during the interview that all art is based on *rasa*, and that the whole world is full of *rasa*. The *oḍisī* dancer also did not consider it necessary to know about *rasa* to experience it, when only a couple of minutes before that I was told by the dancer that a foreign audience is not really capable of grasping *rasa*. This occurred among semiprofessional and professional dancers alike, and I will be further elaborating on this particular contradiction in my chapter on the 'anthropology of aesthetic emotions.'

After having researched *rasa* as a concept I expected it to be much more prevalent in dance education (from amateur schools to professional schools) because of the great importance that was ascribed to it by ancient and modern scholars alike. Rather than theoretical concepts, such as *rasa*, my informants put much more emphasis on practical educational systems of dance. They referred to their embodied knowledge as something they received through the *guru-śiṣya-paramparā*, an Indian educational system that may be applied to dance, but also other art forms such as music. The *guru-śiṣya-paramparā* is described as a more personal teacher-disciple system in which knowledge is passed from teacher to student. According to many Indian 'classical' dancers, even though no official diploma is granted, dancers educated through this 'traditionally Indian' system are often as highly respected and just as capable as those educated through institutionalized schools. The *guru-*

[54] *Bharatanāṭyam* dancer, 40s, f., professional, formal interview, Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, 24/01/2018.
[55] *Oḍisī* dancer, 53, f., professional, formal interview, Triveni Kala Sangam, 19/01/2018.

śiṣya-paramparā is ascribed a reputation of being rigorous. The *oḍisī* teacher of Natya Ballet Centre, for example, told me that whenever the students would not listen, they would get beaten by the teacher with a stick. This, however, seemed rather metaphorically meant, as I actually never saw the *oḍisī* teacher do such thing, even when the students were misbehaving during my time observing the classes.

From these first impressions I concluded that in the setting of amateur and semiprofessional schools, *rasa* was not actively present in the teaching methods. Even though this is also an interesting subject that I could have pursued further, I decided to change my approach and focus on interviewing professionally educated dancers instead. Studying how *rasa* is perceived in amateur and semiprofessional settings is interesting for a study on dance education, but I was more interested in researching the position of *rasa* among dancers from a mainly philosophical perspective. In my experience with amateur and semiprofessional dancers, even when *rasa* is present in the classes it was in the form of a very basic understanding (like for example as the *navarasa* of Abhinavagupta), and when asked about the concept dancers struggled to reproduce basic knowledge. I was more interested in studying interpretations of *rasa* by the dancers themselves, and this was seemingly more present in the professional setting.

2.2 Introduction of respondents

After my experience at Natya Ballet Centre, I chose four other schools to conduct further interviews, two schools for Indian 'classical' dance forms and two for contemporary. Even though I tried to equally divide my attention over 'classical' dance as well as contemporary dance, I found a lot less respondents in the category of contemporary dancers. The groups of students dedicated to contemporary dance were much smaller and there were fewer teachers as well. As a result only about a quarter of my respondents were contemporary dancers, out of which about half had a 'classical' background as well. I would also like to note that for the purpose of this dissertation, I focused on the popular and reoccurring juxtaposition of 'purely classical' dancers and contemporary dancers.[56] I did not consider dancers who created fusion work for this dissertation, even though I have participated in interesting classes of teachers who created fusion work.

The two schools I chose for 'classical' dance were both situated at Mandi House in New Delhi. For two weeks I went back and forth between Triveni Kala Sangam and Gandharva Mahavidyalaya. Triveni Kala Sangam is a 'multi-faceted Art and Educational complex,'[57] where students can enroll with teachers that are educated at well-known institutes, such as Kathak Kendra or Kalakshetra. These teachers are well established in their fields and had already had prolific careers. Triveni Kala Sangam is free to attend without auditioning and did not offer any certificate or diploma course.

[56] Royo 2003: 1.
[57] Triveni Kala Sangam (2018): About Triveni kala Sangam (05-08-2018).

Therefore, Triveni Kala Sangam is described as a semiprofessional setting, where amateur as well as (semi)professionals have the option to enroll with professionally trained dancers. Gandharva Mahavidyalaya could only be attended after auditioning and did offer a diploma. The contemporary dancers, which I interviewed, were either from Gati Dance Forum or Bhoomika Creative Dance Centre. Gati Dance Forum, like Triveni Kala Sangam, is a mostly semiprofessional setting where dancers have the option to join classes and workshops with professionally trained dancers. Bhoomika Creative Dance Centre is a professional dance company with a well-established repertoire. In both Gati Dance Forum and Bhoomika Creative Dance Centre the contemporary teachers I spoke with were trained outside of India.

This made for a more or less diverse group of respondents. My informants were almost equally divided over five age categories: twenties, thirties, forties, fifties and sixties. The informants of the youngest age group were all students, the teachers which I interviewed were all aged between their thirties and sixties. Within the category of 'classical' dancers my informants were also almost equally divided over dancers educated within a more informal *guru-śiṣya-paramparā* and dancers educated in institutionalized schools, although there were also dancers that were educated in both systems (they, for example, started out as students of their own parents, and then continued their higher education at institutionalized schools). As for the contemporary dancers, most of them had a background of being educated in both systems.

When reviewing the backgrounds of my informants, what stood out most was that almost all of my informants were unanimously higher-caste Brahmins. Since caste is a very sensitive subject in India and the subject of this dissertation is *rasa* and not the social position of dancers in India, I never directly asked any of my informants about their caste. It was my fellow-fieldworker, who casually mentioned that it is interesting how all of my respondents were Brahmins. Being Indian, my fellow-fieldworker was able to derive most people's caste from their last names. In the opinion of my fellow-fieldworker, most people in high positions in the arts, academics or administration are still mostly Brahmins.

The division of gender is a bit more complicated. First of all, I would like to note that I didn't encounter any respondents that identified outside the gender binary and cisnormativity. This may be because of the fact that identifying as gender-queer, or non-binary, is still highly taboo in India. Because of the short timeframe of my fieldwork and the emphasis of my questioning on philosophy rather than gender, the representation of gender among my respondents remained within the gender binary. Finding representation among dancers outside the gender binary would, however, be one of my main interests for further research.

At first glance, the division of gender among my informants is almost equally divided over dancers that identify as male and dancers that identify as female. But in the category of contemporary

dancers, almost all informants identified as male. Within the category of 'classical' dancers the division of gender is more balanced between dancers that identify as male and dancers that identify as female. Among the 'classical' dancers I interviewed a little bit more dancers that identify as female, which I consider to be mostly coincidence. Among my contemporary respondents there were very few dancers that identified other than male. This may be caused by gender issues in India such as that contemporary dance does not fit into the Hindu nationalist image of 'the Indian woman,' as they should be conform with the cultural identity of India and not of West.[58] Within an Indian audience many people observe contemporary dance to be 'all about the body,' as one of my contemporary respondents from Gati Dance Forum put it, that there is no expression and that it is too abstract. Some movements and the dress code of contemporary dance may also be considered improper for girls. I experienced this firsthand the first time I was in India, when I spent a semester at the Hindi university in Wardha for three months in 2015. I was very eager to learn Indian dance more intensively. To my disappointment, however, there was no qualified dance teacher available at the time. Since I was going to be there for three months and I did not want to neglect my dance practice for that long, I had decided to take initiative and did an attempt to find interested parties for contemporary dance. I was doing yoga there on a daily basis with a yoga and psychology teacher, who proposed that I would teach his daughter and a friend. Their ages were respectively twelve and nine. Initially, my yoga teacher showed a lot of interest in me because I was very serious about maintaining my yoga practice and I came to the classes every day without missing even once. On Sundays I would get an invitation to lunch at their home, and I was invited to join for dinner many times as well. The teacher arranged a room for me where I could teach contemporary dance, and I would teach two classes every week. This went on for about three to four weeks, and then all contact ended abruptly. The yoga classes stopped, there was no more time for contemporary classes, and there were no more lunches. The fellow-fieldworker with whom I worked for this dissertation was also present at the time, since we met in Wardha. My fellow-fieldworker, who was my friend at the time, had come to observe a couple of my dance classes. According to my fellow-fieldworker it was not surprising that my yoga teacher pulled his daughter and her friend from my contemporary classes and broke all contact. My behavior was considered too 'Western,' and thus an overall bad influence on the girls.

Another reason why there might be mostly informants that identify male among the contemporary dancers may be because of the fact that, as one of my contemporary respondents from Gati Dance Forum told me, the base of most contemporary dance in India is more or less some type of martial art, such as *kalāripayāṭṭu* or *chhau*, and to a much lesser extent 'classical' dance forms such as *bharatanāṭyam*. I would like to note here that my informant emphasized that using martial arts as

[58] For more information on gender and nationalism, and how this affects dancers, cf. supra.

the inspiration for contemporary choreographies is a trend and not the norm. There are also teachers that draw inspiration from 'classical' dance forms such as *kucipuḍī* or even yoga. I participated in one contemporary class by a teacher who mostly inspired the choreographies on yogic movements and 'classical' Indian dance, and in this class there were considerably more female students. It needs to be noted, however, that I only participated in one such a class, and that in a big city like New Delhi the situation may vary from smaller cities, where there might be an overall more conservative image.

Having studied in Europe, that contemporary informant from Gati Dance Forum observed the incorporation of 'masculine' martial arts into contemporary dance in India to be a newly implemented trend, whereas the base of contemporary dance in Europe is still mostly derived from the currently rather 'gender neutral' classical ballet. The shortage of gender representation other than men within the contemporary dance scene may therefore also be related to the current development of contemporary dance in India being mainly rooted in martial arts, which is predominantly practiced by men.[59] This is a trend which I have also observed myself. In the very beginning, when I was still doing participant observation, I noticed how contemporary classes in India (and also contemporary classes which I took at home from Indian teachers) many times incorporated acrobatic jumps and to my personal grief a lot of floor work (which is incidentally not my favorite part of contemporary dance practice). The classes of contemporary dance, which I joined, used a lot of dynamic movements going from and towards the floor and jumps that would put contemporary dancers without a background in martial arts (e.g.: me) to shame. Until this interview I kept contemplating why, as an advanced contemporary dancer, I failed so miserably during my first contemporary class in India. It turns out I simply did not have the martial arts derived techniques to keep up with the rest of the class. I also noticed that in the *chhau* class that I joined there was only one other girl among, maybe, fifteen boys.

2.3 Interviewing methods

For the interviews I used different methods for students and teachers. For the interviews with teachers I often had to make appointments well in advance which gave me plenty of time to prepare for the interviews. In the very beginning, after my many emails and phone calls to schools were not very fruitful in getting replies or invitations, I decided to just drop by unannounced in the schools which interested me and ask if there was anybody I could talk to about *rasa*. Because of the hierarchal status of the teachers (as some of the more famous dancers would assume that I would know them and their accomplishments, were insulted when I did not), a preparatory background check before the interviews seemed crucial. Therefore, by the time that I started the interviews I had

[59] Nowadays martial arts are also mandatory for girls in some schools as a self-defense class, causing more girls to take an interest in martial arts. But as a performing art, martial artists are mainly male.

my topic list ready, but if the interviews were planned well in advance I would also research the dancers and their careers. By getting to know them a little bit through their introductions on their websites and personal blogs, and by viewing their work on YouTube, I was able to ask questions more accurately.

The interviews with the teachers were semi-structured. Before an interview with teachers I would always ask them whether I could record the conversation. During the interviews I would follow the flow of the conversation, but I kept my topic list next to me so that I could see in the end whether I had asked everything I needed.

There was also a big difference in planned and unplanned interviews. A planned interview did not just give me the time to prepare and research my respondent, but it gave the respondent time to do research for the interview as well. In planned interviews, a lot of teachers brought notes or books they could refer to. There was even one *kathak* teacher who at the beginning of the interview asked whether they should just give me the syllabus of the school where the teacher had trained, as it confined 'everything I would need to know' on *rasa*. A lot of teachers tended to theoretically educate me on what the supposed definition of *rasa* was rather than presenting a personal reflection on their idea of the concept or their personal implementations of *rasa* in their dance practice and teaching, which was actually more to my interest. At the beginning of interviews where teachers would assume that I needed an answer to the question of what *rasa* was conceptually, I let them talk for the first ten minutes or so before carefully steering the conversation to their own personal opinions. Some teachers would block there and circle back to a conceptual conversation about what *rasa* was according to the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* and Abhinavagupta. These interviews were mostly the shortest ones and ended after thirty minutes or so. But a lot of teachers also had their criticisms and opinions ready on *rasa* and the theories by the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, what they felt they could relate to in their dance practice, but also which elements of the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* they could not relate to (which was sort of a taboo among other dancers and even other artists that accepted the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* without question). These conversations were the most interesting ones and could take up to one or even two hours.

A re-occurring criticism on the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* for example was on the involvement of the dancer with the character. The *Nāṭya-Śāstra* states that a dancer, upon entering a character, has to remain an actor or a dancer. The actor or dancer is expected to maintain a certain distance from the character they are portraying. The emotions that the actor or dancer represents, need to remain representations rather than becoming the actual emotions of the actor or dancer. As Abhinavagupta theorized, a certain distance needs to be maintained at all times (cf. infra). A successful dancer or actor, according to the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, for example does not actually start crying on stage when representing a character that is experiencing intense pain or sadness. Instead, they should

demonstrate pain or sadness with a controlled portrayal using the right facial expressions, postures and *mudras*. Many dancers did not seem to identify with this, stating that in practice a dancer or actor does get involved with the character they are portraying on stage. Something else from the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* which was often contested, is that 'death' may not be portrayed on stage. To many dancers this seemed arbitrary, as death is an integral part of life and interesting to incorporate in choreographies. Another example, mostly among contemporary dancers with a 'classical' background, was the rule given by the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* that dancers are not allowed to show their back to the audience. These rules that were formerly attributed great authority, are nowadays being experimented with in 'classical' as well as contemporary repertoire.

When interviewing students, I chose to do non-recorded informal interviews. The students were questioned in much more informal settings, such as before or after a class. I never asked to record the conversations or even touched my topic list. The further I progressed in the process of interviewing, the more I started to know my topic list by heart and the easier it got to interview students. After having a conversation with a student or small group of students, I would take notes and write down my impressions.

As the teachers consider themselves peers, the formal setting seemed appropriate, with the students however I wanted to band as a fellow-dancer in order to get the most elaborate information. In the environment of the school, I expected that once I would take out my topic list and ask to record, students could get nervous or start overthinking or rethinking their answers, when what I wanted was a spontaneous and honest conversation of how they viewed *rasa* and get a general idea of what they knew.

2.4 Refusal to record

When preparing my methodology, some of the literature I consulted specifically about anthropology and methodology warned for the possibility that with politically charged subjects respondents could refuse to allow the researcher to record the conversations. I thought this would not apply to me since I would be interviewing my respondents about a philosophical subject, not a political one. So the first time an informant refused to record the conversation, I was quite surprised. This did not remain an isolated incident, after the first time many more times followed where respondents did not want me to record the interview. This was the first reason for me to suspect that *rasa* had a political undertone, on which I will elaborate more in the chapter on *rasa*, nationalism and identity politics.

I distinguished a couple of reasons why respondents did not want me to record. First, there was a deep mistrust towards unknown interviewers and the fear of misusage of data that could potentially ruin their dance career. One contemporary dancer flat out told me that they didn't know who I was and what my motives were. I could have very well been who I told I was, but I could have just as

easily had different intentions. The contemporary dancer said that they did not feel comfortable allowing me to record the conversation because nowadays it is very easy to edit a voice recording, making it sound like something completely different was said from what was actually said during the interview. The contemporary dancer also let me know that because of modern technology the spread of information happens within a matter of seconds, and once it is out there it is impossible to retrieve. So the dancer told me that it was too unclear at the beginning of the interview whether I was trustworthy or not, and that this was the reason why it was best for them not to record the interview. Other than that, the dancer emphasized, there was absolutely nothing to hide.

The second issue was credibility towards the dance community and the dancers' own fear that they have potential shortage in knowledge on the topic. A lot of 'classical' dancers also did not feel comfortable allowing me to record the conversation, for which I believe the reasons to be a bit different. After observing how many teachers prepared for the interview by bringing books and notes, I suspected that teachers were under some amount of pressure not to say anything 'wrong' about *rasa*, which could lead to them losing their status and credibility as a 'classically' trained dancer. But the fear of saying the wrong things was not only present among 'classical' dancers. I have had one contemporary informant literally say, somewhat jokingly: 'I always say the wrong thing and then I lose my job,'[60] regarding a statement I asked about from a magazine interview which this dancer did not realize would get published.

From my experience it seems that people expect 'classical' dancers with a prolific career to be experts in Sanskrit dramaturgical treatises as well, which could make the 'classical' dancers feel pressured into giving 'correct' answers. In contrast with nationalist discourse and its emphasis on sanskritization of dance, dance practice in India remains mainly practice oriented. There is a certain pressure and expectation of philosophical knowledge of dance. One of my respondents told me, however, that the guru who trained this specific respondent could barely write, but knew 'the essence of *rasa* very well' anyway. This was echoed in other interviews, definitely by 'classical' dancers within the age category of fifties to sixties, who have had teachers from the first generation of 'classical' dancers after the reconstruction movement of the 1950s (cf. supra). One of my 'classical' respondents who was in their late sixties stated that not many artists were even familiar with these theories, they just 'did.' This dancer observed studying texts such as the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* to be more of a trend among young artists and dancers, because 'students like to connect.' I have had one younger 'classical' informant state that it was indeed difficult for to relate to the whole concept of *rasa* as it felt so distant from the dancer's personal life. It was stated that:

> I think for the generation of my teachers there still was some context, they understood the context of these theories much more than I do. Definitely for *abhinaya*, they are portraying a certain woman of a certain time. It

[60] Contemporary dancer, 37, m., professional, formal interview, Gati Dance Forum, 16/02/2018.

> just comes more naturally to my teachers than it does to me. I already feel quite distanced from this practice of what *rasa* is in dance, and until now I have not looked beyond so I am not sure if I can really speak for this concept. There is a large body of scholarship on *rasa* I do not know, but based on my experience with *rasa* so far I am not even sure if I would be able to make connections to that larger body.[61]

This trend of younger dancers and artists studying texts such as the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* may also be influenced by the Hindu nationalist movement, in their efforts to further sanskritize the Indian art scene (cf. supra).

Almost all dancers I interviewed thus considered the theory to be there to support the practice and further inform dancers who are interested, but were mostly not viewed as the base of a dancer's knowledge. It seemed to me that most dancers prefer to derive their knowledge from practice and not theoretical studies.

Then finally, there is a third reason why I suspect some dancers refused to allow me to record, and this is also the second reason that made me rethink the political charge of *rasa*. In correspondence with Hindu nationalist discourse, government grants for dancers usually go to the more 'traditional' and classically trained dancers:

> Soon after independence, the classical styles became central to the modernist discourse and received financial support and patronage. Creative dancers - as the non-classical dancers were then called - did not enjoy the same level of acclaim as classical dancers. The underlying position was that, unlike the classical artists, creative dancers indulged in fusion work, and this fusion carried a shade of negativity, for fusion and hybridity were seen to be at odds with 'authenticity of tradition' which classical dancers were perceived to embody.[62]

Since *rasa* is viewed as an integral part of this 'classical' training, it seems that it is important for 'classical' dancers to keep up appearances and act as authorities on *rasa*. One of the main complaints among contemporary dancers was that 'classical dancers always know what to say to get the grants,' I expect that functioning as an authority on Sanskrit dramaturgy plays an integral part in this. The fact that 'classical' dancers seem to get grants with more ease is also echoed in the work of other researchers, such as in that of Katrak (2011), who states that the government subsidizes 'classical' dance forms to promote Indian culture abroad in the introduction of their book:

> The government of India's state policies disturbingly deploy the ancient text *The Natyashastra* to give legitimacy, even "classical" status to dance styles clamouring for such status… The underlying reasons for such status are clearly economic, and in terms of Indian government-funded opportunities for artists to travel abroad, usually they belong to one of the recognized classical traditions.[63]

Some contemporary dancers seemed very frustrated with the fact that most of the grants go to classically trained dancers, but other contemporary dancers did take a more moderate stand. One contemporary informant told me for example that there was no frustration with the government because, firstly considering the current situation in India of high poverty rates there is respectively

[61] *Oḍisī* dancer, 30s, f., professional, formal interview, Gati Dance Forum, 16/02/2018.
[62] Royo 2003: 8.
[63] Katrak in Strybol 2015: 49.

still a decent amount of funding for the arts, and secondly, since India is still a 'developing' country, a lot of money should not be expected in the first place. This informant stated: 'half the country is not eating food, I think art is luxury, we should not expect a lot of money from the government.'[64] At the same time a problem was expressed with the fact that all of the funding ended up going to 'yoga' (for tis respondent the biggest frustration was mostly the amount of money India was spending on the promotion of yoga rather than art).

Because of the underlying tensions during the interviews with 'classical' as well as contemporary dancers, I have decided to keep my informants anonymous. I will only refer to them by their main characteristics, such as dance style, and whether I am talking about a student or a teacher from an amateur or (semi)professional setting. It has to be kept in mind that when I mention a contemporary student from a (semi)professional setting, that I am not necessarily speaking about a dancer from Gati Dance Forum. In many schools where I conducted interviews there were workshops and other types of dance training going on and there was a lot of mobility in between schools. 'Classical' dancers taught classes at contemporary schools, contemporary dancers took classes at 'classical' schools, and so on. I also spoke with a couple of dancers outside of the school settings. In this way it cannot be derived with certainty from description who I am referring to.

2.5 Conducting fieldwork with a partner

For conducting the interviews I worked with a fellow-fieldworker who has the Indian nationality. This had its advantages as well as disadvantages, but in my experience working together had a mostly positive effect on my research. Even though I have a basic knowledge of Hindi, I did not feel like I am fluent enough to properly conduct interviews, mostly because I wanted to clearly understand the answers of my respondents so that I could properly pose further questions. I did, however, always emphasize the fact that I am capable of speaking and understanding Hindi at the beginning of each interview to ensure that respondents could express themselves in Hindi where their English was not fluent enough or where they did not feel confident finding the right way to translate their thoughts. Most respondents still preferred to speak to me in English and addressed my fellow-fieldworker when expressing themselves in Hindi.

A big plus point with my fellow-fieldworker was that I already knew them very well before we started working together (as I mentioned before, our history goes back to 2015). And as with making a quality cup of coffee, it is important when conducting interviews in a foreign language to know the filter through which the information is going. For brewing coffee it is not only important to know which coffee you're working with (e.g.: knowing the background of your informant), but any connoisseur would agree that it is also of crucial importance to know which filter you're using (if any at all), as different filters will bring out different notes and flavors in the coffee. The coffee

[64] Contemporary dancer, 37, m., professional, formal interview, Gati Dance Forum, 13/02/2018.

will still be a cup of coffee, but the taste may slightly vary. Similarly, in my experience I felt that it was a great asset to know the 'filter' through which a part of the information was going. This way I was better able to identify undertones in the interview that I could link back to my fellow-fieldworker and not the respondent, so that in the end I could make a more objective analysis of the interviews.

I found there were three major benefits to conducting my interviews with a fellow-fieldworker. First of all, when working together we had a dynamic collaboration, providing each other with multiple perspectives. Before we started the interviews we had already thoroughly discussed the objective of my topic list and my fellow-fieldworker had already given their perspective on the subject. Secondly my fellow-fieldworker was of great help when attempting to overcome the language barrier. With a native speaker Hindi and a native speaker English present, we could both ensure that the least possible information was lost in translation. Knowledge of Hindi was not just useful when the informants preferred to speak in Hindi, but also when respondents that were native Hindi speakers spoke in English. With my knowledge of Hindi I could more easily pick out the literal translations from Hindi to English or grammatical mistakes which could have been confusing to somebody without an understanding of Hindi, like for example the interchangeability in Hindi of 'yesterday' and 'tomorrow.'

But not just the language barrier can cause problems in properly understanding informants, there is always a cultural barrier which is arguably even more difficult to overcome and often at the root of misunderstandings between respondent and researcher. As Coorlawala paraphrases anthropologist Sally Ann Ness in *Writing out Otherness*: 'There are instances where the researcher is thrown up against the wall of her [or his] inability to transcend her [or his] own constructions of knowing.'[65] Cross-cultural translation is in most instances very limited, and as Ness puts it: the researcher might never really know.[66] I solved the problem of cross-cultural translation the best way I could by working in close proximity to my fellow-fieldworker, as we both tried to ensure that the least possible was lost in the 'translation' of nonverbal communication. As in any conversation nonverbal elements (such as expressions and body language) are of crucial importance, but they are also very much culturally determined. There were multiple occasions where my fellow-fieldworker was much better able to understand the mental state of the respondents because of the underlying tone, behavior, expressions and body language.

On the 10th of February, for example, I attended a workshop organized by Gandharva Mahavidyalaya on art aesthetics as taught by the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*: 'Nāṭya-śāstra Rahasya, Awaken the Performer Within.' On the poster it said that it would be an 'interactive workshop for the dancer,

[65] Coorlawala 2016: 146.
[66] Coorlawala 2016: 146.

musician, poet and actor,' organized by the Meru Education Foundation. Before attending the workshop I already had a suspicion that the underlying discourse of the workshop would be mainly Hindu nationalist, and that it would turn out to be, from my personal perspective, more of a 'lecture' rather than a 'workshop.' The main goal of the Meru Education Foundation is to promote 'classical' Indian culture 'espoused by geniuses such as Bharata, Panini, Kautilya and Kalidas,' outside as well as inside India.[67] The lecturer of the workshop mainly attempted to convey the supremacy of Indian culture, by making statements such as that 'William Shakespeare plagiarized all literary work from Indian plays.'[68] The speaker also emphasized the linear history of Indian arts, stating that the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* is the base of all arts until this day, which is an important element of Hindu nationalist discourse (cf. supra). Even though the lecturer invited the audience to start discussions, members of the audience were 'corrected' when they criticized certain parts of the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* and the lecturer actively attempted to push definitions as given by the text as the correct ones. After the first hour the speaker also tended to cherry-pick which members of the audience were allowed to ask questions, the more critical members in the audience were not chosen anymore to participate in the conversations and discussions. The lecturer also did a couple of strange attempts to involve Sanskrit grammar into understanding poetry and choreography with statements such as that 'the oblique forms in a Sanskrit sentence (according to the speaker the oblique was a grammatical form unique to Sanskrit) is used to express romance in poetry and introduce metaphors.' To me this seemed like a somewhat odd attempt to sanskritize the base of the repertoire of 'classical' dance forms, up to a level where it did not make much sense anymore.

Another statement which made me suspect the lecturer of attempting to convey Hindu nationalist discourse was 'you have to culture your audience [in the teachings of *Nāṭya-Śāstra*].' From other statements I was also able to conclude that the speaker viewed the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* as the ultimate medium to create 'high art,' confirming my suspicions of a Hindu nationalist agenda. My fellow-fieldworker, however, was only convinced that the lecturer was nationalist after they had observed the way the lecturer spoke to me. After the lecture I was quite stunned that a person that obviously was not educated in Sanskrit nor Indian art aesthetics was allowed to lecture an entire room full of professional dancers and musicians with probably a much better understanding of *rasa* than the speaker had. So I was interested to know what made the lecturer qualified to teach this type of content. When attempting to pick up a conversation at first I was ignored. Only after waiting for a long time I gave my fellow-fieldworker an indication that maybe we should just go since the lecture was held really late and we still had to travel quite far to go home. It was only at that point that I was acknowledged, and the lecturer signaled that I would get to ask my questions soon. During a

[67] Meru Education Foundation (2018): *Meru Education Foundation: Objectives* (20/03/2018).

[68] There is some discussion between me and my fellow-fieldworker about whether this was meant as a joke or not. But in my opinion even as a joke it is still an illustration of how nationalist discourse was present in the lecture.

brief conversation I learned that the lecturer was a business person who was currently a teacher at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the United States. As a hobby the speaker had studied spoken Sanskrit and 'read the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*.' I had introduced myself as a student of Indian languages and culture, who had studied Sanskrit intensively for four years. The lecturer attempted to start up a conversation with me in Sanskrit, after which I emphasized that we mostly focused on translation of Sanskrit texts. With a short 'you should study spoken Sanskrit, it is much more useful' the speaker abruptly ended the five-minute conversation and turned the attention away from me again.

I had interpreted this quite nervous behavior as feeling intimidated by me, somebody who had studied what the speaker attempted to lecture much more thoroughly and intensively. I thought that I was turned away so quickly to avoid further questioning into something which the lecturer seemingly knew barely anything about. While leaving the auditorium, however, my fellow-fieldworker said that at that point it was obvious that the lecturer was nationalist. When I asked why in my partner's opinion the lecturer only seemed Hindu nationalist, after a three hour lecture on basically Hindu nationalist discourse complete with elements such as a glorification of Sanskrit and the construction of a linear history of 'classical' Indian culture, my fellow-fieldworker explained that the lecturer had shown contempt towards me as a foreigner trying to start up a discussion about Indian culture, and that the lecturer's disdain towards me was the reason I was turned away so quickly. This placed the 'nervous' behavior of the speaker in a completely different context which I would have never grasped without my fellow-fieldworker present.

This idea of 'culturing the audience in the teachings of the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*' also returned in conversations which I had with some of the 'classical dancers' I interviewed. It seems to be a common conception that dance is a tool to teach the audience in India about Indian philosophy. Not only as conveyed by the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, there were also 'classical' dancers that referred to a more religious narrative saying that dance teaches about for example '*jīvātmā*' ('the supreme being'). Not only is dance considered to be a tool to educate an Indian audience about Indian philosophy, but also to educate the audience outside of India about Indian culture. There was a *kathak* teacher, for example, who viewed *kathak* as a medium to teach a foreign audience about Indian culture. This *kathak* teacher was explaining to me that while traveling to other parts of the world, such as Africa, other people were taught about Indian culture through *kathak* dance. From the contemporary perspective this was considered to be somewhat irrational. As one of my contemporary respondents stated:

> […] this whole thing of 'Indian culture' through dance is not possible. We are such a big country, the second I say *bharatanāṭyam,* I am talking about one part of the country. Is it India? Yes it is India, but is it India as a whole? No. If I talk about Punjab and *bhāngrā,* it is a part of India. Is this applicable to North East? No. This added pressure to represent your country as a dancer is illogical. We are a country of multiple languages and

multiple cultures, so yes, a dance form may represent a particular bunch of people, but it cannot give the whole story for a secular country. [..] The problem starts when we do a dance piece about a particular deity, and then declare that is all of the country. We have Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, and so on, who may not think that part of history was the greatest one. These 'classical' forms are part of a very particular narration, which is great, but at the same time you should recognize there is a Sufi narration, a Mughal narration, an Anglo-Indian narration, a Farsi narration, a Punjabi narration, a Kashmiri narration, a North Eastern narration, the list goes on. […] The way 'classical' dance is made it is not just movement, it is word, it is stories, it is a certain narration, it is beautiful as I said, it is a living museum. As long as we respect that this is one part of the living museum and not just say that is it, we are in a safe space. The nature of the country is so much more complex. That is something which people need to be kept aware of.[69]

[69] Contemporary dancer, 37, m., professional, formal interview, Gati Dance Forum, 13/02/2018.

3. *Rasa*, postcolonial nationalism and identity politics: an anthropological approach

In this chapter I will elaborate further on how *rasa* as a philosophical concept became politically charged. I will explain how the concept was appropriated by postcolonial nationalism, and how this resulted in *rasa* attaining a controversial status among 'classical' and contemporary dancers in India today. But before that, I will start by defining 'which nationalism' I will be discussing, as postcolonial nationalism was the uniting force for different nationalisms after independence originating from the sense of 'India versus the British.' These anti-colonial and anti-westernization ideas are still relevant in current identity politics, but in the post-Nehruvian era union is also motivated by different factors, which I will be discussing into detail in the section on 'navigating diversity in India' and 'the creation of a sense of belonging together' after independence.

After discussing which definition of nationalism I will be using, I will move on to give a short introduction into how postcolonial nationalism affected the performing arts by giving an overview of the recent socio-political history of dance, from 1892 until this day. It was during this timeframe that *rasa* was appropriated by postcolonial nationalism as well.

After that I will finish by discussing current identity politics in the performing arts, which I will be describing from my own field work and experiences. In this part I will also discuss how the identity politics of postcolonial nationalism defined certain gender issues as well as other problems such as discrimination and racism inside and outside of India.

3.1 Which nationalism?

As Eriksen states in the book 'Ethnicity and Nationalism,' it is very difficult to provide a study on nationalism in India with a clear framework. In Eriksen's own words:

> India is a tough case for any scholar trying to develop a general theory of ethnicity or nationalism. India is hardly a state based on cultural similarity or even equality in the Western sense; it is a country with deeply embedded hierarchies and a very considerable degree of internal cultural variation. Its population of nearly a billion is divided by language, religion, caste and culture.[70]

Another reason why it is difficult to define nationalism in India, are the rapid changes between different types of nationalism within the same community, region or society. In the book 'Nations and Nationalism,' Ernest Gellner gives the example of people in the Eastern region of Bengal, who over a period of forty years shifted from secular all-India nationalism in the 1930s, to Muslim separatist nationalism in the 1940s, to Bengali nationalism in the 1960s. Within these frameworks, the cultural 'other' were identified as the British, then the Hindus, and then Urdu speakers of western Pakistan.[71]

[70] Eriksen 1992: 156.
[71] Gellner 1983: 75.

Since nationalism is a product of a historical process and not all types of nationalism are the same, context is very important when discussing nationalism in India.[72] Nationalism cannot be considered one phenomenon, as it has multiple variations that rose throughout history.[73] One way to refer to the nationalism I will be discussing in this chapter may be 'postcolonial nationalism,' mostly defined by the reaction to the British rule in the late 19th century. The popular 'us versus them' rhetoric nowadays has, however, left the rebellion against the British largely behind, and found another more prevalent opponent in the Muslim communities of India. It may thus be said that nationalism in India is partially religiously motivated, that is why another way to refer to this type of nationalism may be 'Hindu nationalism.'[74] Hindu nationalism had its roots in 1892, and continues to influence the way Hindu identity is promoted until this day.

The type of nationalism I will focus on in this chapter may also be referred to as cultural nationalism, which rose during the anticolonial period leading up to India's independence from British rule in 1947, between the 1920s and the 1930s. Cultural nationalism in India was also not one single, homogenous project. Diverse forms of cultural nationalisms came into existence in different regions of India. In the western region of Bengal, for example, there was the modern art movement. What all regional variations of cultural nationalism have in common, however, is the idea that Indian culture had to carry out a certain element of 'Indianness.' This occurred for example in the work of Uday Shankar, a famous Indian modern dancer. While making an autobiographical film, Uday Shankar replaced traveling to Europe during early career stages with travelling to Varanasi in India. This was done in an attempt to appeal to a Hindu nationalist audience.[75] This idea of having to carry out a certain element of 'Indianness' through dance is still very much present today,[76] as I will discuss in the final part of this chapter on identity politics in contemporary India. Many of my contemporary dance respondents, however, informed me that this pressure to convey 'Indianness' through artistic work seems to have faded mostly in other artistic domains. It was repeated to me multiple times that there is much more room for artistic freedom in domains such as theater, music and fine arts, whereas dance seems to be more stuck in a certain 'conservatism.'

[72] Srinivasan 1996: 2.
[73] Chatterjee 1993: 2.
[74] Sahai 2017: 103.
[75] Purkayastha 2012: 76.
[76] This idea of 'Indianness' mostly means carrying out a Hindu Brahmanic identity.

3.2 Overview of the recent socio-political history of the performing arts from 1892 until this day: the construction of a 'classical' culture

3.2.1 Social reform: Anti-Nautch movement (1892)

Under colonial rule, indigenous dance practices were often perceived as political and moral threats to colonial regimes. In many cases, local dance forms were viewed as excessively erotic, and colonial agents as well as missionaries encouraged and sometimes enforced a ban or reform of dance practices.[77] This was no different for India, where in the late 19th century there was a social reform movement to eradicate certain dance practices of South India, nowadays referred to as dance which was practiced by the *devadāsi* communities, and abolish performances, particularly in temples. Influenced by Christianity, these practices were viewed as a form of temple prostitution.[78] The movement to eradicate the dance practices of these *devadāsi* communities, otherwise known as the 'Anti-Nautch'[79] movement, was related to a larger Indian social reform movement based on the upcoming Hindu nationalism of the late 19th century. Its focus was mainly on South India, but the social stigma carried out by the Anti-Nautch movement also affected other 'styles,'[80] providing dance in general with a bad reputation.[81] One of the groups at the core of the movement were Indian social reformers carrying out a Hindu nationalist discourse. They had internalized and adapted critiques of Christian missionaries, who because of the Christian view on the body and spirituality viewed dance to be incompatible with the setting of the temple. Ram Mohan Roy, an important exponent of the reform movement, viewed social improvement to be a 'proper and just' Hindu society, reconstructed from the *śāstras*, and Vedic and Upaniṣadic practices and values.[82] The reconstruction of this mythical Vedic society became the overall goal of the social reform movement. The Anti-Nautch movement promoted the idea of 'social purity,' which affected mostly women. From this moment onwards women were only seen as respectable within monogamous heterosexual marriages, or as celibate temple workers. They were only able to thrive if they fit within a patriarchal framework.[83]

Furthermore, for the performing arts this idea of *śāstras* forming the base for 'properness and justness' meant reconstructing 'authentic' dance forms based on the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, among other Sanskrit texts such as the *Abhinaya Darpaṇa*. As discussed in the first chapter, *rasa* is the central concept in the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, and thus *rasa* became an important element in the discourse of the

[77] Reed 1998: 506.
[78] O'Shea 1998: 50.
[79] The word 'Nautch' is a degeneration of the Hindi word 'nāc.,' which means 'dance.'
[80] The use of the word 'style' is highly contested, as it shows the attempt of unifying plurality and diversity of forms or genres as mere stylistic variations of one another, smoothing over the particularities of each style. Various 'classical' styles supposedly share commonalities, brought together under the umbrella term of 'classical' dance. Therefore, I will avoid using the word 'style.' Royo 2002: 2-3.
[81] O'Shea 1998: 50; Chakravorty 2006: 117.
[82] O'Shea 1998: 50.
[83] Coorlawala 2004: 51-52.

social reformers. *Rasa* was constructed into a measure of 'proper' dance, and from here on, dance was only viewed as 'successful' if *rasa* was rightly conveyed. Linking dance with a continuous lineage of authoritative texts became a characteristic of 'sanskritized' dance, where the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* was viewed to be the basic manual of dance.[84] This was also echoed in my field work, as most of my 'classical' respondents referred to the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* as the additional source of their knowledge besides their *guru*. Another commonly mentioned text was the *Abhinaya Darpaṇa,* but no other text was referred to during my interviews. This lineage to Sanskrit dramaturgy emphasizes the 'antiquity' of the sanskritized national culture. The newly constructed 'pan-Indian' culture, derived from ancient Sanskrit texts like the *Nāṭya-Śāstra,* textualized Indian dance forms regardless of their specific regional or religious histories.[85] Uttara Asha Coorlawala gives the following definition of sanskritization:

> A deliberate self-conscious return to ancient Vedic and Brahmanical values and customs from a new intellectual perspective (often but not necessarily in response to "Westernization"). The term is often used synonymously with brahmanization, because Sanskrit had been the exclusive preserve of Brahmin males.[86]

Coorlawala continues to explain how this affected dance:

> In dance, sanskritization has become a legitimizing process by which dance forms designated as "ritual," "folk," or simply insignificant, attain social and politico-artistic status which brings the redesignation, "classical." […] In the 1970s, almost every dance form claiming antiquity and sophistication, noted references within the canonized *Nāṭyaśāstra* […], and demonstrated how postures, movement, units and narrative techniques were organized according to this text.[87]

The Anti-Nautch movement was a movement for modernization, removing everything that could stand in the way of modernizing the dance forms.[88] Alessandra Lopez y Royo therefore proposes that Indian 'classical' dance, as it is a recent construction based on ideas of modernization, may also be referred to as modern dance. In the words of Royo: 'classical Indian dance is a modern remaking, a modern projection of specific notions on Indian cultural values.'[89]

Postcolonial nationalism is attributed a paradoxical nature, as there are many parallels between the rhetoric of the Indian social reformers and the discourse that is carried out by 19th century Western orientalists, even though it is supposedly these 'Western influences' that Indian social reformers wished to eradicate. The core of both discourses is basically the same, that of India today being a degraded form of a glorious Vedic past.[90]

[84] Coorlawala 2004: 53.
[85] Chakravorty 2006: 119.
[86] Coorlawala 2004: 53.
[87] Coorlawala 2004: 53-54.
[88] O'Shea 1998: 50.
[89] Lopez y Royo 2003: 5.
[90] O'Shea 1998: 46, 56.

Contemporary dancer Ranjabati Sircar describes this paradox as follows:

> The desire to glorify tradition in this way as something ancient and timeless is linked to the need to authenticate culture which stems from the Orientalist agenda, reflecting the insecurity about one's own heritage of a colonized people.[91]

In their attempt to reject Western influences, Indian social reformers thus incorporated and internalized orientalist discourse. The idea of Ram Mohan Roy that social improvement would be carried out by a reconstruction of a mythical Vedic past is exactly how Edward Said describes orientalism: 'the embodied continuities of tradition in a living and present generation are passed over in favour of ancient textual classics.'[92] Indian social reformers only differed in their rhetoric from that of the orientalists where they tried to show how this 'elevated ancient history' and the 'renaissance' of this history was a rebirth of their own traditions and not a borrowing from the West.[93]

3.2.2 Cultural 'revival' movement (1930)

In this segment I will explore into more detail the specifics of how dance was sanskritized and how a 'classical' culture was constructed and institutionalized in the 1930s. I would like to start off by expressing my concerns with the word 'revival,' as revival implies that something of the past is being brought back to life, when in reality the dance forms referred to as 'classical' are a whole new development inspired by India's past. Instead of a reconstruction, Indian 'classical' culture is a construction that uses elements of India's past such as treatises, poetry, sculptures, imagery, art aesthetics and art philosophy, such as *rasa* theory.

The term 'classical Indian dance' also causes discomfort among many researchers as it is largely incorrect, but until this day a new term has not been proposed. The dance forms constructed in the 1930s are still referred to as 'classical' in popular and scholarly literature alike. Also dance practitioners of these styles continue to refer to their dance styles as 'classical.' Alessandra Lopez y Royo refers in a 2002 article to 'classical' dance forms as 'neoclassical' forms. But as the word 'neoclassical' still implies a revival of a classical form, I do not find this a satisfactory substitute. Therefore, same as many other researchers, I will keep referring to these dance forms as 'classical' dance because of the lack of better terminology, although reluctantly.

In an article on *bharatanātyam*, Allen explains how the term 'revival' obscures several other processes and transformations. First of all, there is a re-population, one community appropriating a practice from another. In the case of *bharatanātyam*, the dance form it was based on, was initially practiced by the earlier mentioned *devadāsi* community. As with many other dance forms, there was a shift from the community that initially practiced dance to upper- and middle class Brahmanic

[91] Lopez y Royo 2003: 12.
[92] Said 1978:52 in O'Shea 1998: 56.
[93] O'Shea 1998: 56.

women. Secondly, Allen states there was a reconstruction, an altering of elements of repertoire and choreography. Thirdly, there was a renaming of dance forms, which is also an important part of the sanskritization process. Finally, there is the re-situation of the dance forms from temple and court to the stage.[94]

According to Allen there are two phases in the dance 'revival' of the 1930s. Firstly, there was the aforementioned process of sanskritization which started with the anti-Nautch movement, and is being continued until this day, and secondly there was the institutionalization of the dance forms during the 1950s.

3.2.2.1 Sanskritization

On the sanskritization of the dance forms much ink has been spilled. The process had its roots in the previously mentioned Anti-Nautch campaign, where first of all 'improper' dance was discredited. A high caste, Hindu Brahmanic identity was constructed, in which the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* and *rasa* theory had come to play an integral role. In order to 'modernize' the dance forms, there was a removal of everything that did not fit into the Hindu nationalist identity. This was a gradual process, in which as previously mentioned dance came to be performed by Brahmanic women, and the names were changed to fit a more Brahmanic image. Not only the names, but also the repertoire and costumes were altered.[95]

Chakravorty distinguishes three elements that made the sanskritization process of dance so successful. Firstly, there is the influence by orientalist discourse. Tracing linear histories to Sanskrit texts happened under the influence of orientalists, who viewed these texts as the base of Indian culture. Secondly, these Sanskrit texts (such as the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* in the case of dance) were as previously mentioned viewed as the main sources from which Hindu nationalists created an unbroken Indian history and cultural tradition, promoted as revival. Thirdly, these newly constructed 'roots' in Vedic culture made dance a tradition with a Hindu Brahmanic identity, which speaks to an Indian audience, including younger generations in contemporary India.[96]

The promotion of this newly found Hindu Brahmanic identity meant that foreign influences were gradually phased out. Not only influences of Islam and the West were erased, but also those of European influenced dancers such as Uday Shankar, regardless of attempts to appeal to a Hindu nationalist audience. The only Western influence that was celebrated, was that of the Russian ballet dancer Anna Pavlova, because the popular *bharatanātyam* dancer Rukmini Devi had trained under Anna Pavlova's tutelage and had recognized its influence on Rukmini Devi's own philosophy

[94] Allen 2010: 63-64.
[95] Allen 2010: 63-69.
[96] Chakravorty 1998: 107-120.

regarding 'proper' dance and methods of dance education. Other Western dancers such as Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn from the Denishawn company were much less spoken of.[97]

The eradication of foreign influences is mostly clear in *kathak*, which owes most of its heritage to Islamic culture.[98] The origins of *kathak* were traced back to a 'mythical Brahmin Kathak caste.' Interestingly, *kathak* initially became a primarily male-dominated practice, whereas in other 'classical' dance forms such as *bharāṭanāṭyam* upper-class Brahmanic women were viewed to be the main practitioners of the dance style. In the process of making *kathak* a male-dominated Brahmanic form, Islamic cultural influences on *kathak* and the contributions of *tawaifs*, predominantly Islamic women who were trained in North Indian music and dance, were glossed over.[99] An example of this phasing out of Islamic elements, is the removal of the Islamic *salami* or salute which is nowadays replaced by a Hindu *bhumi praṇām*, where the dancer requests 'Earth' for excuses for dancing on top of her.[100]

3.2.2.2 Institutionalization and the nationalist definition of 'classical' Indian dance forms

Starting from 1953, there was a rise of national cultural academies sponsored by the state. The Sangeet Natak Akademi, an autonomous body of the Ministry of Culture, was established during that time. They announced that the central government at New Delhi was now the official patron of cultural heritage such as music, dance and theater. They became responsible for the protection, preservation and promotion of India's 'cultural heritage,' and they also took a leading role in exporting this 'cultural heritage.' The body that was credited with the responsibility of the social organization of dance and music was the Ministry of Education of the Indian government. The Sangeet Natak Akademi and the Ministry of Culture further stimulated the institutionalization of 'classical' dance forms. An example of a cultural academy sponsored by the state is Kathak Kendra in New Delhi. Furthermore, the *gurukul* method was promoted, which is a male hereditary lineage method applying the aforementioned *guru-śiṣya-paramparā*. This authorized males of traditional families to be the 'true bearers of authentic Indian tradition.' They were seen as the official keepers of India's history and tradition, handed down through this *guru-śiṣya-paramparā*.[101]

For maintaining the cultural relations between India and other countries, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations was established. This was a separate administrative body created and financed by the Ministry of External Affairs. It is the Indian Council for Cultural Relations that selected which artists and performers got to showcase their work abroad on official delegations. They also introduced the 'Festival of India' in Europe, the United States, and other Asian countries. Their aim was to highlight Indian traditions and culture. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations and the

[97] Reed 1992: 508.
[98] Chakravorty 2006: 119.
[99] Chakravorty 2006: 118-119.
[100] Chakravorty 2006: 119. Earth in Hindu mythology is considered female.
[101] Chakravorty 2006: 118-120.

Sangeet Natak Akademi were both funded by the government and administered by government agents. This resulted into performing artists having to conform with the philosophy carried out by the central government and the Sangeet Natak Akademi in order to receive grants, which meant that dancers were only able to work within the framework of patriarchal ideas, such as subordination to *gurus*.[102] Grau states that in the hyper capitalist world of today, it can be said that many times artists have to compromise, and be that for which others are willing to pay. The way in which artists present themselves and their work has repercussions on the funding they may or may not receive, and which places they are invited to perform.[103] This remains strikingly vivid in India today, where as previously discussed in my methodology, most of the funding goes to 'classically' trained dancers and yoga, whereas very little goes to contemporary dance.

3.2.2.2.1 Defining 'classical' dance through the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*

The institutionalization of these so called 'classical' dance forms begs the question which definition was used to select which dance form was 'classical,' and which one was not. The way 'classical' dance is defined seems very unclear and at many times rather vague. Many scholars such as Allen and Chakravorty state that because of the sanskritization of the dance forms, roots in the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* seems to have become one of the main characteristics of 'classical' dance. Not just scholars, but also 'classical' dancers themselves define 'classical' dance by using terminology that is supposedly derived from the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*. All of the 'classical' dancers I interviewed distinguished 'classical' dance from 'folk' dance by referring to 'classical' dance as *nāṭyadharmī*, and 'folk' dance as *lokadharmī*. Strangely enough it is very difficult to locate these two terms within the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, making me question whether these two concepts are even in the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*. I attempted to locate the *śloka* from the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* giving the reference to *nāṭyadharmī* and *lokadharmī* through scholarly articles that mentioned these two terms. I did not find too many to begin with, the two articles which I found upon initial search that clearly mentioned *nāṭyadharmī* and *lokadharmī* were *The Theory and Technique of Classical Indian Dancing* (1967) by Kapila Vatsyayan and *Bharatha Natyam-What Are You?* (1988) by Avanthi Meduri. Both articles attribute the concepts *nāṭyadharmī* and *lokadharmī* to the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*. In the article by Kapila Vatsyayan it is not completely clear, as the dance scholar never explicitly refers to the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*. Kapila Vatsyayan does, however, state that *nāṭyadharmī* was described by Bharata on page 236 of the article.[104] Avanthi Meduri makes a clear reference to the the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, stating that in the English translation by Manomohan Ghosh, it is said that the *lokadharmī* mode of representation is passed over for the more valued *nāṭyadharmī* mode of representation by Bharata.[105] Neither

[102] Chakravorty 2006: 120.
[103] Grau 2007: 201.
[104] Vatsyayan 1967: 236.
[105] Meduri 1988: 3.

researchers give a clear reference as to where in the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* a reference to *nāṭyadharmī* or *lokadharmī* is made.

My second impulse was to look for *nāṭyadharmī* and *lokadharmī* in Monier Williams Sanskrit dictionary, as the dictionary often gives the location of a term. As a translation for *nāṭyadharmī* the dictionary gave 'the ruler of dramatic representation,' which does not even come close to how it is being used in the performing arts. Kapila Vatsyayan defines *nāṭyadharmī* as the mode of presentation (*dharmī*) used to represent what's on stage (*nāṭya*), or in other words: a stylized mode of representation.[106] I would like to note that *dharmī* as a separate word was not found in the Sanskrit dictionary. There was also no specific location given for the word *nāṭyadharmī*. According to the dictionary, *lokadharmī* did not exist either. Kapila Vatsyayan defines *lokadharmī* as the mode of representation (*dharmī*) of the realistic world (*loka*).[107] I was able to find a translation for *lokadharma*, however, which means 'a worldly matter.' I also checked a specialized Sanskrit dictionary, but in that dictionary there was also no mention of *nāṭyadharmī* or *lokadharmī*.

As I still was not able to reach any conclusion from searching the dictionary, I was left with no choice but to scan through the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*. The closest I came to an actual reference of for which *śloka* to look, was in *It Matters For Whom you Dance: Audience Participation in Rasa Theory* by Coorlawala. On page 8 Coorlawala writes how Abhinavagupta makes a reference to stylization or *nāṭyadharmī*, with a footnote referring to *NŚ* 4.25 and 8.70. Upon closer inspection, however, *naṭyadharmī* is mentioned in neither *ślokas*. *Śloka* 4.25 is part of a description of the thirty-two *Aṅgahāras*, and *śloka* 8.70 is part of the segment on descriptions of the 'glances' to express the transitory states. The particular glance discussed in *śloka* 8.70 is named *kuñcitā*, or contraction of the eyes:

8.70 *ānikuñcitapakṣmāgrā puṭairākuñcitaistathā,*
saṃnikuñcitatārā ca kuñcitā dṛṣṭiriṣyate.

The Glance in which ends of eyelashes are bent due to the eyelids being contracted and the eyeballs are also contracted, is called Kuñcitā.[108]

I find it very peculiar that it was so hard to locate *nāṭyadharmī* and *lokadharmī*, as they are unanimously being referred to as the characteristics of 'classical' and 'folk' dance described by the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, and that I still do not have any conclusive answer. I must admit that I did not read the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* in its entirety, as it is a text of more than six hundred pages, so *nāṭyadharmī* and

[106] Vatsyayan 1967: 230.
[107] Vatsyayan 1967: 230.
[108] Ghosh 1967: 156.

lokadharmī may very well be described in a different chapter. Since they are described to be the two modes or representation by Kapila Vatsyayan, I felt it might be logical to find these two terms in the first chapter, where a description of drama is given. But I also had no luck there.

This illustrates how the notion of 'classical' dance forms having their roots in the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* is a recent construction. During the time the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* was written, the division in 'classical' dance and 'folk' dance did not exist yet, as they are terms that have been imported from the West and were only applied under British rule. The Hindi words for 'folk dance' (*loka-nṛtya*) and 'classical dance' (*śāstriya-nṛtya*) are most likely neologisms that were probably created during the 'revival' movement of the 1930s, making it very well possible that *nāṭyadharmī* and *lokadharmī* are either later additions from a later commentary (such as for example one by Abhinavagupta), or maybe even neologisms, like the terms they are used to describe. The terms *nāṭyadharmī* and *lokadharmī* are possibly recent words later attributed to the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* to construct a linear history of the 'classical' dance forms all the way back to the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, but more research is needed to make any conclusive statement.

3.2.2.2.2 'Classical' dance as defined by the Ministry of Culture

The Indian Ministry of Culture is rather vague as well in clarifying what 'classical' dance actually is. They refrain from giving a definition altogether. Instead, they give a list of nine forms on their website with an odd emphasis on geography, which may be an illustration of the nationalist slogan 'unity in diversity' (cf. supra).[109] This list consists of *bharatanāṭyam*, *mohiṇī aṭṭam*, *kathakalī*, and *kucipuḍī* for South India, *kathak* and *sattriyā nṛtya* for North India, and *maṇipurī*, *oḍisī* and *chhau* for East India.[110] To illustrate the fluidity and arbitrarity of the list: in 1958 only four dance forms were recognized as 'classical,' and new dance forms are being 'recovered' until this day.[111] In this list, *chhau* is the odd one out. First of all, it is the most recent addition to the list, having been added around 2016. It is also the only 'classical' dance form that was previously considered a martial art. Finally, the list is also only partially correct when referring to *chhau* as a dance form from the Eastern region of India, as there are at least three variations of *chhau*, one being from North India. The addition of *chhau* to the list of 'classical' dance forms also seems to cause confusion among dancers in India today. Many dancers do not seem convinced by its new label and refer to *chhau* as a 'semi-classical' dance form.

[109] Ministry of Culture, Government of India (2018): *Dance, Ministry of Culture, Government of India*.
[110] Ministry of Culture, Government of India (2018): *Dance, Ministry of Culture, Government of India*.
[111] Coorlawala 2004: 54.

When promoting their *chhau* class, Natya Ballet Centre described the form as following on their Facebook page:

> Seraikella Chhau is a semi classical [*sic*] Indian dance with folk origins hailing from Jharkand. It uses masks to identify characters making it an even more interesting watch [*sic*]… The themes of this dance are traced back to Shaivism, Shaktism and Vaishnavism...[112]

For more information on 'classical' dance, the Indian Ministry of Culture gives a reference to the website of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, which is incidentally just more vagueness. Same as on the website of the Indian Ministry of Culture, no clear definition is to be found.

3.3 Postcolonial nationalism and the search for an identity

As various art forms embody the aesthetic and socio-cultural terms of a society, so does dance. Researching dance forms from the perspective of identity politics can therefore be of help in understanding the identity issues many postcolonial states have to deal with.[113]

Identity is a difficult concept to define. Most commonly, identity is meant to refer to 'a set of information, from which you can recognize an individual.'[114] This set of information is usually viewed to be invariable. When researching identity, however, it is important to keep in mind that identity is dynamic, ever changing, fluid, and always in the making.[115] Identity is constructed through dialogue, because people are never isolated. As Grau states: the 'I' is bound to the 'we,' a person cannot be unique alone. Identity is bound to the dynamics of interaction.[116]

Among many postmodern and poststructuralist researchers, identity research is considered to be out-dated. They maintain that ours is a time of 'post-identity.'[117] Researchers such as Burt state that concerns with identity can be limiting, constraining, fixing and reductive.[118] In my opinion, however, the idea that 'identity issues are outdated' can only be stated from a privileged position, and I would like to show in the remaining part of this chapter that issues concerning identity are still very much relevant today. I will discuss how identity was constructed in post-independence India, and how this further shaped the landscape of Indian dance forms in contemporary India.

3.3.1 Navigating diversity in India: the creation of a 'sense of belonging together'

The biggest challenge for the newly found Indian nation-state after independence, was how to navigate India's great diversity. The goal was to create national unity, when in reality the regional diversity was too extensive, as India has a large variety of societal cultures. Kymlicka proposes that a 'sense of belonging together,' the feeling of being 'one' community, is created through a shared national identity. The author lists two important factors to create this shared national identity: a

[112] Facebook page of Natya Ballet Centre, posted on 16/04/2018.
[113] Grau 2007: 189.
[114] Grau 2007: 189.
[115] Grau 2007: 191-201.
[116] Grau 2007: 190-191.
[117] Grau 2007: 199.
[118] Burt 2000: 126.

shared history and a shared language. A shared language will result in shared media channels, and shared political and social institutions. Shared media channels in particular are very important in the creation of a shared frame of reference. The role of media, social media and communication are integral to the development of a public sphere, which in India relates to postcolonial nationalism, the formation of the modern nation-state, and globalization.[119] In the words of Kymlicka:

> […] shared principles are not sufficient [to maintain social unity]. […] Social unity, then, requires […] a sense of shared membership. Citizens must have a sense of belonging to the same community, and a shared desire to continue to live together. Social unity, in short, requires that citizens identify with their fellow citizens, and view them as 'one of us'. This sense of shared identity helps sustain the relationships of trust and solidarity needed for citizens to accept the results of democratic decisions […][120]

He then continues:

> What then makes citizens […] feel that they belong together, that they are members of the same nation? The answer typically involves a sense of a shared history, and a common language. Citizens share a sense of belonging to a particular historical society because they share a language and history; they participate in common social and political institutions which are based on this shared language, and which manifest and perpetuate this shared history; and they see their life-choices as bound up with the survival of this society and its institutions into the indefinite future. Citizens can share a national identity in this sense, and yet share very little in terms of ethnicity, religion, or conceptions of the good.[121]

In the case of postcolonial nationalism in India, the construction of a shared history proved to be the most important factor when creating a 'sense of belonging together' and a shared identity, as there was a construction of a linear history within the Hindu nationalist movement.[122] A shared language and thus unifying media were a lot more sensitive, and difficult to achieve. The attempt to create unifying media in India through newscasts in '*shuddh*' or 'pure' Hindi failed miserably and even had the opposite effect, alienating people that speak vernacular languages and even speakers of Hindi dialects who found the Hindi spoken during these newscasts too 'fake' and too difficult.[123]

The diversity in India was finally institutionalized through the aforementioned slogan 'unity in diversity.'[124] This embrace of diversity was not a reflection of, or a response to a natural pre-existing order. It entailed the active production of an 'institutional pluralism,' or in other words: selective inclusion.[125] In dance, this meant the arbitrary incorporation of only certain dance forms as 'classical.' Colonial categories, such as classification into 'folk' and 'classical,' are an illustration of the exclusivism as well as the politically motivated social identities.[126] This classification and the narrative of exclusivism was constructed to be a 'historical one,' being 'rooted' into the *Nāṭya-*

[119] Chakravorty 2006: 115.
[120] Kymlicka 2001: 31-32.
[121] Kymlicka 2001: 31-32.
[122] O'Shea 1998: 46.
[123] Chakravorty 2006: 123.
[124] Roy 2007: 4.
[125] Roy 2007: 7.
[126] Reed 1998: 509.

Śāstra. Group identities were transformed into state-supporting diversity, but only certain kinds of group identities were recognized. This translates into dance as only certain dance forms being recognized as 'classical,' those which supported the Hindu nationalist ideals. The selection of 'classical' dance forms is highly politically charged, and thus the list keeps being edited.

In addition, there was a depiction of Indian diversity alongside the state as the successful manager of this diversity, who supposedly provided individuals with security, groups with freedom and recognition, and the nation as a whole with unity and stability.[127] I also noticed upon multiple occasions that the nationalist party in India today is viewed as the bearer of stability, for example through Facebook posts of some of my Indian friends. Not just among conservative elders in India, but also among many younger people the nationalist party has gained popularity by supposedly bringing stability to India, achieved by selective inclusion. National unity is thus state facilitated and manufactured, and very artificial.[128] This is echoed in an article by Sahai, who states that the victory of the BJP-led right-wing government in 2014 still keeps the idea of the nation as a religious-nationalist ideal of the 'Hindu Rashtra' alive. According to her, this leads to an exclusivist citizenship based on a Hindu identity.[129]

The selected regional dance forms were turned into symbols of the slogan 'unity in diversity,' which became the backbone for the pan-Indian national ideology. Diversity is, however, a questionable use of words, as mostly a Brahmanic Hindu identity was promoted. There was an alienation of Muslims and minority religions, and an alienation of lower castes.[130] An underlying Brahmanic Hindu discourse dominates dance, which is embodied in my fieldwork as all of my contemporary as well as 'classical' informants were Hindu Brahmins. 'Classical' Indian national culture claimed antique origins through the construction of a linear history and the construction of a high caste image, which defined 'Indian' identity. The idea of India being the success story of diversity management was promoted and became the unquestioned starting point of postcolonial politics.[131] It needs to be noted that non-Hindus, or castes other than Brahmins, were never actively barred from learning these dance forms. But even when a dancer is not a Hindu Brahmin, a Brahmanic Hindu identity is given through dance, and 'classical' dance performed by non-Brahmin Hindus is not always received with a lot of enthusiasm.[132] This may be illustrated by two examples Grau gives in a 2007 article on dance and identity. Grau describes the experience of dancer Bithika Chatterjee, who at an Indian dance performance, where some of the performers were non-Indian, overheard two women saying that white women should not perform Indian dance forms, as in their

[127] Roy 2007: 7.
[128] Roy 2007: 19.
[129] Sahai 2017: 101.
[130] Chakravorty 2006: 10.
[131] Roy 2007: 3.
[132] Royo 2003: 10.

opinion it made them look like *hijras*.[133] This statement is discriminatory against non-Indians as well as *hijras*, a community of transgender people often marginalized in India, transforming the term *hijra* into an insult. My fellow-fieldworker further confirmed this notion among many Indians, as according to my fellow-fieldworker it is often stated that white women should not dance because they look less feminine than Indian women.

Similarly, Grau described the experience of the well-known *bharatanāṭyam* dancer Navtej Johar, who is a Sikh from Punjab. Navtej Johar stated that upon many occasions, they were made to feel like an 'outsider' by the musicians, giving the professional dancer the impression that they were inexperienced in dance and music, possibly because of the lack of a Hindu identity when participating in artistic practices linked to Hinduism.[134]

3.3.2 The 'identity question' of dancers in today's Indian society

Since the 19th century, dance was used worldwide as a symbol to carry out a national identity. Dance researchers as well as identity researchers explored the subject of dance as national culture, the politics of the category 'art,' the reconstructions of tradition and the reinforcement as well as contestation of gender, ethnic and class stereotypes.[135] The appropriation of dance by nationalist movements is a strategy that is applied worldwide by postcolonial discourse, and its promotion by the state and reformation of national dances has been researched upon multiple occasions.[136] Bodily movement thus becomes a powerful tool to form and negotiate identity.[137] As Meyer stated in 1995: 'Dance is a powerful tool in shaping nationalist ideology and in the creation of national subjects, often more so than are political rhetoric or intellectual debates.'[138]

In this section I will first explore how postcolonial nationalism affected gender issues and how it affected female dancers, after which I will continue to show how postcolonial nationalism affected contemporary dancers in general. Problems such as discrimination and racism will also be addressed.

3.3.2.1 Postcolonial nationalism and gender

'Classical' dance in India is embedded in patriarchal views of the role and function of women in society.[139] Women in India maintain a paradoxical position, which I would like to further explain using Chatterjee's 'Inner versus Outer' framework. Chatterjee proposes that there is a creation of the new, modern woman by postcolonial nationalism in two domains. This modern woman first of all had to be different from Indian women of the countryside, but also from Western women, as she

[133] Grau 2007: 202.
[134] Grau 2007: 202.
[135] Reed 1998: 510.
[136] Reed 1998: 511.
[137] Reed 1998: 505.
[138] Meyer in Reed 1998: 511.
[139] Chakravorty 2000: 108.

had to be conform with the cultural identity of India. In the inner domain it became the task of women to keep their household free from Western influences, and to stimulate all elements that are essential for the Indian cultural identity. But at the same time, to eradicate the conservative image, they had to be schooled as well. For this women had to move into the outer domain, where there was a risk for Westernization. As a result, women were attributed a list of characteristics which included ways of dressing and social behavior, such as self-sacrifice, pride, self-control, restraint, and so on.[140]

This results in many women showing contradictory behavior, also in their perceptions of each other. Often women are described to be stuck in between two places, the more conservative image that was carried out by Hindu nationalism, and a more 'progressive' one influenced by ideals of modernization. However, many women seem to be going back and forth between the 'ideal Indian woman' and the more progressive image, which makes the situation in reality more complicated than simply being stuck in between two places. There is a constant interaction between 'conservative' and 'progressive' identities. During my stay in New Delhi, for example, I have witnessed a girl being teased over and over again for wanting to remain chaste until marriage. She was referred to with 'you're such a girl, lighten up a little bit.' But when that same girl ordered a cocktail before dinner, this was considered 'shocking and inappropriate behavior.' Cultural rules for the way women dress are also seemingly complicated to place within a clear framework. When I was in Nagpur three years ago, there were many women dressing traditionally, such as in the Indian '*salwār kamīz*,' and women dressing more Westernized would risk being criticized. My first days in Nagpur I was staying with a Belgian friend who was doing an internship there, and on the third or fourth day we went grocery shopping with one of my friend's colleagues. There was a girl in front of us at the checkout line, wearing jeans pants with a matching jeans vest. She was completely covered in jeans from shoulders to ankles, and not showing any cleavage. Still my friend's colleague hissed 'tss, so vulgar. Girls these days don't have any shame,' while the lady in question was wearing a sari with a tiny blouse that left her entire belly and back exposed. Ideas on proper ways to dress for women go beyond being completely covered, often traditionally Indian ways to dress are viewed to be the right way to dress for women, regardless of whether parts of the body are left exposed or not. One would expect the situation to be a bit different in larger cities such as New Delhi, but the vagueness surrounding the way women should dress remained largely the same. When I was packing to come to Delhi, I asked a friend what type of clothes I should bring. I was told that in a large city I could pretty much wear whatever I wanted, so I could bring whatever clothes I liked best. Upon arrival, however, it turned out that half the clothes which I brought were

[140] Chatterjee 1993: 116.

not alright for me to wear. The skirts of some of my dresses were considered too short, even though I wore them with pantyhose. Or some of my shirts were cut out too deep.

As for the university I was studying at in 2015 in Wardha, which is a relatively small village in Indian terms, one would expect that women here would dress more conservatively. But during my stay there I witnessed everything from female students wearing tank tops, miniskirts and stilettos to students dressing in only traditional Indian clothes such as *salwār kamīz*, to women covered in saris. Because my Belgian friend had scared me into dressing only in traditional Indian clothes, saying that Westernized dressing styles were not accepted at the university in question, during the first months I always dressed in *salwār kamīz* with a matching *dupaṭṭa* (a pashmina style shawl) to cover my shoulders. As I had gotten comments from many Indian girls asking me why I would voluntarily dress in traditional Indian clothes, after a month or so I became more relaxed in the way I dressed. One day I decided to wear a long dress up to my ankles with broad straps that left my shoulders partially exposed. Since I had bought the dress in question in Nagpur, I figured it would be ok to wear as it was. But upon entering the mess hall, I got comments from the lady that cooked in my hostel. She told me that my bra straps were showing and that I should go back to my room to get my *dupaṭṭa* before going to my classes. The rules for the way women are supposed to dress remain more or less difficult to make sense out of. Even after having travelled to India three times I feel like I can never get the way I dress right.

Moreover, the other characteristics on the 'list' are also strikingly vivid, as I have known many women to be praised over and over again for being self-sacrificing and having a strong sense of self-control, including myself for supposedly being a 'pure vegetarian' (meaning that besides meat and fish, I did not consume any eggs) and practicing yoga daily. Restraint also seems to be celebrated, as I know many women to fast for the good fortune of their brothers, fathers, husbands, and even their male friends. In Wardha I witnessed a girl fasting for 24 hours because one of her male friends had a streak of bad luck.

For dance, this meant that through movement vocabulary, choreography, costuming, training and technique, performance is often rooted in the idea of a natural gender difference. Movement lexicons are highly gendered and often demonstrate cultural display rules of how each gender should behave. They are the ideals of gendered difference in action.[141] It needs to be noted here that many times female roles on stage are portrayed by actors of a gender other than female, but always using the mannerisms of stereotypical women.[142]

Postcolonial nationalism created an unrealistic, almost unattainable ideal of women being the perfect balance between tradition and modernization. The female Indian 'classical' dancer portrayed

[141] Reed 1998: 516.
[142] Reed 1998: 517.

this balance and ideal as such, making her the ultimate symbol of the Indian nation state. The identity of the female 'classical' dancer became synonymous with Indian tradition and the Brahmanic Hindu discourse in India. The 'revival' of 'classical' Indian dance, and the construction of the Indian woman are both different sides of the same postcolonial medal.[143] The representation of 'classical' female dancers in the media spread the symbol far and wide across the globe.[144] The construction of dancers into symbols for a nation with a colonial past was not specific to India, but a phenomenon that occurred in many other postcolonial nations:

> […] the dancer of the valorized national dance comes to be idealized as an emblem of an authentic precolonial [sic] past. Where necessary, dancers come to stand in for the nation at local, regional, national and international festivals and other occasions. As an embodiment of cultural heritage, the dancer becomes inscribed in nationalist histories and is refigured to conform to those histories, yet ambivalence about the dancers and their practices is often evident because the practices themselves often resist being fully incorporated into nationalist discourses. […] the very aspects that make dances appealing and colorful as representations of the past may be precisely the things that do not easily fit into the self-representation of the nation.[145]

Because the female 'classical' dancer was constructed into a symbol of the Indian nation-state, there are tensions between the aspirations of female dancers and the nationalist ideal of women as a cultural symbol.[146] As I mentioned while introducing my informants, there were a lot fewer dancers that identified other than male for example, as this does not conform with the nationalist 'list of characteristics' of Indian women.

3.3.2.2 Postcolonial nationalism and contemporary dance

The appropriation of the female 'classical' dancer as a symbol for Indian culture did not only cause tensions for women, but for contemporary dancers in general as well. More and more contemporary dancers are starting to voice their concerns about '*Nāṭya-Śāstra* discourse' still being embedded in current dance practice, and as Coorlawala puts it, remains a re-occurring criteria for contemplating and generating performance.[147] Hindu nationalism is not only still very much alive in 'classical' dance forms, but also in contemporary dance. New form and content are often derived from alternative readings of the very same textual material. Material that was earlier used for sanskritization, is now being reworked and presented in a new manner. Inspiration may also be drawn from body training methods such as yoga and martial arts, as I mentioned while discussing my methodology and fieldwork.[148] Among contemporary dancers, the usage of the same texts that were previously used for sanskritization as a source of inspiration is becoming a point of frustration. In 2011 Katrak still described belonging to contemporary Indian dance with 'the desire to retain and

[143] Chakravorty 2000: 111-112.
[144] Chakravorty 2006: 126.
[145] Reed 1998: 511.
[146] Sahai 2017: 105.
[147] Coorlawala 2016: 145.
[148] Royo 2003: 8.

communicate Indianness through movement as in use of *mudras*, costumes, music, and Indian art aesthetics.'[149] But not all contemporary dancers in India feel the need to convey 'Indianness.' In the words of one of my contemporary informants:

> I know choreographers who draw a lot of inspiration of 'classical' dance, and there are others who focus on deconstructing it. There are many choreographers who use the concepts as they are, they are still unfolding new ways of storytelling, and sometimes they do the same stories, there is just a new way of unfolding them. […] But we cannot forget it is *contemporary* dance. On the one hand, we cannot forget the wisdom that we have, I would not say we have to start new. I always go back to what I have learnt, but I also cannot get stuck there. That is when the whole 'not rejecting of forms' comes. We just have to say: it is there. I do not have to be *slave* to that and I also do not have to reject it. I do not have to redefine it, because who am I to redefine it? There are many people saying 'we are reconstructing it, we are redefining it, we are deconstructing it.' But let us be honest, it has already been reconstructed and deconstructed a thousand times. It becomes 'every teacher has their own perspective,' but at the same time they want everything to be the same. They want dance to be universal, but they want it to be Indian. There is a whole lot of paradoxes.[150]

As with the 'woman's question,' 'the question of the contemporary dancer' is defined by paradox, referred to by the famous contemporary dancer Chandralekha as 'In-Betweenness,' by Royo (2002) as 'the dancer being a trapped victim,' and by Purkayastha (2012) in the article on Uday Shankar as 'the floating artist' or 'the native other.' Indian dancers today, be it 'classical' or contemporary, are stuck in between the 'classical' paradigm as it was composed by postcolonial nationalist discourse, and 'views of modernization.' This 'In-Betweenness' is defined by a struggle for identity, of finding a place of belonging. There seems to be an either-or choice between remaining Indian and embracing notions from outside of India. This dilemma has been present from in the early periods of modern arts in India. Dancers such as Uday Shankar for example 'collaborated with' as well as 'resisted to' Indian nationalist contexts, and the struggle to find an identity continues until this day.[151]

What makes the situation even more difficult for contemporary dancers, is the exportation of the 'classical' dancer as a symbol abroad. The 'classical' Indian dancer was viewed to be a representative of 'Indianness' and therefore Indian culture. This symbol was presented as timeless and universal.[152] Indian 'classical' dance came to be validated as 'exotic' by a Western romanticization of the Orient.[153] Furthermore, it came to be expected inside as well as outside of India. Western dance and theater circuits internalized the idea that Indian 'classical' dance forms were authentically Indian.[154] In the West, it became a demand of Indians to address a dominant perspective of Indian dance, which is a common frustration among contemporary dancers today,

[149] Katrak 2011: 7.
[150] Contemporary dancer, 37, m., professional, formal interview, Gati Dance Forum, 16/02/2018.
[151] Purkayastha 2012: 80-84.
[152] Royo 2003: 2.
[153] Royo 2003: 4-5.
[154] Chakravorty 2000: 108.

who consider these notions to be borderline racism in the performing arts outside of India. Many contemporary dancers describe it to be discrimination when training or performing abroad. One of my respondents made the following statement:

> Problems [concerning discrimination of Indian dancers outside of India] lie in both the European perspective, and what the country decides to do. In Europe, they are all used to seeing a particular kind of work. And in India, it is the curators who decide what goes out, not the dancers. The curators decide what is going to bring in seats, what is going to make a festival successful. And the mentality among Europeans is usually something like this: when the audience sees a ballet company from China, choreographers say wow, they are trained in ballet. But when they see an Indian dancer all they can think of is that great beautiful piece they saw at Pina Bausch where a girl was doing *oḍisī*. Indian 'classical' dance is already in the pop culture, Michael Jackson for example had an *oḍisī* dancer in 'Black and White.' There is already a perception of an 'Indian' dancer in the minds of Western choreographers, and when they select Indian dancers for their pieces more often than not they expect this perception to be on stage. But I also worked with choreographers that treated me like a body, I am not generalizing, but the problem is there. What is also not helping is this whole UK scene which is happening, with good dancers such as Akram Khan, but based on the work they are showing there is this perception that is already built, this exoticism. They do *kathak*, they do *bharatanāṭyam*, but not all of us have to do it. I can get wisdom from swimming, I can get wisdom from climbing a mountain, I think this has not yet come into the picture when it comes to curators in India. Once they will start putting out work that goes beyond this kind of perceptions, it will become easier for the rest of us. The world beyond the 'classical' form is not yet happening, because we do not get curated. Do not get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with what they are showing. But if it is only that, it becomes harder for other people to grow.[155]

The state of 'In-Betweenness' is still a complex and sensitive issue in India today. There was an incident during one of my last interviews on the 14th of February at Bhoomika Creative Dance Centre, illustrating the sensitivity of the subject. It was an interview with a professional contemporary dancer aged in their late fifties, who thoroughly criticized the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*. According to this respondent *rasa* as theorized by the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* was outdated and not relevant anymore in today's society, and the contemporary dancer was actively backing up the premise with very harsh arguments in an attempt to deconstruct the elevated position of the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*. The dancer, for example, referred to the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* as the 'text of terror' and referred to the expectation of following its guidelines by dancers and the audience alike 'terrorism in performing arts.'[156] My fellow-fieldworker however, a recent graduate of drama studies in India, was very attached to the *rasa* theory as given by the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*. By my fellow-fieldworker it was considered to be the best and only way of viewing *rasa*.

As my informant criticized the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, I could feel my fellow-fieldworker getting uncomfortable, and after sometime my fellow-fieldworker could not refrain from intervening and starting a discussion with the respondent in defense of the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*. My fellow-fieldworker was

[155] Contemporary dancer, 37, m., professional, formal interview, Gati Dance Forum, 16/02/2018.
[156] Not all contemporary dancers reacted to the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* this strongly, most dancers took a more moderate position.

obviously upset, and it took me a couple of attempts to subtly steer the focus back to the informant. In my opinion this incident did not affect the interview overall, which still ended up being one of the most interesting conversations about *rasa* we had.

This also made me realize that the more people are present at the interview, the more difficult it is to control the situation, and the more alert you have to be whether an informant is influenced by external elements during the interview or not. This particular interview was held at the apartment of the respondent in question, and coincidentally there was a guest present, a fine arts curator from Calcutta (who as later turned out had quite a flair for the dramatic). My respondent had kindly requested the guest to rest in the bedroom, but it did not take long before the fine arts curator came back out and joined in on the conversation. Even though as a fine arts expert the curator also had an interesting opinion on *rasa*, at some points the curator actively influenced the answers of my respondent. This mostly occurred during the final question of the interview, when I asked my informant whether, since they seemed very much aggravated by the politics surrounding *rasa*, it was the dancer's goal to completely abolish *rasa* in dance practice and repertoire or not. My informant started out the answer with a clear 'no,' explaining that in their personal opinion *rasa* should be present as a part of India's cultural heritage, but should not be actively present 'in the head' of the performers and the audience. It was explained to me that the dancer did not want to abolish it completely, but that the theory of *rasa* as it was written in the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* simply did not fit into a modern context. While my respondent was still trying to further elaborate on the answer, the fine arts curator cried out quite loudly 'Excuse me? I am absolutely shocked! How can you allow such an outdated theory to still be present in your work? I must say I am quite disappointed.' After giving the comment some thought, my respondent changed the answer saying that the presence of *rasa* was not allowed in the repertoire the built and that it could be stated that *rasa* was completely rejected, to which the curator gave some affirming comments and nods. Even though this interview was interesting in its own way, during a conversation like this awareness for external influence on the respondent is extremely important.

It is also interesting how after having rather harshly criticized the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, my informant still was not inclined to state that it should completely be rejected. To me, this illustrates the sensitivity of the subject, the attachment to India's supposed cultural heritage, as well as the state of 'In-Betweenness.'

In *Writing out Otherness*, Coorlawala states that nowadays an artist is left with mostly two choices: confronting or conforming.[157] The idea that a dancer needs to be either-or is still very present in today's society. The 'identity question' of dancers in contemporary India is still at an early stage. To many dancers it is rather difficult to decide which identity to express: the individual self? The

[157] Coorlawala 2016: 146.

national self? Or, something else completely.[158] Many dancers are still working on how to negotiate the expected 'Indianness' as well as Western influences.

[158] Coorlawala 2016: 150.

4. An anthropology of 'aesthetic emotions:' contextualizing *rasa* within cross-cultural views on emotion

In this fourth and final chapter, I will explore how among many 'classical,' as well as contemporary dancers, the concept of *rasa* was associated with universality and omnipresence, and how *rasa* was often perceived as 'emotion.' Before my first formal interview with a *chhau* teacher at Triveni Kala Sangam, upon setting the appointment for our interview, it was stated that: 'Before our meeting tomorrow, let me already make one thing very clear: *rasa* exists in everything. In the dancers, the audience, the costumes, even this classroom. *Rasa* is universal, and it is present everywhere.'

This perception of *rasa* as omnipresent as well as universal returned in almost every single interview that followed. As anthropologist Margaret Lock stated: 'We must remain inherently suspicious of universal truths, entrenched power bases, and intransigent relativisms.'[159] Universality claims, however, remain common within cross-cultural anthropology until this day. Studying dance and emotion addresses many problematic concepts that are often taken for granted and applied universally, starting with 'dance' and 'emotion' themselves, but also 'culture,' 'the body,' 'space,' and 'the senses.' To illustrate how often concepts are taken for granted and how cross-cultural use should be approached with caution, I will be challenging these concepts and their use in cross-cultural research.

In this chapter I will firstly elaborate on the perception of *rasa* as universal and omnipresent by my informants, and how *rasa* came to be equated to 'emotion' by many of them. After that, I will continue to provide the reader with a theoretical framework of universality claims and emotion studies from an anthropological perspective, and how *rasa* was incorporated in many anthropological overviews of emotion studies. I will also discuss how the incorporation of *rasa* in overviews of emotion studies generated misconceptions, as *rasa* does not equal 'emotion,' being part of a larger aesthetic system. Then, I will finish by proposing an alternate approach of *rasa* within the framework of emotion studies.

4.1 Describing universality claims from my fieldwork

As I briefly showed when discussing my methodology, many 'classical' dancers referred to *rasa* as 'universal' and 'omnipresent,' and as I also noted, here contradictions and confusion seemed to arise. *Rasa* was by most dancers considered to be present in all dance forms, also non-Indian ones, and in all arts in general, including fine arts, poetry, music and so on. *Rasa* was also considered to be universally understandable, something which comes naturally to anybody, and often equated to 'emotion.' Among contemporary dancers this was more contested. One of my contemporary informants from Bhoomika Creative Dance Centre even attributed this perception of *rasa* as universal and omnipresent to ethnocentricity and nationalism.

[159] Lock 1993: 134 in Grau 2011: 18.

The equation of *rasa* to emotion is strange, as at the beginning of most interviews, when dancers were questioned about *rasa* in general, many dancers referred to *rasa* as something which is difficult to explain. Most dancers seemed to recognize the philosophical complexity of the concept, and many dancers admitted to having difficulties in giving a general image of how they viewed *rasa*. Most dancers also considered it necessary to give some context about Hindu mythology and performance methods before a show. Almost all dancers considered this to be important for the audience to properly understand the performance, definitely outside of India as people abroad mostly do not have any knowledge of Hindu mythology whatsoever. But some dancers also considered it necessary to give context inside of India, for example when performing for younger children.

This was in contrast with their views on the experience of the audience, mainly that *rasa* could be understood by an 'inexperienced' audience (without any knowledge of *rasa* theory), within as well as outside of India. Generally, it was considered unnecessary to know about the concept of *rasa* (when before it was stated that context needed to be given) to experience it. Understanding was perceived to come natural to the audience inside as well as outside of India, where usually an equation to emotion was made, 'as emotion may be universally understood across the globe, because everybody feels, and emotions are the same everywhere.' Some dancers even stated that expressing *rasa* comes naturally to dancers during their training, emphasizing the importance of practice over theory.

Dancers would often give many examples of how their work was generally understood outside of India. One *kathak* dancer for example mentioned two occasions, one in France and one in Irak, where the dancer was happily surprised by the deep understanding of the audience:

> One time I performed in Avignon, and most of the poetry was recited in Hindi. There was a translation projected onto a screen, but the music was also completely in Hindi, and the mannerisms were entirely Indian. It was my idea to depict the theory of evolution, because in the Indian perception it is a little bit different from the European one. I wanted to depict the ancient concepts of *manu* / *puruṣ* and *prākṛti*. I brought a performance based on these concepts, how *puruṣ* and *prākṛti* first met, how water was the first entity, and how everything came from the water, after which comes the earth and the mountains, then the whole nature like grass and flowers, and so on. After my performance a French member of the audience came to me and pointed out that it was such a beautiful presentation of the evolution of mankind. I was really pleasantly surprised that this audience member could understand, because in France most of the times we gave context but it hardly ever happened that people completely understood our work. But this specific member of the audience could, because the audience member was describing all the details that I was dancing. Sometimes you do not need language to understand. The performance was actually not meant for a French audience. We did it just because we wanted to, and we had decided not to change anything.[160]

[160] *Kathak* dancer, 55, f., professional, formal interview, Kathak Kendra, 23/01/2018.

The *kathak* dancer continues on their experience in Irak:

> Similarly, I was performing for a celebration for the fiftieth year of independence of India in Irak. I was discussing this performance with the investors, and my investor told me: 'look, the whole audience is going to be completely Islamic. Maybe they will not appreciate it.' I replied: 'perhaps, but let me do as I want. Let me go on stage, and in the moment I will be able to tell whether I can go on with the performance or not.' I can tell, because dancers can feel the vibrations of the audience. If you can feel the vibrations, you can stop at any moment.[161] So I started the way I wanted, and to my wonderful shock and surprise, I finished my performance. When I came out, there was a local TV crew waiting for me, asking me whether I had ever been to Babylonia, as my performance for Śiva was very similar to the depictions of icons in Babylonia. That evening at the reception party I told the investors that the way we thought my work would be perceived was very different from the way the audience actually perceived my work. This incident confirmed my perception that you do not have to change your repertoire according to your audience. The sensitivities, all the basic emotions, the *navarasas*, they are all the same and universal. Love is love, fear is fear, astonishment is astonishment,… The love between mother and child, being at peace… After this I thought I will not change my performance ever again, never.[162]

I was told countless other stories similar to these two. Within the setting of the interviews, *rasa* was initially always referred to as complex, which throughout the conversation somehow evolved into *rasa* being universally understandable and omnipresent. But also outside of interviews and focused questioning, within the setting of a dance class for example, *rasa* was referred to as universal and omnipresent. The question arises where this particular perception and these contradictions come from. I took a couple of options under consideration. First of all, contradictions may arise from the tension between theory and practice. Influenced by Hindu nationalist discourse, great importance may be attributed to theoretical treatises, when most dancers feel they derive their knowledge mainly from practice. While attempting to retain their authority as 'classically trained' dancers, they may try to create a synthesis between the 'highly esteemed' theory and their own experience, resulting in contradictions. Secondly, because of the many commentaries and different views on *rasa* that arose since the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, dancers may possibly apply multiple definitions. A dancer may pick up on contradictory information when training under different gurus or reading multiple texts on *rasa*. As multiple gurus and texts could be considered equally authoritative, dancers may try to combine contradictory statements into a 'one size fits all' theory.

Then, where does the perception of *rasa* as universal and omnipresent come from? First of all, there may still be some influence left of Upaniṣadic philosophy. As I mentioned in my first chapter when discussing the etymology of *rasa*, under the influence of Upaniṣadic philosophy *rasa* came to mean 'essence, essence of everything, essence of the universe.' Only later in the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* this

[161] In India, *kathak* dancers are described to interact with their audience and work off of the reactions of the audience. Other dance forms, such as *bharatanātyam* or *oḍisī*, are usually danced from a more 'internalized' perspective. They describe their dance to be mainly for themselves or for a god.

[162] *Kathak* dancer, 55, f., professional, formal interview, Kathak Kendra, 23/01/2018.

evolved into 'essence of drama,' but the idea that *rasa* is the 'essence of everything' may still have partially survived, making *rasa* to be perceived as omnipresent. Furthermore, attributing the perception of *rasa* as universal and omnipresent to ethnocentricity and nationalism, as one of my contemporary respondents did, may sound like an attractive solution. But personally I think this perception is more closely linked to the equation of *rasa* to emotion. It seems like dancers tend to project their own personal experiences and emotions onto their audience. This phenomenon is not specific to 'classical' dancers, or to India for that matter. Dancers and other artists often perceive their work to be understood cross-culturally, without the audience having to understand the individual dance tradition in terms of the cultural background.[163] But if the equation of *rasa* to emotion is what makes them to be perceived as universal, this begs the question whether emotions are universal in the first place. To further explore the equation of *rasa* to emotion, I will start off by introducing the anthropological approach of dance and emotion studies, where universality claims are a highly contested subject. After that, I will continue to argue why I consider *rasa* to not completely fit within emotion studies, even though over the years many anthropologists have taken a great interest in *rasa* and incorporated it within research on emotion.

4.2 Theoretical framework of universality claims and emotions in cross-cultural anthropology

4.2.1 Deconstructing universality claims: an overview of commonly used terminology when analyzing dance

Within dance and emotion studies, the meaning of many concepts is often taken for granted and applied cross-culturally, when in reality they are usually not universally applicable. The aim of this section is to question everyday words and concepts, and re-examine the modern imaginings of these concepts. Through this re-examination I hope to demonstrate how categories which were formed in the West are social constructs, historical products, arbitrary, conventional, fluid and variable.[164] Many concepts lack the elaboration which is necessary to avoid ethnocentrism.[165]

The first concept I will take under examination is 'culture.' When Raymond Williams, a scholar in cultural studies, referred to culture as one of the most complicated words in English language, an important debate was sparked that lead to some researchers viewing the entire concept to be intellectually null and void. As Theresa Buckland wrote, culture is a 'dangerously unfocused term that nonetheless remains attractive to dance scholars, many of whom may use it, unaware of its debated status within anthropology.'[166] Similarly, many other 'unfocused' terms are commonly used, such as 'dance,' 'the body,' 'space,' and 'the senses.' These English terms carry preconceptions that are of a typically Western nature and in some cases are highly Christianized as

[163] Kaeppler 1978: 47.
[164] Grau 2007: 198.
[165] Reddy 1999: 262.
[166] Buckland 1999: 4.

well, such as our conception of 'the body.'[167] As Grau wrote in 2011: 'all corporealities and spatialities are socially and culturally mediated. The way people perceive, speak off or conceptualize corporeality, spatiality and sensibility are not identical.'[168] Meaning is often derived from 'the frameworks of interpretation which we bring to them.'[169]

4.2.1.1 The body

The way in which people conceptualize their body, influences their perception of daily life.[170] A thorough contextualization of the concept 'body' is therefore important for dance studies. According to Mary Douglas, the 'social body' affects the way the 'physical body' is perceived. The physical body, in turn, conditions the way society is viewed. Therefore, it is important to analyze the manner in which the body is handled by people of a certain society, such as in dance for example, as well as the attitudes people have about their bodies, because this aids in understanding the society.[171]

The typical Western understanding of the body is derived from the mind-body split as proposed in the philosophy of Descartes, where later on it was understood that the mind is superior to the body.[172] The Cartesian mind-body split influenced language and theoretical categories, providing scholars with difficulties in finding fitting terminology when analyzing movement.[173] To analyze how a certain society conceptualizes the body, a researcher can consider three important categories of study: how a society divides the body parts, bodily metaphors, and medical anthropology. An example of how the division of body parts is culturally specific can be found in the work of Edwin Ardener, a British social anthropologist, who wrote in 1971 about how in some languages 'the hand' may refer to what is in between finger tips and wrist, while in others it may refer to everything from fingertips to elbow.[174] The *Nāṭya-Śāstra* divides or even 'fragments' the body into *angas* and *upāngas*, major and minor limbs, for the constructions of correct *kāraṇas* or dance positions.[175]

Metaphors are also an interesting method to research conceptualization of the body, as bodily metaphors diverge according to stigmas and scientific or popular beliefs. Many cultures locate abstract feelings in certain body parts. In English mostly the heart is viewed as the seat of the feelings, whereas in many Asian languages, such as Chinese, this is the liver. Lastly, medical anthropology is a valuable source of information when it comes to researching how a society

[167] Grau 2011: 5.
[168] Grau 2011: 5.
[169] Stuart Hall 1997:3 in Grau 2011: 6.
[170] Grau 2011: 6.
[171] Youngerman 1975: 125.
[172] Grau 2011: 7.
[173] Reed 1998: 520.
[174] Grau 2011: 6.
[175] Royo 2003: 9.

conceptualizes the body, as it shows how beliefs about body, health and illness differ a lot. There is a great deal of intra-cultural as well as cross-cultural variation. In the work of Shigehisa Kuriyama, for example, it is shown that the human body in classical Greek medicine primarily focuses on anatomy and muscle, where in ancient China there was mainly a focus on sensory aspects.[176] Ayurveda in India seems to primarily focus on bodily fluids, and how disruption of a proper flow and interaction of these fluids may cause disease.

4.2.1.2 Space

In dance studies, when interpreting movement, it is of crucial importance to be aware of cultural conceptions of space. Space is not simply the background of the dancer, often it provides fundamental orientation and meaning.[177] In the Western perspective, the understanding of the body in space is derived from Kantian philosophy. The Western conceptualization of space is mainly anthropocentric.[178] As with 'the body,' there are many cultural variations in the way space is conceptualized. This may be illustrated by the following quote from research by Brenda Farnell:

> When working on the transcription of a particular story that contained many pointing gestures that seemed ambiguous, […] I asked 'When you make that sign, do you think of your hand as moving away from your chest, or is it going towards the front, or towards something?' The reply was a slow, patient, 'No… it's going east'.[179]

There are many ways to refer to the space surrounding us, but most people tend to favor one over the others. First of all, there is the division in 'egocentric, or anthropomorphic' and 'allocentric, geocentric, or 'topocentric.' Egocentric or anthropomorphic means referring to objects or people in relation to the viewer's body. An allocentric, geocentric or topocentric perspective refers to space in relation to the environment.[180] Suppose my dance teacher would tell me to turn to my right, then she or he would be referring to space from an egocentric or anthropomorphic perspective. My own body will be my point of reference. If she or he would tell me to walk downstage, however, then the reference would be allocentric, geocentric or topocentric, as I will have to orient myself according to the space around me. Besides that, there is also a division in intrinsic, absolute and relative. Intrinsic means referring to space towards an object and its intrinsic frame, e.g.: the front, back or sides of the object. Telling a person to walk towards the front of a chair would be an intrinsic reference. An absolute reference to space would be 'birds are flying south for the winter.' A relative view is viewer-centered, meaning the viewer's front, back or sides. A relative reference would be

[176] Grau 2011: 6.
[177] Reed 1998: 523.
[178] Grau 2011: 5-6.
[179] Farnell 1999: 154-155 in Grau 2011: 13
[180] Grau 2011: 14.

'my dance partner is jumping towards me.' In the West people mostly refer to space from an egocentric and anthropomorphic perspective.[181]

4.2.1.3 The senses

Anthony Seeger wrote that 'it is important to analyze how people think they perceive.'[182] A common problem in anthropological research of emotion is that there is a great difference in perceptions of emotion, individually as well as culturally. Being aware of the individual and cultural differences in ways how emotion may be 'sensed' or perceived helps in properly contextualizing accounts on emotion. But also in cross-cultural dance studies it is important to consider sensory perspectives. As Grau argues, our understanding of space largely depends on our sensual engagement with it, making the senses important to understand how we conceptualize entities such as space and dance.[183]

The five senses as we know them, taste, smell, touch, sight and sound, are an ethnocentric construct.[184] These five senses are derived from the philosophy of Aristotle. In the Aristotelian model of the five senses, there is a strong emphasis on vision being the most important sensory input. In this model there is also a linking of each sense to a specific bodily organ. The way in which Aristotle equates 'seeing' to 'understanding' has formed our conceptualization of the senses. This emphasis on 'seeing' as the way to 'understanding' is intertwined with our language, for example in sayings such as 'seeing is perceiving,' or in the concept 'worldview,' where actuality is transformed into something that can be pictured. Other examples are 'point of view,' or a person's 'vision' for the future, the list goes on. This preference to vision, and the linking of each sense to a bodily organ, are not universal.[185] The Hopi of Arizona, for example, who were studied by Constance Classen and Benjamin Lee Whorf, referred to sensations as vibration, which they considered to be their main sensory input. Their vocabulary was consequently rich in terminology to refer to 'vibrations.' Classen also studied the Desana of Columbia, who put great emphasis on sensory input through color.[186]

[181] Grau 2011: 14.
[182] 1981:80 in Grau 2011: 9.
[183] Grau 2011: 8.
[184] Grau 2011: 6.
[185] Grau 2011: 8.
[186] Grau 2011: 8.

4.2.1.4 Dance

Dance as a concept, like 'body,' 'space,' and 'the senses,' is also not universally applicable. It is a Western term and concept that is a complex and socially rooted practice. Dance practice involves many mechanisms, such as psychology, kinetics, and even linguistics. Dances are the product of action, interaction and reaction, and often part of a larger activity system.[187]

During the 'butterfly collectors stage' of anthropology, multiple expeditions from the European continent collected 'art objects' from other cultures, to bring back home and place them in cabinets of curiosities, which later grew into museums. Labeling these objects as 'art,' however, is rather questionable. Objects could vary from decorative spoons to religious statues, and were often not considered 'art' in their country of origin. Objects were removed from their original contexts. For example, totem poles were seized from sacred positions in nature, only to end up in museums labeled as 'primitive art objects.' Similarly, there was a tendency to separate movement and music from other forms of human behavior and label them 'dance,' when in reality these forms might have not been considered 'dance' to local peoples. These forms of movement might have not even been considered to be a cultural category, comparable to what from a Western perspective is referred to as 'dance.' Social as well as religious rituals, similarly to our understanding of 'dance,' also manipulate the human body in time and space. It is thus important to remain critical of whether movement practices that are being referred to, are truly comparable to 'dance' in the Western sense of the word.[188] Over the years, the concept of 'dance' has grown to be very broad, and the question arises whether all forms placed under this umbrella term are comparable. Are 'dances of participation,' such as salsa or jive, truly comparable to 'dances of presentation,' such as classical ballet? May a performance for gods be compared to a performance for people?[189] In each category there is a use of the body that seems like dance to a Western audience, but might not be perceived as 'dance' by the people performing.[190] Adrienne Kaeppler, for example, studied the classification of Japanese movement practices that are being referred to as dance. There are three different 'cultural forms' of Japan that are in English described as dance: *mikagura* performed in Shinto shrines, *buyo* that occurs either within or separated from Kabuki drama, and *bon* to honor the dead. Anthropologically speaking, there is very little reason to class these three forms together as 'dance forms,' as they do not belong to the same category of activity. *Mikagura* is a ritual performed in the formal setting of Shinto shrines, *buyo* is a practice which is derived from drama, and *bon* is often performed as a group activity during festivals.[191]

[187] Grau 2011: 5; Kaeppler 2000: 117.
[188] Kaeppler 1978: 46.
[189] Kaeppler 1978: 46.
[190] Kaeppler 1978: 46.
[191] Kaeppler 1978: 46-47.

Similar to Kaeppler's example of Japanese movement practices and the categorization of these activities as 'dance,' I would argue that language is of importance to understand how movement practices were viewed in India before they were categorized and all placed under the umbrella term 'dance.' All words used to refer to dance (*nṛtya*, *nṛtta*, *nāṭa*, etc.) are derived from the same verbal root *nṛt.*, for which the Sanskrit dictionary Monier Williams gives the translation of 'to act on the stage, represent.' In the same line, *nṛtya* means 'dancing, acting, gesticulation or pantomime,' *nṛtta* means 'dancing, acting, gesticulation,' *nāṭya* means 'dancing, mimic representation, dramatic art' as well as 'the costume of an actor,' *nāṭa* means 'dancing, acting, or a dance,' *naṭana* means 'dancing, dance, pantomime,' and *nāṭaka* means 'acting, dancing, an actor, dancer, mime, any show or representation, any play or drama.'

Even though many words that are derived from the verbal root *nṛt*. are commonly used to refer to dance (for example, influenced by the *Abhinaya Darpaṇa nṛtta* is used to refer to 'pure, abstract dance' and *nṛtya* is used to refer to 'expressive dance'), according to the dictionary they may also be translated as 'drama' or 'acting.' Where according to Western categorization of performing arts 'dance' and 'theater' are separate categories, this illustrates how in India they belong mainly in the same category. This makes it questionable whether the term 'dance' is still an appropriate way of referring to these forms, as it may be a reduction or a shift in meaning of how these forms are perceived in India.

It would also be interesting to further explore the etymology and history of the various 'dance forms' in India, to get a better understanding of the contexts in which they were practiced. Where the newly constructed term *bharatanāṭyam* is derived from the Sanskrit root *nṛt*. and thus subscribes to the idea that this movement system may be referred to as 'dance,' its previous name *sadir* does not. It may thus be stated that *bharatanāṭyam* is a 'dance of presentation' constructed in de 1930s inspired by the practices of the *devadāsi* communities.

As Kaeppler mentioned in an article on the anthropology of dance, it is almost impossible to define dance as something apart from other movement practices that manipulate the body in time and space. Therefore, it is important to keep the context of movement practices in mind, for example whether it is participatory or presentational, danced for gods or people. And most importantly, 'dance' cannot be a universal concept if only native categories can define what 'dance' really means to a particular society.[192] Dissecting 'dance forms' and further categorizing them, for example into 'folk' and 'classical,' obstructs our understanding of practices that manipulate the body in time and space, and their functions in society. Problematic terminology such as 'folk,' 'ethnic dance,' 'ethnological dance,' 'theatrical dance,' 'commercial dance,' 'art dance' and so on should be

[192] Kaeppler 1978: 47.

avoided at all cost.[193] The Western perspective often transforms or even reduces creations of 'other cultures' into something which they are not, such as 'art.' These creations are subjected to Western concepts, categorization (such as 'folk' and 'classical'), structure, function and aesthetics, resulting in cultural forms worldwide being judged by Western norms and values until this day.[194] What dance means from a Western perspective may mask certain elements in properly analyzing movement practices.[195]

Manipulation of the body in time and space is very broad, and may refer to various activities and cultural forms that result from creative use of the body. The creative processes that manipulate human bodies in time and space can be further elaborated with music systems, textual traditions, and so on. Movement practices can be visual manifestations of social relations, results of elaborate aesthetic systems, and may assist in understanding cultural values and the deeper structure of a society.[196] Studying socially constructed movement practices, the activities that generate them, and how and by whom they are executed and judged can be of great assistance in understanding a society.[197]

4.2.2 Researching emotion: a matter of approach, concept definition, and none of the above

Hoping to have properly introduced the challenges that accompany universality claims, and why common concepts in dance studies should not be taken for granted, I will now move on to provide the reader with a theoretical background of emotion studies from an anthropological perspective.

When researching emotion, there are three main approaches. Firstly, there is the biological approach, often based on the evolutionary paradigm by Darwin. From a biological perspective, emotions may be considered to be panhuman. Secondly, there is the individual approach, where emotion is studied from an egocentric and biographical perspective. Psychological studies, for example, focus on the emotions of the individual. From this perspective emotions are idiosyncratic, and thus not universal. Lastly, there is the anthropological and sociological approaches, based on the notion that emotions are shaped by society. As in this perspective emotions are culturally specific, they can also not be considered universal. In theory, emotion is an indivisible entity: emotions are as much panhuman as they are idiosyncratic and culturally specific.[198] Biology, psychology and society equally influence experiences of emotions. In practice, however, it is impossible to equally take each element under consideration at all times. An extensive and 'complete' study on emotion is unrealistic, yet it is important to keep other perspectives in mind to avoid reductionism.

[193] Kaeppler 1978: 42.
[194] Kaeppler 1978: 33.
[195] Kaeppler 1978: 45.
[196] Kaeppler 2000: 117.
[197] Kaeppler 2000: 120.
[198] Beatty 2014: 25.

When trying to make sense out of the tensions, interactions and dynamics between the biological, psychological and anthropological / sociological studies of emotion, it is important to remember that emotions might be cultural constructions, but that they are certainly always individual experiences.[199] Referring to emotions as culturally specific may lead to an ethnographic overgeneralization. Although ethnographic generalizations are sometimes helpful in constructing a more thorough understanding of a certain society, they might generate prejudice as well. Just because there is a culturally specific way in which emotions are handled, does not mean that they generally apply to the individual. Cultural views on emotions do not always control the feelings of the individual.[200]

Furthermore, the idea of emotions being universal often goes hand in hand with the idea of there being a subset of universally applicable basic, primary or fundamental emotions.[201] In the biological perspective there is the idea that emotions are biologically primitive, and that there might be neurophysiological and anatomical substrates corresponding to these basic emotions.[202] In the psychological perspective, basic emotions are considered to be psychologically primitive, and they are often thought of as the primitive building blocks of other, non-basic emotions.[203] However, there is no coherent definition of these basic emotions, and there is very little agreement on how emotions can be considered basic, which ones would be basic, and why.[204] It needs to be noted that the idea of there being a subset of basic emotions is not held by all scholars, and rejected by some.[205]

Looking more closely at the individual approach of emotion, there are two sorts of particularity: egocentric, evolving around the consciousness, and biographical, evolving around lives and histories. Emotions are given personal relevance and intensity by individual history.[206] They carry past experience in them, and embody traces of a history that is commonly human (studied by developmental psychology) and socially structured (studied by anthropology).[207] The claim that emotions are partially formed by past experience is further supported by cognitive psychology and neuroscience:

> An emotion experience is a conceptual structure stored in memory whose conditions include current perceptions, cognitions, actions, and core affect. A specific emotion conceptualization (e.g., a context-specific conceptualization of anger) … reinstates how these conditions have been experienced in the past.[208]

[199] Beatty 2014: 14.
[200] Lutz/White 1986: 409.
[201] Turner 1990: 315.
[202] Turner 1990: 315-317.
[203] Turner 1990: 315-317.
[204] Turner 1990: 315.
[205] Turner 1990: 316.
[206] Beatty 2014: 14-5.
[207] Beatty 2014: 25.
[208] Barrett *et al.* 2007: 386 in Beatty 2014: 14.

The debate on the universality of emotions takes a turn away from particularity of emotion with the biological perspectives of the ethological and evolutionary approach. The core of these approaches is the evolutionary paradigm by Darwin, which is discussed in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. According to Darwin expression contributes to the chance of survival. Emotional expressions, particularly facial expressions, are seen as functioning primarily to signal the individuals intentions, informing others about likely future actions. Ekman internalized Darwin's views in the cross-cultural research program on emotion *Neurocultural*, viewing emotion as an essentially biological system. In this study facial expressions of emotion across cultures were included, as well as studies of patterns of facial muscle movement. It was concluded that some emotions have the same distinctive configuration of facial movements, these are: happiness, surprise, fear, anger, disgust and sadness, and maybe interest, shame and contempt. Ekman stated that culture only influences emotion through cultural display rules, which are the acquired conventions, norms and habits (e.g.: what can be shown to whom, and in which context).[209] Similar to Ekman, Tomkins re-explored Darwin in the field of psychology. Tomkins classified affects and identified basic states of excitement, such as enjoyment-joy, distress-anguish, anger-rage, interest-excitement, fear-terror, contempt-disgust, interest-excitement and shame-humiliation.[210]

The findings of Ekman were echoed in the work of Boucher, who researched the universality of emotional experience through language universals, employing methods such as word grouping research.[211] Boucher studied eight Asian, European and Pacific languages. The major semantic groupings in each language parallel the six emotions of Ekman. This study is, however, not yet replicated in other languages.[212] An important critique is that anthropologically speaking, words for emotion do not function solely or primarily as labels for internal feeling states or facial expressions.[213] What one person may consider 'being sad' may widely differ from what another person considers 'being sad,' yet the same emotion word can be used as a label for the internal feeling. Wierzbicka (1992) also states that from the perspective of the study of linguistic semantics of emotion terms, there is no basis for universal emotions.[214]

Not only the approach, but also concept definition may define whether emotions can be considered universal or not. As with many other concepts used in anthropology, it is important to keep in mind that conceptions of emotion are never free of value. In West, for example, there has been a tendency to view emotions solely as messages from a private place within the individual, but this is not

[209] Lutz/White 1986: 410-412.
[210] Ram 2011: 163.
[211] Lutz /White 1986: 415.
[212] Lutz/White 1986: 416.
[213] Lutz/White 1986: 417.
[214] Shweder/Haidt 2000: 402.

universal.[215] Its integrity as a concept may not be taken for granted, and neither can its cross-cultural applicability.[216] In many cases, conceptions of emotion are reinforced by ideologies and help legitimate political relations and inequality.[217] Furthermore, within the generalizing format of case study and ethnographic summary, the concept 'emotion' is rather difficult to capture.[218] Over the years many ways to define emotion have been formed: emotion as (internal) feeling state, a socially validated judgment, emotion as opposed to sentiment, affect or mood, the list goes on. Conception mainly depends on the approach. Within the search of a subset of basic emotions, many scholars attempted to theorize and conceptualize basic emotions as well, and the debate on how many basic emotions there are is reminiscent of the debate on how many *rasas* there are. But the problem remains that researchers cannot find a satisfactory definition of 'emotion' or 'basic emotion.'[219]

But even the most thorough methodology or elegant concept definition may fall short, as there are many problems with the standard tools of emotion research. First of all, a synthetic example or summary is not the same as real events, that is why the longer a researcher stays on location to gather actual experiences the better. Semi-structured interviews (e.g.: what does *rasa* mean to you?), word sorting tasks, or focus groups (e.g.: let us talk about *rasa*), are all just snapshots of reality. As with a picture, they give an idea of what reality looks like, but not completely. They are framed within a certain reality, or may even be edited.[220] There may also be a contrast between 'what people do or feel' and 'what they say or think they do or feel.' What informants think or say they do or feel may only be partially correct, a snapshot of their real life actions. This can lead to incomplete reports. Another common problem is the misrecognition of emotion. This does not only occur in cross-cultural research, it is also easy to misrecognize the emotions of people with the same background as the researcher.[221]

There are also a couple of shortcomings in my methodology of choice, the semi-structured interview, when it comes to emotion research. First of all, personal circumstances of the researcher may affect or even determine emotional experience and the course of relations between people. Secondly, an interview, however long it may take, is too short to properly embed emotions in interwoven lives.[222] On some occasions assumptions may be correct from first impressions, but most of the times they are not. In this way, reflexivity is an integral part of anthropological

[215] Reddy 1999: 258.
[216] Beatty 2014: 2.
[217] Desjarlais/Wilce 2003: 1179.
[218] Beatty 2014: 1.
[219] Turner 1990: 329.
[220] Beatty 2014: 4.
[221] Beatty 2014: 17-18.
[222] Beatty 2014: 15.

fieldwork.[223] A lot of times private experience is at the base of anthropological research, and this should be acknowledged to give a complete account of the findings. Grau states that 'the dynamics of the self in the field' therefore are important to examine as well, referring to them as 'the root of the collected data.'[224]

4.3 An anthropology of 'aesthetic emotions'

Over the years many anthropologists have shown interest in *rasa*, and incorporated it in their accounts of emotion research. A lot of anthropological works on *rasa*, however, often fall short because many researchers misunderstood the concept and did not thoroughly embed it within the aesthetic system it is part of, and subsequently continue to place it within a psychological or biological framework. Also within theories of subsets of basic emotions, *rasa* has played an important role in proving or refuting there being a subset of basic emotions.

Shweder and Haidt for example incorporated *rasa* theory in their work on cultural psychology. The goal of their work was to prove psychic unity and uniformity of emotions.[225] They considered the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* to be an ancient example of human emotions, and they stated that the text gives an account of basic emotions favorably comparable to the approach of cognitive psychology.[226] In their opinion, the 'strategy' employed in the *Rasādhyāya*, the chapter of the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* devoted to *rasa*, parallels the contemporary approach of cultural psychology.[227] They also viewed *bhāvas* to be basic emotions and *rasas* to be meta-emotions, subscribing to the common notion that performance in India lifts individuals out of particular, idiosyncratic emotions into a realm of generalized, spiritually significant emotions.[228] They also referred to the *Rasādhyāya* as a canonical Sanskrit text on emotions. They move on to state that in Sanskrit drama, the primary aim of aesthetic experience was psychological.[229]

In both the work of Shweder and Haidt, and the work of Richard Schechner, *rasa* theory is compared to *Neurocultural* by Ekman. Shweder and Haidt take a more moderate stand, claiming to find overlap between the list given in the *Rasādhyāya* and the list given in *Neurocultural* on three points.[230] Schechner, however, presents a series of photographs of facial expressions that are in the researcher's opinion 'iconic of the nine *rasas*,' and poses direct analogies between six of the photographs and the six facial expressions of Ekman's scheme, and then continues to claim the pattern to be universal.[231] By placing *rasa* either within the framework of cultural psychology, or

[223] Grau 2007: 3.
[224] Grau 2007: 2.
[225] Shweder/Haidt 2000: 398.
[226] Shweder/Haidt 2000: 399.
[227] Shweder/Haidt 2000: 405.
[228] Reddy 1999: 261.
[229] Shweder/Haidt 2000: 399.
[230] Shweder/Haidt 2000: 403.
[231] Shweder/Haidt 2000: 401.

within the biological approach employed in *Neurocultural*, the misconception that *rasa* theory is universal is being enforced.

Furthermore, determining such a subset of basic emotions which are universal is in my opinion an unattainable goal. There are too many challenges that cannot be overcome in emotion research to discover a universal line, such as conception, labeling of internal feeling states which cannot empirically be compared, and translation of words for emotion. For now it will have to suffice to say that all human beings feel. What we feel, and understanding what others feel, can only be understood from projecting our own personal experiences onto others. It remains impossible to determine whether when I say that I am feeling sad, or when somebody else says they are feeling sad, that we are actually talking about the same thing. In my opinion, research should not be focused as much on determining whether emotions are universal or not, but rather on our capability of empathy. Researchers, as well as people in general, routinely depend on empathy without acknowledging it.[232] The focus on determining a universal subset of basic emotions leads anthropology to a constructionist dead end.[233] Empathy, I would argue, is the whole reason why we perceive emotions to be universal in the first place. And besides, searching for a basic subset of emotions which is universal and where all other emotions are derived from, is largely evolutionist. The attempt to find a clear linear explanation, or clear categories that apply to everything, is comparable to the notion that there is a basic subset of people, to which all other people trace back, in order to explain human diversity in its totality.[234] But we can all agree that development of human history is not linear. The same conclusion in the study of emotions is yet to be made.[235]

Other misconceptions arose from placing *rasa* completely within the context of *bhakti*. As I have shown in my introduction on *rasa*, this is only partially correct, as *rasa* was only appropriated by the *bhakti* movement in the late 1500s. As there is also a tendency to refer to *bhakti* as something which is 'religious' in the Christian sense of the word, *rasa* is here being placed within a religious context. In Desjarlais and Wilce (2003) for example, 'emotion in South Asia' is described to have a moral connotation because of the lack of the mind-body separation, which a Western perception of the body is based on. Subsequently, they place *rasa* completely within the context of *bhakti*. Besides *rasa* being framed within the context of *bhakti*, the region 'South Asia' is too large a place to make an ethnographical generalization. *Rasa* and *bhakti* are mainly Indian, and do not apply completely for example to Sri Lanka, even though there may be a lot of influence and exchange

[232] Reddy 1999: 262.
[233] Reddy 1999: 262.
[234] Turner 1990: 329.
[235] Turner 1990: 329.

between India and Sri Lanka. They further quote Gerow saying that 'Art is Religion' for many people in South Asia.[236] From this they conclude:

> The close links between dramatic performance, emotional experience, and divine sentiments in these and other performance, illustrate what scholars have often noted: that there is no strict divide, as there reputedly is in the modern West, between aesthetic and religious practices.[237]

Equating 'modern' to 'West' is rather problematic. They also create a dichotomy between 'East' and 'West,' focusing on the secularism of art in 'modern' Western society and the mixture of aesthetic and 'religious practices' in South Asia. These views are still largely based on orientalist discourse.

Misconceptions continue to arise to this day, such as for example that *rasa* theory patterns how people in India feel.[238] This conception is echoed in the work of Stroeken:

> Emotion [in India] is not related to the 'uncontrollable biological compulsion' and the 'animal world and instincts' that it supposedly is in Western psychology, but to public performance and theater.[239]

What many researchers seem to misunderstand is that *rasa* is neither solely religious, nor a daily life emotion, and that 'conceptions of emotion in India' do not equate to '*rasa* theory.' *Rasas* are aesthetic emotions. They are always highly stylized, essentialized, aestheticized and may even be beautified as well. Emotions are always being manipulated during performance. *Rasa* thus only exists within the controlled setting of the stage. In the terminology of Abhinavagupta: aesthetic emotions may be viewed as an essence of daily life emotions, but they are not the same. People in daily life do not act according to the *rasa* theory. This confusion is illustrated by a comparison Appudarai makes in 1990 between beggars and actors, stating that much like actors on a 'classical' stage, to create an emotional bond and communal understanding beggars use gesture and utterance.[240] It is, however, the other way around. Actors and dancers on stage recreate daily life gesturing. On stage these gestures are stylized and beautified. It is the same for *rasa* theory, which stylizes and beautifies daily life emotions.

Until this day, there has not been much separate research on 'aesthetic emotions,' as they were always embedded within general research on emotion. But aesthetic emotions cannot be equated to emotions in general. *Rasa* in this way is also definitely not universal. Being part of an Indian aesthetic theory, *rasa* carries within cultural preconceptions that are specific to Indian society. The mannerisms in which these emotions are portrayed, definitely differ from how they may be portrayed in for example Belgian theater. Where in Belgium it is socially acceptable to portray love with an intimate onstage kiss, in India this is definitely out of the question. Upon closer research,

[236] Gerow 1974: 143 in Desjarlais/Wilce 2003: 1194
[237] Desjarlais/Wilce 2003: 1194.
[238] Desjarlais/Wilce 2003: 1192.
[239] Stroeken 2013: 127.
[240] Desjarlais/Wilce 2003: 1193.

one will find that physical expression of intimacy between lovers in India is not socially acceptable in the public sphere, whereas in Belgium it is (up to a certain point) not very problematic. Similarly, when onstage lovers are not allowed to portray their emotion with a kiss, and portray their love in the controlled environment of the stage with *mudras*, glances and facial expressions, this does not mean that lovers in India never kiss in general. Or only court each other by using *mudras*, glances, and facial expressions, for that matter. Emotions are always manipulated when performed for audiences.[241] They are a portrayal of what an emotion may be, but certainly not what the emotion always is in reality.

Studying *rasa* thus does not help in understanding conceptions of daily life emotions in India. But what *rasa* does embody, are the cultural display rules: the acquired conventions, norms and habits that determine what can be shown to whom, and in which context.[242] On stage, an 'ideal scenario' is being portrayed. The relationship between everyday emotions and onstage emotions may be continuous, but they are never identical. A portrayal of emotions on stage does not illustrate the actual experience of emotions.[243] *Rasa*, being an aesthetic emotion, can therefore be neither universally applicable, nor universally understood, as many of my informants perceive it to be, and does not equate daily life emotion.

As the equation of *rasa* to emotion was subtle and seemed like a logical course of thoughts within the conversations I had with dancers, I only noticed it to be a contradiction upon further analysis of the interviews when I was already back at home. I would suspect that when the statement that '*rasa* equates emotion' is posed back as a question to many of my informants, and that upon confrontation with the contradictions within the interviews, that many informants would negate *rasa* being the same as emotion. Many of my respondents emphasized the complexity of the subject, and recognized *rasa* to be part of a larger aesthetic system. The reason why many dancers somehow equated *rasa* to emotion throughout the interviews, thus remains a question mark in this dissertation, and would be an interesting topic for further research.

[241] Beatty 2014: 28.
[242] Lutz/White 1986: 410-412.
[243] Reed 1998: 524.

Conclusion

Rasa remains an elusive concept that is hard to define. Throughout history *rasa* has been the topic of many philosophical debates, starting from its appropriation by dramaturgy in the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*. The way *rasa* will be understood depends primarily on the perspective from which *rasa* is analyzed. When analyzed internally, *rasa* is a representation of human behavior. Characters on stage represent daily life emotions. Externally there is an emphasis on the reaction of the audience to these representations. The conception of *rasa* thus becomes a matter of perspective. Either *rasa* is a characteristic of the performance, a characteristic of the audience, or is confined in the exchange between the two.[244]

When researching the position of *rasa* among contemporary as well as 'classical' dancers in India today, and how *rasa* is most commonly conceptualized by these dancers, two observations stood out: that *rasa*, through its appropriation by postcolonial nationalism, became politically charged and thus attained a quite controversial position, and that *rasa* was almost unanimously perceived to be universal and omnipresent, where more often than not *rasa* was eventually equated to 'emotion.'

The appropriation of *rasa* by postcolonial nationalism when shaping a 'classical,' sanskritized 'high' culture and a Brahmanic Hindu identity, resulted in the concept attaining a controversial status among 'classical' and contemporary dancers in India today. This in turn had an enormous impact on the formation of identity of dancers. The construction of the 'classical' dancer into a national symbol created tensions between the aspirations of contemporary dancers and 'classical' dancers. They were expected to embody and represent 'Indian culture,' inside as well as outside of India. The identity politics of postcolonial nationalism also defined certain gender issues, as well as other problems such as discrimination of minority religions and lower castes, and racism inside and outside of India. Until this day, the idea of dance having to carry out a certain 'Indianness' is being negotiated with Western influences and notions on modernization, and dancers continue to question which identity they want to carry out through their work.

Finally, the perception of *rasa* as a universal and omnipresent concept most likely results from the projection of personal experiences and emotions of dancers onto their audience. This phenomenon is not specific to India, as many dancers and artists often perceive their work to be understood cross-culturally.[245] The reason why many dancers equate *rasa* to emotion, however, continues to remain a question mark. This particular misconception is enforced by anthropological research, as many anthropologists show the same tendencies to equate *rasa* to emotion, most likely because most anthropologists do not properly embed *rasa* within the aesthetic system it is part of. *Rasa* does not equal daily life emotion, and 'conceptions of emotion in India' cannot be described from *rasa*

[244] Pollock 2016: 25-26.
[245] Kaeppler 1978: 47.

theory. *Rasas* are aesthetic emotions, that are highly stylized and aestheticized. During onstage performances, emotions are always being manipulated. *Rasa* thus only exists within the controlled setting of the stage, and cannot be considered universal nor omnipresent. Aesthetic emotions do, however, give insight into cultural display rules, showing ideal scenarios of how emotions should be expressed.

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