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Cultural Heritage in Transition

Exploring the Challenges of Representing Classical Indian
Dances in Finland

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DEGREE THESIS	
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Abstract:
This thesis examines the challenges of representing and reproducing classical Indian dances in Finland. These key cultural heritage art forms of India are constantly going through a transition in time and space. This study aims to examine and identify factors that affect the authenticity of the dance. I search for answers that explains what happens, when the dances are taken out from their original context and spread globally. Authenticity, aura, representation, cultural appropriation, and the digitalization of the dance play an important role in the challenges professional dancers, both non-Indian and Indian, face in today's world. The history of classical Indian dances is presented together with prior knowledge about the development of the dance forms by Sharon Lowen. The theoretical part consists of Walter Benjamins' theory of aura of the arts and Stuart Halls' theory of representation. Multiple methods are used to conduct the research itself, including personal interviews with professional dance teachers and performers in semi-structured manner. In order to include a wider perspective, classical Indian dance students in Finland give their opinion in a qualitative and quantitative questionnaire.
The results show that there are multiple challenges in representing classical Indian dances and that it is almost impossible to achieve an ideal image of them in Finland. The conclusion is that a dancer must have knowledge, understanding and respect when working with classical Indian dances, that are still deeply rooted in Indian culture.

Keywords:	India, dance, cultural heritage, authenticity, aura, representation, appropriation, digitalization
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Sammandrag:

Detta examensarbete undersöker utmaningarna med att representera och reproducera klassiska indiska danser i Finland. Dessa viktiga kulturarvskonstformer från Indien går ständigt igenom förändringar. Denna studie undersöker och identifierar faktorer som påverkar dansens autenticitet. Jag söker efter svar som förklarar vad som händer när danserna tas ut ur sitt ursprungliga sammanhang och sprids globalt. Autenticitet, aura, representation, kulturell appropriering och digitalisering spelar viktiga roller i de utmaningar som professionella dansare, både icke-indiska och indiska, står inför idag. De klassiska indiska dansernas historia presenteras tillsammans med förkunskaper om dansformernas utveckling av Sharon Lowen. I den teoretiska delen används Walter Benjamins teori om konstens aura och Stuart Halls teori om representation. Flera metoder används för att genomföra denna forskning. Professionella danslärare och artister intervjuas i semistrukturerade intervjuer. För ett vidare perspektiv ger elever inom klassisk indisk dans i Finland sin åsikt i ett kvalitativt och kvantitativt frågeformulär.

Resultaten visar att det finns flera utmaningar med att representera klassiska indiska danser och att det är nästan omöjligt att få en idealbild av dem i Finland. Slutsatsen är att en dansare måste ha kunskap, förståelse och respekt när hen arbetar med klassiska indiska danser, som fortfarande är djupt rotade i den indiska kulturen.

Nyckelord:	Indien, dans, kulturarv, autenticitet, aura, representation, appropriering, digitalisering
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Tässä opinnäytetyössä tarkastellaan klassisten intialaisten tanssien edustamisen haasteita Suomessa. Nämä Intian keskeiset kulttuuriperinnön taidemuodot ovat jatkuvan muutoksen alla. Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on selvittää ja tunnistaa tanssin autenttisuuteen vaikuttavia tekijöitä. Etsin vastauksia, jotka selittävät, mitä tapahtuu, kun tanssit irrotetaan alkuperäisestä kontekstistaan ja levitetään maailmanlaajuisesti. Autenttisuus, aura, edustaminen, kulttuurinen ominen ja digitalisaatio ovat tärkeitä osia haasteissa, joita ammattitanssijat, sekä ei-intialaiset että intialaiset, kohtaavat nykyään. Klassisten intialaisten tanssien historia esitellään yhdessä Sharon Lowenin aiemman tiedon tanssien kehityksestä kanssa. Teoreettisen osan muodostaa Walter Benjaminin teoria taiteen aurasta ja Stuart Hallin teoria representaatiosta. Tämän tutkimuksen suorittamiseen käytetään useita menetelmiä. Ammattilaisia tanssinopettajia ja esiintyjiä haastatellaan henkilökohtaisesti puolistrukturoiduissa haastatteluissa. Laajemman näkökulman saamiseksi klassisen intialaisen tanssin oppilaat Suomessa antavat mielipiteensä kyselyssä.

Tulokset osoittavat, että klassisen intialaisen tanssin esittämisessä on monia haasteita ja, että niistä on lähes mahdotonta saavuttaa ihanteellista kuvaa Suomessa. Johtopäätös on, että tanssijalla tulee olla tietoa, ymmärrystä ja kunnioitusta työskennellessään klassisten intialaisten tanssien parissa, jotka ovat vielä syvästi juurtuneet intialaiseen kulttuuriin.

Avainsanat:	Intia, tanssi, kulttuuriperintö, autenttisuus, aura, edustaminen, kulttuurinen omiminen, digitalisaatio
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In the very beginning, before starting to write this thesis, I had three factors that was of a big importance to me while choosing the topic. First, the topic would have to be about dance. I have been working as a dance teacher and performer in Finland for almost 20 years now. During my studies in Arcada University of Applied Sciences, I did give other art forms in the creative industry a chance, but dancing was always so deeply rooted in my whole being, that I could not escape it. I also felt that it was kind of an obligation to leave my mark in Finland's dance scene and maybe, who knows, create a legacy. Secondly, I wanted the thesis to be something that I am proud to share to my colleagues and dance students. I would be honoured, if someone, as obsessively interested in ethnic dances and their origins as I am, would find use of my thesis. Therefore, my third goal was to make this thesis as beneficial as possible.

A cultural producer can find support in this thesis when working with multicultural projects. It is sustainable that producers understand the people who are engaged in the field of cultural industry. Everyone comes from different backgrounds, and I believe that no one should be judged because of assumptions, prejudice, and stereotypes. The research could also work as a tool for creating awareness and understanding about multiculturalism in for example schools.

In these three years my thoughts of the thesis have gone up and down and I have circled around the main topic multiple times. I want to thank John Grönvall, my Threshold Guardian, who believed in me and understood my need to choose this topic. He could relate to it and made me humble by saying that my special knowledge in the classical Indian dances was my strength. The topic is unique but also very up to date and important. I am eager to continue the endless research about the topic.

This study mirrors three main themes in dancing classical Indian dances: creating, maintaining, and destroying/rebuilding. This division, this Trinity, has also a deeper meaning and has a symbolic significance in the thesis. It is metaphorically linked to the ancient Hindu Mythology, where it is believed that the world exists because of three main Gods:

Brahma - the creator, Vishnu - the maintainer, and Shiva - the destroyer and recreator. All these qualities are valuable and needed. I personally think that art circulates through time in the same repeating, reincarnated pattern.

My relation to dance, music has changed during the process of writing this thesis. I do think differently about performing and teaching now. I am very proud that the Indian dance scene in Finland is so developed. The responsibility my colleagues take in the field is heart-warming.

Helsinki 3rd June 2022   Mikaela Jokinen

1 INTRODUCTION

After multiple hours of sweat and tears, stamping my feet on the hard concrete floor while learning classical Indian dances in New Delhi, I returned to Helsinki and continued working with my passion, what I love the most: to dance Indian dances. I had been breathing the essence of the real India, which was very different from the brochures I had wondered upon before making the decision to move abroad. The year 2017 changed me and my attitude towards my work as a performing artist in Finland.

As a born Finn, teaching ethnic dances as my daily profession, I struggle with multiple issues regarding teaching and performing these artforms. I have also noticed that my colleagues constantly ponder about the same topic. No matter how hard we try to do our best, we sometimes end up in situations where praise is not the only feedback we get. Even though we wear the same outfits, silky and shiny outfits, jingly bangles, forehead Tikas and black kohl eye liners, we know that we Finns are not born into this culture and its norms. Are we authentic enough? Is my interpretation of the classical Indian dances accurate enough? Sometimes we might be accused of stealing from a culture that is not ours to embrace, other times we might end up offending Indians while performing when we lack the proper knowledge about the culture and its traditions. Cultural appropriation[1] has become a major topic among many different ethnic dance forms. It can be unclear what kind of background is needed by the performer for them to be eligible and worthy of the honour involved, and what is expected when performing this type of ritualistic dance. Me and my colleagues know that we have a responsibility, as professional dancers, to present ancient, holy dances in a respectful way and gain appreciation from the Natives. I believe that most, if not all, of my colleagues have encountered a situation, where they have seen a performance where the dancer did not do justice to the art form. Many of us Finns have been requested, by the customers, to respect the traditions and colour our skin dark with makeup and wear a dark wig for a dance performance, to look more authentic. As a cultural producer, I have been in a situation where the audience felt that a particular performance, that I had chosen for a show was insulting them and their religious views. The examples are endless.

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[1] See section 3.5 for a discussion about the concept cultural appropriation

It is not only challenging for the Finnish artists to represent the dance styles in Finland. Likewise, Indians living in Finland are facing challenges in both teaching and performing the art form. Which places are suitable to perform in? Finland being a very different country than India, it can be hard to adapt the traditions to the stages here in the North, which creates a dilemma that has been one key question guiding my work. Are the classical Indian dances at all suitable to be presented in Finland?

What interests me the most has to do with the deep essence of the dance forms. What happens with the aura[2] and authenticity of classical Indian dances, when they are reproduced outside their original context, the Hindu temples in India? Are the dances losing their deeper meaning when the audience that understands the art form and the devotion is missing? Are we losing the connection to the sanctity of the dance forms by cutting more and more roots from the origin of the dance?

As we have seen above, there are many interesting questions that rise when discussing the Indian dances, and their authenticity when being performed in different contexts and under a variety of circumstances. Moreover, modern platforms now have made the secrets of the tradition accessible to anyone. With an increasingly digitalized society, dance is spreading rapidly to all different platforms. Like all art forms, classical Indian dances have been changing throughout the years and now, with the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers have been forced to stream their dance classes online. Classical Indian dances are forced to evolve and adapt to current times. Modern platforms give easy accessibility to the secrets of classical Indian dances through live video online meetings like Zoom etc. But I cannot help wondering, what will this new trend of digitalization of the dance forms do to the aura. This brings me to the key questions and aim of my work. What happens with the aura as discussed by Benjamin (1935)? Is the aura, the uniqueness of the dance, completely lost? More specifically, can we use his concepts and ideas to address the challenges involved with performing theses classical dances in a western country, such as Finland?

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[2] I use the concept of aura in line with Walter Benjamin, in his seminal work Art in the Age of Mechanical reproduction (1935). See section 3.3

1.1 Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the research is to investigate what authenticity of the dances mean to the dancer and which elements create a veritable experience in the professionals' eyes[3]. I want to understand which all factors should be thought of when creating an ideal classical Indian dance performance. This research also aims to explore the question whether Indian dances can be spread globally without borders. Can the dance be represented by any nationalities or does the art belong only to those who were born into Indian culture? Also, for the sake of my own profession, I am eager to explore if it is possible to be an excellent dancer by only learning the specific techniques and choreographies, instead of embracing the whole ideology behind them? Keeping these challenges in mind we see that it becomes motivated to study how multiculturalism is affecting the dance.

This thesis focuses on authenticity and aura, representation, and the transition from original context to digitalization that the classical Indian dances are going through today. These factors are contributors to the challenges professional dancers in Finland face. I am going to mirror my research on the knowledge of Sharon Lowen and Patti Tamara Lenard and theories by Benjamin Walters and Stuart Hall.

1.2 Research Question

In line with the above, the research question for my thesis becomes:
"How can the classical Indian dances, a key cultural heritage of India, be represented and reproduced outside their original context?"

1.3 Further Objectives

I am also going to try to find answers to the following questions:
- What is needed to create an authentic experience of a classical Indian dance performance?
- How does the aura of classical Indian dances change when they are transformed into modern times?

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[3] Professional dance teachers and performers interviewed in this research

- How does origin, skin colour or religion matter when presenting classical Indian dances?
- How is the era of digitalization affecting authenticity and aura of classical Indian dances when they are taught and performed virtually?
- What are the challenges of representing classical Indian dances in Finland in an accurate way?

1.4 Delimitation

My study is focusing on classical Indian dances, one form of Indian cultural heritage. I am not going to focus on other ethnic dance forms, nor other dance forms from India, such as modern film industry dances (Bollywood, Tollywood, Mollywood etc.), folk dances or fusion dances.

1.5 Definitions

In this thesis I will be discussing the topics of aura, authenticity, cross-cultural communication, cultural appropriation, cultural heritage, and representation of classical Indian dance. In the following chapter I will clarify these definitions and how I use them.

1.5.1 Aura

In this research, the word aura is used when describing Walter Benjamins seminal work, his concept of aura. See chapter 3.3.

1.5.2 Authenticity

Worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on fact, conforming to an original so as to reproduce essential features, made or done the same way as an original, not false or imitation: real, actual, true to one's own personality, spirit, or character. (Merriam-Webster 2022)

1.5.3 Classical Indian Dances

The eight classical dance forms from India are called Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Mohiniattam, Manipuri, Odissi and Sattriya (Venkataraman 2015). The different dance styles, their origin and characteristics are described in chapter 3.1.

1.5.4 Cross-cultural Communication

Dealing with or offering comparison between two or more different cultures or cultural areas. (Merriam-Webster 2022)

1.5.5 Cultural Appropriation

The act of taking or using things from a culture that is not your own, especially without showing that you understand or respect this culture. (Cambridge Dictionary 2022). The adoption, usually without acknowledgment, of cultural identity markers from subcultures or minority communities into mainstream culture by people with a relatively privileged status. (Dictionary 2022)

1.5.6 Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage includes artefacts, monuments, a group of buildings and sites, museums that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific, and social significance. It includes tangible heritage (movable, immobile, and underwater), intangible cultural heritage (ICH) embedded into cultural, and natural heritage artefacts, sites, or monuments. The definition excludes ICH related to other cultural domains such as festivals, celebration etc. It covers industrial heritage and cave paintings. (Cultural heritage 2022)

1.5.7 Representation

One that represents, such as: an artistic likeness or image, a statement or account made to influence opinion or action / an incidental or collateral statement of fact on the faith of which a contract is entered into. (Merriam-Webster 2022)

2 METHOD AND EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

In this study my main methods are a semi-structured interview in line with Gillham (2005) complemented by a supporting questionnaire for classical dance students.

2.1 Semi-structured Interviews

I have chosen method semi-structured interview as the method because the problem that I am focusing on is of a qualitative form of its nature. Interviews and questionnaires serve different purposes and to achieve a depth of understanding, an appropriate form of interview is used (Gillham 2005). Interviews are more flexible and the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is responsive and interactive (Gillham 2005). The method gives a versatile insight on the matter.

It is important to note that interviews aren't necessarily telling the whole truth. Knowing that the interview is being done, the interviewee might be constructing themselves in what they say (Gillham 2005). Also, interviews that are recorded and transcribed, can also have negative twists. In the transcribing process, the most obvious loss is the semantic properties of a human voice, the dimensions of speech which can radically alter what the words mean (Gillham 2005).

Ethics behind this research have been taken seriously. Safety is an ethical and practical issue (Gillham 2005). All interviewees agreed to present with their own name. They had the possibility to delete sections from the transcribed text and they were given the opportunity to go through the text before it is published. The material was sent to a few who wanted to check and comment on possible corrections. All the professionals, representing their own persona, were told that this thesis is going to be public. It was also clarified how the interview data was collected and handled. Everyone was treated with respect.

2.2 The Interviews

In order to cover the field of classical Indian dances in Finland, experts representing different classical styles have been asked to give their perspective on the matter. The dance scene in Finland is very narrow and in that context the quantity of interview can be considered to widely cover the field.

I have reached out to six professionals in the field who have knowledge and authority regarding the topic. They represent five of the eight classical Indian dance styles. Professional teachers in Manipur and Sattriya could not be found in Finland for this research. The Indian Embassy to Finland and Estonia has published a catalog "Kala Sangam" that includes the professionals working in Finland and Estonia (*Kala Sangam - Celebrating Indian culture in Finland and Estonia* 2022). The catalog helped to get a wide perspective of the representation of classical Indian dances.

For my interviews I have chosen dancers from different backgrounds and origins. They represent different forms of classical Indian dances: Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Mohiniattam and Odissi. The Finns, Kunnas and Mannila represent, together with Pärs from Estonia, the professional views of the dancers from the Baltic. Menon and Panda are professional dancers from India who are now living and doing their dance art in Finland. Gupta represents the views of teaching and performing classical Indian dances in India.

Madhur Gupta

Madhur Gupta is one of the leading Odissi dance exponents of his generation. Beginning his initial training in Kathak with maestro Padma Vibhushan awardee Pt. Birju Maharaj, he was strongly drawn toward Odissi. Having had the fortune of interacting and learning from masters like Madhavi Mudgal, Bichitranand Swain, and Kumkum Lal; Gupta is currently in advanced training under the renowned danseuse and Guru, Smt. Sharon Lowen in the Padma Vibhushan Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra style of Odissi. Apart from extensive touring, performing, and writing, Gupta also teaches Odissi at Sangeet Vidya Niketan, New Delhi. (Gupta 2022)

Laura Kunnas

After being trained in classical ballet, Laura started learning Bharatanatyam from Ann Ojala in 2011. She has attended dance workshops in the Baltic region and studied for a semester under Ms Rajagopalan in The Temple of Fine Arts, Singapore. In 2016, Laura moved to Delhi to continue her training under Guru Saroja Vaidyanathan and under Vidushi Arupa Lahiry, disciple of Guru Chitra Visweswaran. During her three-year stay in India, she performed Bharatanatyam at various cultural events and studied Carnatic music and Hindi.

Since 2019, Laura resides in Espoo, where she continues to practice her art. She is a trained teacher (Helsinki University) and has been choreographing dance since 2014. Laura feels content when dancing Bharatanatyam as her whole body and soul is immersed in creating this visual poetry. Currently she is the deputy chair at LOTUS - Indian Dance Centre Finland Association, based in Helsinki. (Kunnas 2022)

Hanna Mannila

Hanna Mannila (MA, Doctoral Researcher, South Asian Studies, University of Helsinki) has been dancing Indian classical Kathak dance since 1998. She started her Kathak training in Agra, India, with Raashi Johri in the Jaipur style of kathak, but received her main training in the Lucknow style at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in London, finishing her three-year kathak diploma course with Distinction in 2001. Her main Kathak teachers in London were Sushmita Ghosh and Abhay Shankar Mishra. She performed her solo debut in London after intensive training with Sushmita Ghosh in India in 2006. In addition, she attended numerous workshops taught by some of the most well-known kathak artists, including Birju Maharaj, Shaswati Sen, Kumudini Lakhia, Aditi Mangaldas, Arjun Mishra, Geetanjali Lal and Nahid Siddiqui, to name a few. Hanna worked in London as a freelance dancer and teacher for ten years, performing with several Kathak dance groups in the UK, India, Europe, and the US. After moving back to Finland in 2011, she has been teaching Kathak mainly in Helsinki, currently at LOTUS – Indian Dance Centre Finland. Hanna is also working on her PhD on a Kathak related topic at the University of Helsinki. Prior to the Kathak training, Hanna danced ballet as a hobby for over ten years, as well as jazz, contemporary and African dance. She is also a certified yoga instructor. (Mannila 2022)

Gayathri Menon

Gayathri Menon is a versatile dancer and choreographer with extensive experience in Indian dance styles; Bharatanatyam, Mohiniattam, Kathakali, Ottanthullal and semiclassical dances. She is a passionate teacher and performing artist and has given performances in numerous stages both in Finland and India. Menon started dancing at a very early age and she learned Kathakali from Shri Kalamandalam Manoj Kumar, Bharatanatyam and Mohiniattam from Smt Kalakshetra Pushpalatha.

Menon is the co-founder and instructor at Fusia Performing Arts in Tampere, where Indian classical dance styles are taught and performed. She has also taught Kathakali courses in University of Arts, Helsinki and conducted workshops and demonstrations in libraries and schools in Finland. Her work with the Finnish epic Kalevala, presented in four Indian dance forms - Bharatanatyam, Mohiniattam, Kerala Natanam, and Kathakali was much appreciated by Indians and Finns alike. Experimenting with Finnish tunes and Indian rock music has also been met with warmth and love at many events. (Menon 2022)

Payal Panda

Payal Panda is a professional Odissi dance performer from Bhubaneshwar, India. She has been living in Espoo, Finland since 2019. She has passed her graduation in Odissi and has experience of the dance form for over 20 years. Panda was personally trained by late Shri Kanduri Charan Behera. (Panda 2022)

Pille Pärs

Pille Pärs began studying classical Indian dance Bharatanatyam in 1984 with Irina Jankevich. In January 1987, Jankevich handed over the studio to Pärs, and in the fall she began mentoring her first group of beginners.

Pärs has attended Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Summer School in London on several occasions, studying with Chitra Visweshwaran, Leela Ramanathan, Sarasvati Sundareshan and Surya N. Rao. She also attended Chitra Visweshwaran Dance School in India. She has also completed courses and private lessons with Arundhati Chattopadayan, Syed Sallaudin Pasha, Malini Srinivasan and Anusha Subramanyam in Estonia, Janaki Rangarajani and Shalin Shivashankar in Latvia and Prakash Yadagudde in the UK. Pärs has directed several concerts, organized numerous courses and summer camps. Since

2000, Pärs has been teaching in Latvia, where the independent Indian dance studio Bharata grew out of a small group that started with Bharatanatyam at the dance studio Alegria. Pärs has also given Indian dance lessons in Finland. (Pärs 2022)

Five of the interviews were conducted over video call (Zoom), recorded and transcribed. Pärs chose to answer in a written form directly through email.

2.3 Survey (Google Form Questionnaire)

Together with the empirical material, dance students were included in the research in order to get a wider perspective on the topics discussing authenticity, representation and digitalization of the dances. A survey (Google form) was sent to dance students who practice classical Indian dances in Finland. The students were contacted through LOTUS - Indian Dance Centre Finland, Fusia Performing Arts and Facebook groups. The questionnaire contained 15 quantitative questions and one qualitative question. Answering to the Google form was made anonymous to give honest results. The number of students practicing classical Indian dances in Finland is estimated to be only around 30-40 persons. 12 dance students contributed to the survey.

The survey is an efficient and fast data collection method, especially because of its standardization, which means that the data is collected in the same format from all members of the target group. The survey can also reach a wide range of respondents. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2005).

The survey is usually used in a mapping and descriptive study or when then topic is unusual and there is little or no knowledge. The mapping study looks for new perspectives or new phenomena. Its aim is to answer, for example, the question of the main themes and models.
Descriptive research tries to provide correct descriptions and interesting features of the phenomenon. The description is used to answer behaviors, events, beliefs and processes in the phenomenon. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2005)

The questions can be closed and/or open. Closed, multiple-choice questions produce less varied answers, and the data is easier to process and analyze (Hirsjärvi et al. 2005). In open questions, the respondent can answer in an own expressing way. Open questions don't suggest any answers (Hirsjärvi et al. 2005).

Survey as a method has also disadvantages. It is not possible to know how seriously the target group has taken the research and whether they have responded honestly and carefully. It can also be, that the respondents do not have information about the topic, and they can be unfamiliar with the matter they were asked about.

3 BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework chosen for this thesis builds on well-known theories, those of Sharon Lowen's and her views on cross-culturalism; Walter Benjamins theory about art in the age of mechanical reproduction (1935), more specifically his concepts of *aura* and *authenticity*. Stuart Hall's representation theory is also well suited to and a central theory relevant to the work, lastly the notion of Cultural Appropriation by Patti Tamara Lenard is presented as it also is an important concept used in the analysis.

This next section gives an overview of what classical Indian dances are and present prior theory that is relevant for the research topic. The reader needs to understand the origin of the dance form, its background, importance in the history of India and its position in the culture today.

3.1 Classical Indian Dances

During my visits to India, I have learned that India is very rich in culture. Specially the selection of different dances is versatile. The film industry is one of the biggest in the world. Bollywood-movies and their dance acts are famous in many countries for their inspiring choreographies. Apart from the groovy commercial dances, India offers colorful dance traditions from different states. These cultural heritage dances can be divided into folk and classical dances.

Folk dances were developed by the people reflecting their lives, often to the local music. Originally folk dances were a simple form of dance, often meant for group performances, created for a recreational or celebratory reason such as agricultural harvest. The dancers were not trained, and the steps were just picked up as they mirror the region, lifestyle, and aspirations of the local, common people. They were performed for pure enjoyment and did not require many years of serious training or technicalities. (*Difference between classical dance and folk dance* 2022)

The classical Indian dances are more demanding, the training is more rigorous (*Difference between classical dance and folk dance* 2022).

The theory and origin of classical dances of India or 'Shastriya Devesh' can be traced back thousands of years to the Sanskrit text of Natya Shastra, the Indian Bible of dance. The various forms of dance that fall under this umbrella have their roots in Hindu religious musical theatres. Performed during occasions, festivities, and ceremonies, the classical dances of India exhibit the unique culture of India in its true essence. (Modak 2022)

The Devadasis, the proverbial dancing girls of India, were part of a sanctioned sociocultural institution, nurtured by both royalty and the temples. Their services, ritualistic and entertaining, addressed the deity in the temple and the royalty in the court. However, in the 19th century, when Britain dominated over the country, the legacy of the Devadasis was almost lost. By the time India attained independence in 1947, these girls had lost their living due to the law that abolished the practice of initiating young girls for dancing in temples. (Venkataraman 2015)

Traditional art forms are subject to cycles of growth, decay, and renewal. After being nurtured in the temples and the royal courts, Indian dances suffered a reversal during colonial rule. The years between 1930 and 1970 are often referred to as the years of Dance Renaissance in India (Venkataraman 2015). The art forms were revived during the nationalist movement and thereafter a dance renaissance started in post-Independence India. (Venkataraman & Pasricha 2014) This was a part of the search for the true Indian identity during the period of the struggle for independence.

The classical Indian dances have been called "neo classical"; they are recreated by gurus (teachers) from the ancient forms. There is a vacuum felt today as most of the traditional gurus have passed away. Without the presence of these gurus, who ensured that dance traditions did not change beyond recognition, the future for the dances seems very uncertain. (Venkataraman 2015)

The future of the dances, the struggle for their preservation, their need to keep in step with the rhythm of today's speedier world fascinates many professional dancers globally. The classical arts have always been challenged by the dialectics of tradition versus modernity. The dances were kept in interior areas in India for years but are now showcased on international stages around the world.

Change is inevitable and nobody would think of traditions frozen in time. The main concern is, which direction the changes will take. (Venkataraman & Pasricha 2014)

Many dance artists still feel that space of originality and creativity can be found within the conventional format, necessitating no compromise on the preserved integrity of classical structures. Curiously in the present context, classical dances are seen to be increasing while audiences are shrinking. The classical dancer soldiers are waging an unequal battle against the monolithic mega entertainment machine – the television. (Venkataraman & Pasricha 2014)

The Sangeet Natak Academy recognizes eight classical dance forms in India: Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Mohiniattam, Manipuri, Odissi and Sattriya. (Modak 2022)

Bharatanatyam is amongst the oldest of the contemporary classical dances of India. Bharatanatyam originated sometime around 1000 BC, in the ancient temples of the state of Tamil Nadu. This elegant form of classical Indian dance is performed by women, to the tunes of Carnatic music. Through the performance, the dancers showcase Hindu mythological themes and spiritual concepts. It is enriched with graceful hand gestures (called "Mudras"), limb movements, and facial expressions, all of which contrive a story. Bharatnatyam was a prevalent dance form which faced stringent oppression during the British colonial period. Today, it is recognised as one of the most respectable art forms in India, luckily kept alive despite all the repercussions. In South India, it is a matter of pride for a dancer to learn this renowned classical dance form. (Modak 2022)

Figure 1. Laura Kunnas performing Bharatanatyam in Helsinki. Photograph Nalle Elmgren 2022

The term **Kathak** etymologically derived from "Katha" (story) and stands for a class or community of storytellers referred to as Gaur Brahmins. Nurtured in areas roughly pertaining to present-day Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, Kathak is the only Indian dance style combining both Hindu and Islamic influences, one giving it the myth and the other its brilliant virtuosity and secular aspect. (Venkataraman & Pasricha 2014). It is performed by both women and men and is sometimes referred to as the dance of love (Modak 2022).

Figure 2. Hanna Mannila performing Kathak in Stoa, Helsinki. Photograph Ilkka Roitto 2014

The dance form originating from Kerala, **Kathakali**, narrates mythological tales only through gestures and facial expressions. Kathakali, meaning "storyteller", is a religious dance form of high esteem. It derives its movements from athletic traditions, religious drama, and folk arts of the South. Kathakali dancers are adorned in very heavy, traditional costumes, ornate face masks and body paint. (Modak 2022)

Figure 3. Gayathri Menon performing Kathakali in Helsinki. Photograph Matti Sten 2018

The growth of **Kuchipudi** in the last half century is one more instance in post-independence India of a little-known local tradition. It was practised by Brahmin performers of an Andhra Pradesh village and is now spreading to all parts of India, with its

tone and presentation undergoing substantial changes in the process. The Kuchipudi scene today bristles with a majority of female exponents. However, it used to be an all-male tradition. (Venkataraman & Pasricha 2014)

Mohiniattam, literally Dance of the Enchantress, has its seeds in the deep past of Kerala. Its present form is designed exclusively for the female dancers. The repertoire of Mohiniattam has no temple connections but has nevertheless a strong devotional element. (Venkataraman & Pasricha 2014)

Figure 4. Gayathri Menon in Mohiniattam costume. Photograph Eveliina Pohja (no date)

Though it shares the philosophy of Indian classical dance, **Manipuri** is completely different in its visual manifestation. Intricately woven with the lifestyle of an Indo-Mongoloid stock of people, Manipuri is an indispensable part of religious worship. (Venkataraman & Pasricha 2014) The dance form represents the culture that thrives in the north-eastern state of Manipur (Modak 2022).

Odissi has risen like a Phoenix in the last fifty years from being a skeletal remnant of history to reincarnate as one of the sought-after classical forms. Odissi has gone through a remarkable cultural recovery in art history. (Venkataraman & Pasricha 2014) Odissi originated in the temples of Odisha. The sculptures of deities of ancient temples have inspired the gestures of this intricate dance form that explore the mythological tales. The melody of the music accompanies the Hindi poetry recital and Odissi is said to be one of the most melodious classical dances of India. (Modak 2022).

Figure 5. Mikaela Jokinen & Payal Panda performing Odissi in Vantaa. Photograph Matti Sten 2022

Sattriya originates in the state of Assam, and it was only as late as 2000 that Sattriya started sharing the arena as a classical dance along the other dance forms. It is said to be a 500-year-old monastic tradition. (Venkataraman 2015).

3.2 Cultural Heritage in Transition by Sharon Lowen

Sharon Lowen is a renowned artist of classical Indian dance Odissi. She has performed on stage and screen for over three decades in over 20 countries. Of American origin, India considers her a dancer "who has shown with total conviction how dance is a language away and above any barrier of race and nationality." As an educator, Lowen has been an advisor and consultant on cross-cultural education in the U.S. and India, including the American Embassy School, New Delhi, as well as presenting 400 school programs in the U.S along with residencies and concerts at colleges and universities. (Lowen 2022)

Lowen has written numerous articles, held several conferences related to the art forms and is considered to be a living legend in India. What is of continuing interest for her today is the ways classical dance traditions have been reconstructed for the stage during the 20th and now 21st centuries. Lowens thoughts on cross-cultural communication through classical Indian dances inspires this research.

To understand the art form, it is crucial to know the history of the classical dances. Lowen describes the enormous change that the dances went through when they left the temples. Once out of the temples, the sophisticated codified language of the various regional dance genres could be used in myriad ways and the aesthetics, themes and techniques developed were dependent only on the values, abilities and motivations of teachers and disciples (Lowen 2022). The shift from the temples to the stages sanctioned dance presentations ranging from high art to simple entertainment, Lowen writes, and continues that the shift also provided the opportunity to create a sacred space potentially uniting an audience in a shared experience of spiritual transcendence. The motivation and abilities of the dancer determine how close he or she comes to this option (Lowen 2022).

Lowen analyses, that dance is a movement art, transmitted as an oral, or rather aural-visual, tradition. According to her, the classical dances are constantly evolving as they are living traditions. Art helps us to respond to, understand and integrate our external and internal realities (Lowen 2022). The classical dance traditions of India are ideally suited to continue offering an art that speaks to the inner world, a world that we all share (Lowen 2022).

It is the restlessness of today's world (audiences, and even artists) that needs the meditative core of the art preserved as these genres continue their evolution. This essential need that we humans have is eternal, neither superficial nor outdated. Dance can delight, entertain, educate, and explore new vistas of choreography. Yet, if we abandon the transcendent capacity of the traditions, we will lose the core of the art that has been able to survive the transition from temples to entertainment stages. (Lowen 2022)

However, art is not an isolated creative activity (Lowen 2022). According to Lowen it reflects the society in which we live in and serves the aesthetic, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual needs of the society. The classical Indian dance traditions arose from a spiritual consciousness and a unique aspect detailed in the the encyclopedic Natya Shastra of Indian performing arts, where it was described that the dancer's role was the aim to evoke *rasa* (Lowen 2022). What does *rasa* mean? The *rasa* theory asserts that entertainment is a desired effect of performance arts. Yet, it is not the primary goal. The primary goal is to transport the individual in the audience into another parallel reality, full

of wonder, where the viewer experiences the essence of his own consciousness and reflects on spiritual and moral questions. (Lowen 2022) The aesthetics expressed in Indian dance use human love as the closest metaphor to approaching an understanding of divine love and the concept of communicating unselfish, unconditional spiritual love through the metaphors of mundane human love is intrinsic to Indian aesthetic and philosophical traditions. The aim of the experience is to lift the audience to a higher level of universal understanding and connection. The audience can feel the nuances and states of love in relation to anticipation, preparation, yearning, waiting, disappointment, betrayal, reconciliation and ultimately, union. Lowen describes that Indian classical dance forms provide an opportunity to communicate metaphysical values, love, truth, and beauty – love without ego, beauty that is not superficial.

Lowen is teaching dance in New Delhi, India. She was the student of the national treasure late Padmavibushan Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, one of the architects who recreated Odissi. Lowen writes, that the complex considerations of interpreting holy scripts and ensuring that the masterful choreography by the senior teachers is maintained demands that the teachers and students should respect piece and should not dilute or change this choreography or the music composition if they are performing it. However, the subtle yet significant variations that Guru Mohapatra made over the decades in teaching and performing, clearly show that there is a path for individual interpretation within these constraints. (Lowen 2022)

In dance performances Lowen wants to see whether the student or professional aspires to display the beauty, rhythmic prowess of the dance, entertain and excite or does the dancer have motivations to touch souls and to take the audience to a metaphysical level? While classical Indian dance may have originated in a spiritual consciousness, it is now on the stage and media, so all these aims are valid. Personally, Lowen feels that while many dance forms around the globe are aesthetic and entertaining, Indian genres can aim higher to invoke *rasa* and create a connection with the non-duality of divine oneness.

Lowen encourages her students to perform in various occasions such as events in retirement homes for the aged or children's cancer wards. She believes an inner dialogue with the audience, even while doing beginning basics, can communicate the delight of

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each step in its own way. Sharing with the audience, will not only avoid blank or artificial expressions but help the students to share the dance and not be self-consciously showing off or shy, but rather focus on sharing the beauty of the dance. (Lowen 2022) A dancer should first absorb the dance perfectly and then continue to bring own personality and sensibility into the performance practice. This will be in the right direction if the dancer is honest to their art, their teacher and their self. (Lowen 2022)

Lowen questions whether teachers aim to teach a skill or an art. She also believes, that without the benefits of learning under a parental, like mentoring master teacher or a committed pedagogy of an institution, the prospect of a dancer becoming thoroughly trained performing artist that can captivate the audience for a full evening performance, becomes less likely (Lowen 2022). To connect the mind and the dancing body, there should be, right in the beginning, equal emphasis on both steps and expression, and that is often neglected. (Lowen 2022) Lowen wants to create a supportive learning, stress-free environment in her classes. Back in the days teachers used to beat their students. that is long gone, but what still remains is competition and jealousy, which are equally abusive in a classroom setting. (Lowen 2022) According to Lowen, the competition atmosphere is encouraged in Indian schools and is also present in dance training situations in the country. Her teacher Mohapatra had the confidence and perhaps the foresight, to take the risk of sharing his teaching over a huge number of students who were free to use or misuse his teaching. He believed that art would rise above the students.

Being a non-Indian herself, Lowen has written much about multiculturalism in the dance field. Connecting to others, from within one's own cultural background and expanding out to those less familiar is essential to inhabit a world where people live at ease within their global communities (Lowen 2022). An opportunity to enter the cultural space of others dissolves the defensiveness of fear of the "other". It enables a sense of security and happiness of connection, understanding and even celebration of sharing a larger human landscape. (Lowen 2022) Cross-cultural education, interactions, and carefully framed introductions to cross-cultural essence through performing arts build understandings that can go beyond the intellectual to a more intrinsic connection (Lowen 2022).

In a fast-changing world, the performing arts can also be one of the most effective ways of communicating culture internationally, yet it is important that cross-cultural performances are framed in ways that they provide deeper understandings into their cultural import beyond mere colorful spectacle (Lowen 2022). Cultural performances for children have a profound effect in them and their connection to the world in which they inhabit and therefore also their sense of unity with other children. Being able to identify and empathize with another's culture widens one's ability to understand one's own and is quite different from experiencing others as exotica (Lowen 2022). Cross cultural education, interactions, and carefully framed introductions to cross-cultural essence through performing arts also increases the happiness of an expanding internalization of other (Lowen 2022).

Lowen has made research of the challenges for Indian classical dance forms sustaining their place in today's world. There are obvious challenges with innovation and fusion, effects of institutional learning versus teacher-student one-on-one training, the waning interest and attention spans of audiences raised on television and computer-based information technology, and problems of earning a living as a professional dancer in a market driven economy. However, the arts continue to live and grow dynamically, while remaining rooted in long traditions. (Lowen 2022)

Dance traditions are organic and ever-growing, and they need to keep changing in order to remain healthy (Lowen 2022). The changing values and stress of materialism, globalization, and disparity of social injustice cause the audiences to have shorter attention spans: they would increasingly prefer a 45-minute "fast food" sampler of a dance program, rather than patiently digest an elegantly presented full course presentation of two to three hours (Lowen 2022). This impatience to savor the traditional development of a dance performance is a growing phenomenon (Lowen 2022).

All dancers must continue to be challenged with adjusting to new contexts including television and other media. New directions based on tradition should be warmly applauded if they evolve from thoughtfulness, rather than efforts to please the crowd with novelty. They must offer the magical renewal. Classical Indian becoming more and more popular has naturally brought positive and negative changes, which means more quantity and less quality.

It may be that the dancer does not anymore have the depth of involvement and understanding to connect and touch the audience. (Lowen 2022)

A lifetime is not enough to learn all aspects of arts knowledge and related fields that one needs. – Sharon Lowen

3.3 Walter Benjamin and the Concept of the Aura

Walter Benjamin, the German intellectual, has written numerous influential and groundbreaking essays about art and philosophy. They have inspired research around the globe for years. In his seminal essay *"The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"* from the year 1935, Benjamin discusses the idea of *aura*, the uniqueness of the art, in society, culture and arts. His idea of the loss of aura in mechanical reproduction is relevant in this research. Benjamin has numerous interesting aspects of the topic mechanical reproduction; however, they are outside the scope of my study, and I am only focusing on the concept of aura.

In his essay *"The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"* Benjamin discusses the paradox of the spreading of original art. He argues that in principle a work of art has always been reproducible. Man-made artifacts could always be imitated by others, and replicas were made by pupils in practice of their craft, by masters for diffusing their works, and, finally, by third parties in the pursuit of gain (Benjamin 1935). He thought, however, that mechanical reproduction of a work of art, represents something new.

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be (Benjamin 1935). Benjamin argues that the presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity, there can be no replica. That which withers away in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura, the unique existence, of the work of art (Benjamin 1935). Benjamin wrote that the uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric of tradition, and this tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable.

Benjamin argued that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual, that they were first the magical, then the religious kind of objects destined to serve in a cult. Likewise, the temple dances in India were created to have a relationship and communicate with the divine. That is to say, the matter of the early art works was in their existence, not their being on view (Benjamin 1935).

The existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function (Benjamin 1935). Benjamin wrote that aura is the mark of authenticity contained in a work of art and that there is a privilege of the original. He explained that the unique value of the "authentic" work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value and that this ritualistic basis, however remote, is still recognizable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty (Benjamin 1935).

Benjamin described that art has become less and less tied to spiritual or ritual service. He wrote that works of art are received and valued on different planes. These two polar types, according to Benjamin, are the cult value and the exhibition value of the work. When art loses aura, it cuts its ties with the cult and is free to go anywhere. Benjamin argued that when art doesn't serve a cultic value anymore, it moves towards politics and changes the reaction of the masses towards art. When the age of mechanical reproduction, in Benjamin's case the rise of photography, film and audio recordings, separated art from its basis in cult, the semblance of its autonomy disappeared forever (Benjamin 1935).

When discussing this separation of art from its aura through mechanical reproduction, Benjamin described the difference between theatre and film. Film is the art that is most intimately bound with technological reproducibility (Benjamin 1935). Benjamin wrote about film, but his ideas are applicable to our modern age of live video online and streaming services. What happens with the close relationship in time and space between the art and the audience when the art goes digital? Is the connection lost on digital platforms? Is it that in a dance performance, where the audience is engaged with the dancer, there is aura, whereas a recording of that same dance performance does not have aura? Benjamin argued that aura is lost in cinema because the audience is distracted, meaning they are not focused or present in the art work, they are not absorbed in it.

Despite his critique towards recorded art, Benjamin acknowledged that mechanical reproduction has benefits. Art can be spread out to more people to admire. At the same time, there is the loss of uniqueness, the aura. Benjamin disliked that art objects were only available for higher classes, the elite. He celebrated the idea of spreading art to everyone. Likewise, temple dances in India were originally seen only by the priests and kings. Now anyone can enjoy these dance forms, the art is much more democratized now.

3.4 The Work of Representation by Stuart Hall

The concept of representation has come to occupy a new and important place in the study of culture according to Stuart Hall. Representation connects meaning and language to culture and is the process by which members of a culture use (Hall 1997). To explain representation shortly, it is the product of meaning through either language, signs, or images (Hall 1997). This is the system by which all sorts of objects, for example people are correlated with a set of concepts or mental representation which we humans carry around in our heads (Hall 1997). Hall argues, that without them, we could not interpret the world meaningfully at all. The conceptual maps which are carried around in our heads are totally different from one another's, in which case people would interpret or make sense of the world in totally different ways (Hall 1997).

This definition or representation carries the important premise that objects do not have in themselves any fixed, final, or true meaning and it is we humans, our societies and human cultures that make them signify (Hall 1997). The meanings we create will always change from one culture or period to another (Hall 1997). Hall argues that there is no guarantee that every object in a culture will have an equivalent meaning in another, precisely because cultures differ, sometimes even radically, from one another in the assign meaning to the world. One important idea about representation is the acceptance of a degree of cultural relativism between one culture and another, a certain lack of equivalence, and hence the need for translation as we move from the mind-set or conceptual universe of one culture or another (Hall 1997).

As the dance art form originated in the temples in India, the question about representation becomes relevant for this research. This is directly linked to the topic of cultural appropriation.

3.5 Cultural Appropriation Defined by Patti Tamara Lenard

Today, social media is full of accusations and counter-accusations of a wrong called "cultural appropriation" (Lenard & Balint 2020). All kinds of actions have been labelled as cultural appropriation: for example, the teaching of yoga by people who cannot trace their descent to the Indian sub-continent (Lenard & Balint 2020). The same accusations apply for non-Indians teaching and/or performing classical Indian dances. What is the issue behind? Many people around the globe express hostility toward immigrants and immigrant cultures, as well as toward indigenous groups, while at the same time engaging and appropriating from these other cultures (Lenard & Balint 2020). The appropriation accusations treat the problematic act as part of a long-standing history in which privileged individuals treat those with less power with contempt and disdain, these accusations say for example that white people are empowered and can do whatever they want (Lenard & Balint 2020). The demands to return or desist in appropriation are consistent with advocating on behalf of marginalized groups (Lenard & Balint 2020). Cultural engagement is inevitable in human society, but things can sometimes go wrong and there are two main forms in which cultural engagement can go wrong: cultural offence and cultural misrepresentation (Lenard & Balint 2020). An offensive act or statement is one that causes others to be upset or hurt; they will typically be acts or statements that attack or insult others, often but not always, by negatively characterizing them in some way whereas misrepresentation is generally an act or statement that gives a false or misleading account of something (Lenard & Balint 2020).

India has a history of British occupation. This makes it important to examine how appropriation is associated with classical Indian dances.

4   FINDINGS

The findings from the interviews and survey are presented in this chapter.

4.1   Results from the Interviews

The interviews for this thesis were held on Zoom, recorded, transcribed, and coded. The interview questions followed certain themes. These are the findings that resulted.

4.1.1   What is Authentic Classical Indian Dance?

The interviews started with defining authenticity. What do the professionals define as authentic and what is needed in an ideal classical Indian dance representation?

Gupta and Kunnas felt the need to explain about the history of the classical dances before answering the question about authenticity. Kunnas thinks that it would be easy to say that whatever is done in India is authentic, but there are so many ways of doing classical Indian dance, regardless nationality, that it is difficult to draw a line anywhere. She pointed out that what people assume to be authentic, has already changed multiple times in history. Gupta explained that the dance forms are very old, over 2000-year-old.

> Ex. 1: However, this form of dance, that can be seen for example in temple sculptures, is not danced anymore; the classical Indian dances didn't exist as a term before the Indian independence movement; they are constructed dances (Gupta 2022).

"Authenticity of a dancer can be shown in exams" (Panda 2022). Panda explained that in India dance students complete different levels and receive certificates in their dance training. "The tradition of getting certificates is very old and cannot be false" (Panda 2022). This, in her opinion is a proof that a dancer is professional and authentic. Though, Panda is sceptic to the usage of the word authentic. As said by Panda: "Authenticity has become a very underrated thing. Everything is declared authentic, but does it really have quality?"

Mannila pointed out that it is difficult to define authentic because there are several aspects to it.

Ex. 2: There is a popular narrative that everybody repeats: The dance art is thousands of years old tradition that never changes, which sells well to the audiences who know nothing about it, and unfortunately there are a lot of dancers nowadays who believe this as well" (Mannila 2022).

Mannila mentioned technique, music theory, live music, improvisation and understanding of lyrics and culture as important contributors to an ideal performance.

Ex. 3: A dancer needs to understand the language as well as the lyrics or the terminology. A dancer also needs to understand the culture and the religion related to the dance (Mannila 2022).

The exact same factors, together with costume, were mentioned by Pärs. Gupta also mentioned that the costume of the dancer should be from the state in India where the art has originated.

Interviewees mentioned that a professional dancer should master the technique of classical Indian dance. Menon thinks that technique of the dancer is the most important thing, meaning the steps, the hand gestures and how a dancer moves their eyes. For her, the storyline doesn't matter but she explains that many Indians prefer Hindu stories. In Menon's opinion it is too narrowminded to think that classical dances should only describe the traditional stories.

Authenticity for Kunnas means that the dancer masters not only technique but also expression. Mannila and Panda agreed on this point. "The authenticity will be achieved when the dancer can reach the audience through their expression, body movement and hand gestures" (Panda 2022).

Mannila explained the importance of a knowledgeable audience. "The aim of Indian classical dance is to produce *rasa*[4], this sort of aesthetic experience, in the audience" (Mannila 2022). There used to be interaction between the performer and the audience, which can only happen if the audience understands the music, the lyrics of the songs and the dance form (Mannila 2022).

"The authenticity of the performance also depends on the place where a dancer is performing the dance" (Panda 2022). Panda thinks that it is not the same to perform Odissi in a dance event in Helsinki compared to performing in India as the audience in Finland most likely doesn't have an inch of idea what the performance is about.

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[4] The term *rasa* in this context means aesthetic experience in the audience

Gupta would find it also bit unsettling to perform for an audience who doesn't respect the dance form, as he feels that his art is absolutely sacred. He believes that the reason to do dance art is to communicate an idea, and therefore the audience should be educated. "If you do not have the right ambience, the right atmosphere, and the right audience mindset, how will you be able to communicate (Gupta 2022)?" However, having said that, Gupta pointed out, that there might be two random people in the audience who are touched by the art and might be interested in learning more.

Panda's opinion of the ultimate goal of the dance form is opposite to Menon's. "The ultimate goal of Indian dancers is to represent the history of The Hindu gods and the Hindu myths" (Panda 2022). "Artists can reach the audience through their expressions and the audience should feel connected to the artist and therefore understand what the dancer is portraying" (Panda 2022). She explained that this is achieved in India, where the audience is born and brought up in the culture, whereas expressing is tough when performing to a foreign crowd or outside India.

The ultimate goal for Gupta is something else. For him, the conversation is not with the mortal audience, but with the higher being, with the superior, with the divine. Gupta also explained what he feels is authentic classical dance. "Authenticity is that the essence of the dance art remains" (Gupta 2022).

> Ex. 4: The essence of spiritualism should be the baseline. In classical Indian dance the performer speaks from the heart, the energy is going inwards. The gestures, facial expressions, body movement patterns are secondary to emotion. In Western show business everything should be attractive, and emphasis is on the visual (Gupta 2022).

The physicality doesn't matter in Gupta's opinion. An 80-year-old man perform on stage and still convey absolute spirituality and deliver emotions, that is the sacred aura of classical Indian dance. "Aura is sharing, devotion and dedication; it is lost when it becomes about you and not the art itself" (Gupta 2022).

When discussed about the aura of classical Indian dance, the professionals mostly agreed that the aura is very relevant to the connection between the performer and the audience. Pärs agreed that the classical Indian dances can nowadays be taken very far from its original context, and the aura is lost.

> Ex. 5: Abhinaya (acting and emotions), which creates *rasa* between the performer and the audience, makes the real aura of Indian classical dance (Pärs 2022).

She recommends dancers to choose some other item or Bollywood dance style when thinking about the place where the dances are performed. "The holiness and worship will no longer be part of the performance and the dance loses its value when the dance has left its original context" (Panda 2022).

> Ex. 6: The aura, the uniqueness, and original context of the classical Indian dances should be kept and carried forward in this way. If the dance is taken out from its original context, the dance form doesn't exist anymore (Panda 2022).

"When performed in a foreign land the value of the performance is little less, however, in order to make people know about this art form, it is sometimes required to compromise" (Panda 2022). According to Panda, private Indian events can function as compromising venues.

> Ex. 7: When the dances are taken out from their original context, the aura easy transforms into exotism. If the knowledgeable audience is missing, so is an important part of the performance's context (Mannila 2022).

Kunnas found the question of loss of aura difficult to answer, because in her opinion, it is very challenging to define what the original context is anymore. Mannila agreed the dance style Kathak, that she is master of, has been changed so much during her 25 years in the scene. This makes it hard to think about the loss of aura.

> Ex. 8: Who decides what is the correct date when the dance has been most authentic? Was it most authentic 100 years ago or 200 years ago (Mannila 2022)?

When discussing about how important authenticity is, everyone agreed that is it very important. Kunnas and Panda want to reproduce the exact teachings that they got from their teachers. Pärs agreed with them and also mentioned that in the beginning of her dance career she couldn't even think of changing something in the dance pieces or create something own because the existing dance choreographies in her opinion were already perfect. Panda would only change a piece to adapt a solo performance into a group performance. "We should pass on the exact same traditions that we learned from our teachers – that is authentic" (Panda 2022).

Mannila believes that there is no need to go for only this or that when choosing between tradition and innovation. "There is space for innovation, and it is not bad that the dance is evolving" (Mannila 2022). "Thanks to the increasing of dancers and competition, the quality has improved and there are more rules than before" (Mannila 2022).

However, Mannila feels she has to compromise with the ideal scene of classical Indian dance all the time when teaching and performing in Finland. She points out that the same issue, having a knowledgeable audience and live music, is also becoming more and more rare in India itself, so in that sense the perfect authenticity cannot be a very important factor. Kunnas believes it is important to find a middle ground between traditional and modernity, but she isn't sure yet what that would be. "Change only as much as you really have to in the choreographies" (Kunnas 2022).

Kunnas does accept a change in the dance as one wouldn't even recognize the dance style if they went back in time" (Kunnas 2022). "Everything what is alive evolves with time, and traditions live long only when they are cherished, and the roots aren't forgotten" (Pärs 2022). Gupta also agreed that nothing is original and reminded of the history behind the dance art.

Out of respect to his teachers and the responsibilities he now has, Gupta tries to stay close to the original choreographies and music, but he will also introduce new content. "Classical dances are not static; they are not frozen in the time even though the rules and regulations of the Natya Shastra creates a huge boundary to innovation" (Gupta 2022). Gupta follows the adjectives which describe each style of classical dance and stays true to these words. The movement can elaborate, and new storylines can be created to address for example contemporary issues of the society.

> Ex. 9: Changes are bound to happen, even though people would not accept them very easily. There will always be a set of people complaining about changes. Some say that we aren't respecting, that we are insulting. But nobody owns the art form (Menon 2022).

"New kinds of music, instruments and stories are nowadays used in the dance form" (Menon 2022). According to Menon, the changes should be accepted. If they are not accepted now, at least the future generations will embrace them. "Art should reach people; if it comes out from the temple, if it comes out on stages, clubs, roads, streets and to other countries, it's a good thing" (Menon 2022). "A contemporary dance choreography might be the most authentic when an artist creates and choreographs it their self by combining all of their learnings, and eventually makes it their own" (Menon 2022). Menon believes that this is an original piece and is as much of value than the traditional classical forms.

Ex. 10: We artists are the product of our generation. We are born in the times where everyone has access to social media and modern ideas. We are not temple dancers anymore. Indian dance art has existed for thousands of years and will continue to exist. It is the artists responsibility to extend the boundaries and add value to the art. If you do not extend the boundaries, then you will not be an artist. You are only a craftsman (Gupta 2022).

"If a dancer decides to dance classical Indian dance to techno music, it is not traditional anymore, it becomes a new style" (Gupta 2022). That is not bad, it is just different in his opinion.

4.1.2 Representation & Cultural Appropriation

In the discussion about representation several interesting questions arose. Who can perform classical Indian dances? Does skin color or origin matter? Does the performer need to be a follower of Hindu religion to convey the religious stories? The topic cultural appropriation, that has been talked about a lot recently among ethnic dances, was analyzed in the context of classical Indian dances.

All interviewees agreed that the skin colour or origin of a classical Indian dancer doesn't matter, as long as the dancer is appreciating the dance form and trying to do justice to it, the best she can. "Basically, anyone can perform it in my view, and anyone can learn it" (Mannila 2022). Mannila added that if someone performs in a non-respectful way, then there might be an issue. Both Mannila and Pärs also mentioned that they have never encountered hate speech when it comes to dances. Pärs mentioned, that historically it was never unusual for a foreigner to learn and perform classical art forms in India.

Menon pointed out that, in her opinion, India is a privileged country, thus she can't understand why a foreigner would be accused of stealing from Indians when teaching or performing classical Indian dances. She added that there are a lot of Indians who don't care about these art forms and maybe some even prefer Western dance styles more. Menon appreciates that foreign people come and learn our art form and respect it, perform it and teach it. "Everything is now globalised, the world is like one country now, and people from all over the world can choose what kind of dance they like" (Menon 2022).

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Kunnas enlightened that for example Bharatanatyam is a revived dance form. The dance was given to people from a different cast. "Actually, there was already a very mean cultural appropriation happening that shouldn't have happened. And that's very unfortunate that it happened because it also erased not only all these people and their histories, but dance movements and repertoire. You can't go worse anymore. The dance today should be allowed for everyone." (Kunnas 2022) Due to the circumstances from the past, Kunnas believes it doesn't matter anymore who performs the dance style.

> Ex. 11: It is absolutely bizarre in today's day and age, at least for me, that somebody questions why somebody is trying to learn or be part of somebody else's culture. Instead, one should be proud that their culture is so influential and so amazing (Gupta 2022).

Gupta also agrees that skin colour, origin, or religious views of the dancers don't matter at all. He explained why there are still teachers in India who value certain qualities in a dancer and try to stick to old norms. Gupta explained what happened in history, during the independence movement in India. "The families that were exercising the dances were afraid that their knowledge would be stolen by other people who started exploring the arts as a possible new profession" (Gupta 2022).

Gupta also explained, that the Natya Shastra mentions how a perfect dancer should look like. "A perfect dancer has to have a slender figure, black hair, lotus-like eyes and be tall" (Gupta 2022). Gupta doesn't stand behind these values himself, as he sees them very retrograding. He feels that dancers in this generation should not worry about these opinions. "Whatever a dancer wants to do, whether it is Bollywood, folk dance, or classical dance, it can be done if the dancer stays true the norms in the current times" (Gupta 2022).

Panda agrees that whoever has the love for the dance, or whoever has the eagerness to learn can perform. She also has a suggestion to dancers who are not born in Indian culture; "The dancer should first get to know the culture, feel that culture, understand the holiness of the art and be true to it as much as possible. After that the performance will have the same feeling as it would in India." (Panda 2022) "For whoever is just copying the dance from YouTube and making a business out of it without any knowledge about the culture and context, the expression will never come, and the performance will always lack something" (Panda 2022).

Panda believes that a dancer who is performing the dance should be considered authentic and professional by the audience and should perform the dances in a very holy way, as the original dancers in history. Performers should have the full certificate and have the full knowledge about the culture, its norms and traditions.

> Ex. 12: Classical Indian dances originated in India, and out of respect the credits should go to Indians (Panda 2022).

Pärs also values dedication, appreciation of traditions and respect to the culture rather than the origin of the dancer. In her opinion, devotional dances can be danced even if the dancer is not a follower of Hindu religion. "Devotion and respect are the same" (Pärs 2022). Gupta agreed and said that a dancer doesn't need to be religious, but spiritual for sure. "They need to have faith in a higher power and of hope for humanity in order to portray emotions on stage" (Gupta 2002).

Religious views don't matter to Kunnas. Kunnas was inspired by Russian teacher Elena Tarasova, who said in a workshop in Helsinki, that one does not have to be a Hindu to appreciate Ganesha (God of wisdom in Hindu mythology), because Ganesha is not only a God. "Ganesha stands for everything that has to do with, for example, knowledge, music, and dance. If a dancer appreciates these values, they will be able to bring that devotion to their dance" (Kunnas 2022). "A dancer can take these values on a metaphorical level and enjoy them on stage, they are universal values" (Kunnas 2022).

For Menon, emotions are more important than devotion. "A dancer only needs to know the characters in Hindu mythology and what they represent" (Menon 2022). She has heard that there are people who say that when a dancer presents a devotional piece, she would have to believe in what she is portraying. Menon describes that when she is doing a devotional piece, she is imagining the emotions needed. "Imagining and creating, that is what professional artists do" (Menon 2022). She adds that the people everywhere in the world share the same emotions and everyone can relate to them. "There are no barriers for any art" (Menon 2022).

4.1.3 Dancing into the Age of Digital Reproduction

The teachers and performers were asked about their opinion on the digitalization of the classical Indian dances. The question was two parted. First the discussion was about teaching classical Indian dances online worldwide through different platforms, something that became a trend during the pandemic from 2020. Before a dancer can represent classical Indian dances, they must study them somehow. Later the discussion went into digital dance performances, the possible loss of aura when the art form is mechanically reproduced and spread.

Everyone agreed that online dance classes can't compete with normal live dance classes. "Teaching is better when you do it in person" (Menon 2022). "The digital era, in one hand, gives opportunity to those who cannot travel, but on the other hand the real contact and feeling, the vibrating energy of the teacher or performer is not there" (Pärs 2022). Panda agreed on this point: The relationship between the student and the teacher is of big importance in classical Indian dance. "The interaction between the student and the teacher is better in class" (Menon 2022). "There is something missing in online classes, something which happens in person" (Kunnas 2022).

Gupta, Menon, and Panda mentioned that the correction of exact dance postures is important while learning classical Indian dance. "It is quite difficult to correct a beginner online and this applies to any other dance form, such as ballet" (Kunnas 2022). "Learning online can be useful if you already know the basics" (Mannila 2022). Mannilas' opinion is, that if the dancer is advanced, then she can learn more dance pieces online and develop, but the dancer needs to have the basics, or enough of work done in a live context before online classes can work. Personally, Mannila would not teach beginners online classes of Kathak in Finland. Kunnas agreed on this point: The dancer must have prior experience in the dance form. "Teaching dance online is an excellent tool and can be used up to a point. But I would not, for example, start a completely new dance form and think that I can learn it only online without physical presence of the teacher at any point ". (Kunnas 2022)

Guptas senior teacher, Sharon Lowen in New Delhi, also told Gupta that learning through a screen or basically, from any technical devise, can only lead the dance student to a certain level and extent, and there are many layers to unravel in Indian classical dance. Gupta would, like Mannila and Kunnas, recommend online classes to somebody who has experienced the art beforehand in person, like for example a yoga instructor who knows her body well. "If the student is absolutely a new beginner, or a child, who doesn't understand body kinetics, it is not recommended to learn online" (Gupta 2022). "Learning on screen is acceptable, but the student should make a genuine effort to go to their teacher and learn in person whenever and as often as it is possible to move on to the next level" (Gupta 2022). Gupta compares the discussion about whether online classes should be held or not, to a crutch and a broken leg:

> Ex. 13: What will you do when your leg is broken? You must utilise a crutch, but then you have to get better and start walking at some point and that walking exercise has to be done with a professional (Gupta 2022).

Menon switched to online mode during the pandemic, and she believes it is working. She believes that new doors have been opened and she can teach in a new way with new methods which she hadn't used before in live classes. "With this technology, like with a very fast internet system and sound as well as, picture and video sharing options, teachers can explore more tools for their teaching" (Menon 2022). Menon started new beginners' online classes, and according to her, it has worked out successfully.

Just like Menon, many dance teachers in India started giving online dance classes because of Covid-19. "Before the pandemic, it was unheard of that a senior teacher would teach online. There was no experience and understanding of how it could be done." (Gupta, 2022) "Due to the pandemic the whole world was literally forced to be on screen. It was a test for everyone." (Gupta 2022) Gupta explained that he couldn't decide if it was appropriate to start teaching online, thus he consulted his own senior teachers. According to him, he received a perfect answer: "It is the responsibility for me as a teacher to pass on the knowledge that I have gotten from my gurus. The world is in a situation that we don't know when things might open up and when people might actually show up at your doorstep for dance classes, so if there are people who aren't able to be in the same place and are absolutely passionate about learning, why should be stop them?" (Gupta 2022)

"Online teaching started to gain fraction step by step and nowadays the teachers are giving expensive dance classes digitally, which foreigners can afford" (Pärs 2022). Panda believes that online teaching is just another source of income for teachers in India. She believes it will be harmful for the art form if the senior teachers only go after the profits, they get from teaching online. "There will be a decrease in authenticity and the uniqueness of the dance" (Panda 2022). Panda pointed out that nowadays, people copy the dance from videos on, for example, YouTube and after pass on a dance style that is not authentic anymore. Mannila also agreed that beginners can meet challenges when they want to copy and learn from videoclips, because there are so many different styles to the dances so it can get confusing when there is so much available online. However, Menon is in the opinion that digital teaching opened a new way to spread the art form, meaning that now anyone can learn from these senior teachers from India. "It may not be very effective and efficient as it would be in normal live classes, but it is still a method that is working" (Menon 2022).

Panda believes that classical Indian dances should always happen face to face, otherwise the feeling and the emotions are missing. According to her, the expressions the performer makes are completely different on a screen and cannot be felt. Panda and Kunnas would definitely prefer that classical Indian dances are performed to a real audience. "The feeling is not the same as it would be when sitting in the audience" (Kunnas 2022).

> Ex. 14: In India they have live music and when the drum is beaten, you can feel the vibrations in your body (Kunnas 2022).

Gupta has refused to perform for cameras in many years now, as he wants to stay close to the authenticity he values. He will not desecrate and ruin a sacred dance form that must be experienced in a spiritual mindset, both for the artist and the audience.

> Ex. 15: A performing art is three dimensional, you can almost touch, you can almost smell, you can feel it. It's a different experience (Gupta 2022).

Menon ponders whether it's the psychological feeling that makes the whole experience special, the feeling that this moment in the audience is unique. Menon doesn't think that the aura of classical Indian dances is destroyed through online performances, but it does change them. Mannila agreed with Menon.

"Obviously, some of the aura will get diluted to some extent, but if the performer is very skilled and experienced, and the recording is of high quality, some of the magic of the dance may be transmitted even through social media" (Mannila 2022).

Mannila thinks that video clips of dance performances can bring back some memories. She can imagine what the dance would be like. Yet, for somebody who has never experienced performances in classical Indian dances, a Tik Tok video or an Instagram reel portraying the dance form might be a very different experience. Overall, the social media style dance video is always very short. "Dances are aiming for the spectacular, wowing the audience, so you need to show everything you have in one minute on the social media whereas the traditional performance might have taken hours" (Mannila 2022). Mannila explained about a traditional Kathak performance: The atmosphere in which the musicians and dancers slowly warm up the audience, gradually going for the more spectacular things.

"Unfortunately, here in Finland, live Indian classical dance performances are rare" (Mannila 2022). In that sense, Mannila believes, that it is good to have online media showing the art forms. "At least the dance students can see lots of different performers and I would encourage them to watch videos of other dancers online, and particularly the excellent dancers, such as the senior teachers" (Mannila 2022).

4.1.4 Challenges in Finland

Everyone agreed that there are challenges in representing classical India dances in Finland. Certain topics were popular when discussing the teaching of classical Indian dances, such as the origin of the dance students, the lack of students, and the ability to teach different levels, motivation of the students, and the assumptions people have about the dance form. Regarding performing in Finland, the focus lied on the place where the classical Indian dances could be performed.

When discussing about where the dance students come from, Menon pointed out that her students are mainly from South India. She thought that it might be because she speaks the same language, which makes it easier for the dance students to connect with her.

Likewise, she believes that Finnish students might prefer a Finnish teacher, who can explain about the Indian culture freely to them in Finnish. "Maybe Finns also prefer Finnish teachers because they could connect to Indian culture more through Finnish teachers who are connected to Indian culture?" (Menon 2022) Menon has mostly Indian children as her students, she never had Finnish children as her students. She is currently teaching approximately 10 Indian adult women.

Kunnas on the other hand has an Indian student from North India who has been dancing long-term. She believed that the dance student felt more comfortable with her compared to a South Indian teacher because of the linguistic and cultural differences between North and South India. Kunnas believes, that her speaking Hindi, a North Indian language, and having experience of living in India has helped her in teaching. "I don't think anybody would be learning from me if I didn't have all the cultural things backing me up" (Kunnas 2022).

Kunnas agreed with Menon, that Indians like to stick to their language and their culture. The culture in the North and South India is very different. Mannila explained that while she was practising dance in London, she felt that, for some Indians student, dancing classical dances was like an identity building tool, rather than merely a hobby. For Mannila dance has always been art.

Apart from language barriers, Kunnas finds it challenging to teach religious dance pieces to Finnish children. She prefers to teach composition that are totally secular, that have nothing to do with Hinduism because some deity stories can be rough.

"There are common assumptions about Indian dance in Finland" (Kunnas 2022). Kunnas gets frustrated when Finns have certain stereotypes about Indian dances. She explains that students might get disappointed after they come to class because the dance was not what they expected. "People think that classical Indian dances are like Bollywood or Belly dance" (Kunnas 2022). Kunnas believes that it is hard to motivate Finns to get interested in the art form, whereas Menon's students, who are from India, already know what to except because they have seen it before. "Students are shocked when they find out that it takes much practise and time to learn classical Indian dances, it is a very rigorous exercise to learn" (Kunnas 2022).

She feels that the students leave when they realise how much commitment it takes to actually learn this dance form. Pärs from Estonia feels lucky that she has had students with patience. Her students have learned this demanding art form for years and have not gotten bored. "It takes much longer to get on stage with Indian classical dance then some other common dance styles" (Pärs 2022).

Mannila pointed out the lack of students in Finland because the scene is very small. She doesn't have enough people to form enough of different levels such as beginners, improvers, intermediate and advanced. This results in putting students of different levels in the same classes. "There is lack of performances where students would be able to see and experience the dance in a proper performance context" (Mannila 2022). Mannila also explained that there are no proper dance performances that could inspire her students.

> Ex. 16: An ideal classical Indian dance performance cannot really be achieved in Finland because the knowledgeable audience and the live music context is missing (Mannila 2022).

The interview also discussed the performing of the classical Indian dances in Finland and Estonia. Panda thinks that classical Indian dances cannot be promoted in Finland because artists can't perform anywhere.

> Ex. 17: The dances should be performed to specific people and specific audience, who have the interest in the dance form and who come to see it. Classical Indian dances can't be performed in shopping malls (Panda 2022).

Menon disagreed with Panda. She believes that wherever classical Indian dances are performed, it is a good thing. Creating dance performances that correlate to Finnish traditions has been Menon's interest. However, she explained that it is challenging for her as a non-Finn to get access to Finnish songs and dig into the Finnish culture. Menon wants to dance to Finnish stories and connect with the audience in Finland. Currently, according to her, those who come to Indian dance shows in Finland are people who already are interested in Indian the culture and the dances. Menon thinks it is important to reach out to Finns who have no knowledge about the Indian dances. She wants those who aren't familiar with Indian culture to get interested in the dance forms. She mentions for example school children.

4.2 Results from the Survey

In this section the result from the questionnaire is presented. The Google form received 12 answers. Despite only a few answers, the survey serves an important function because it gives an image of the classical Indian dance scene in Finland today from the student's perspective. Lotus has an estimation of 20 classical students in Helsinki Fusia has reported to have around 10 students in Tampere. That makes the response rate of this questionnaire high.

Question number 1: I am Indian/Non-Indian
Five of the dancer students who took part in the survey are Indians, seven are non-Indians. (Figure 6)
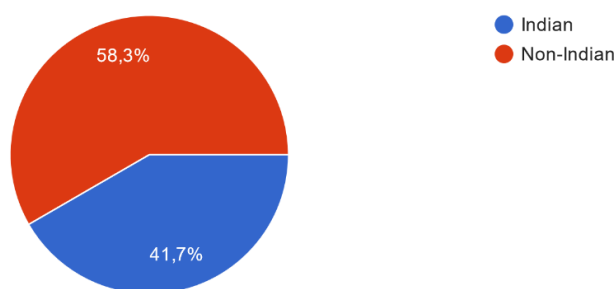

Figure 6. Question 1: I am Indian/Non-Indian

Question number 2: My teacher in Finland tells me about the origin and history of the dance style we are learning in class.
Question number two (Figure 7) asked whether the dance students felt that their teacher told them about the origin and history of the dance style that they are learning in class. The majority answered yes. One Indian dance student answered that her Indian teacher didn't share the history.
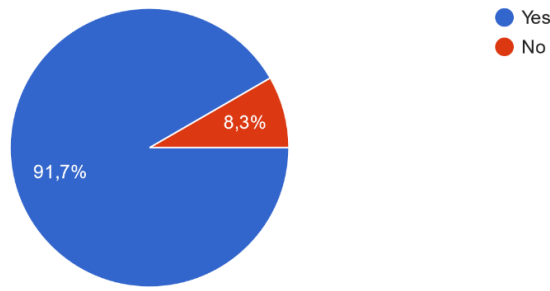
Figure 7. Question 2: My teacher in Finland tells me about the origin and history of the dance style we are learning in class

Question number 3: I think it is important that my teacher tells me about the original context of the dance and its history

As seen in question number 3 (Figure 8), the majority feels that it is important that the teacher tells the students about the original context of the dance. One Indian student didn't feel the need for it.
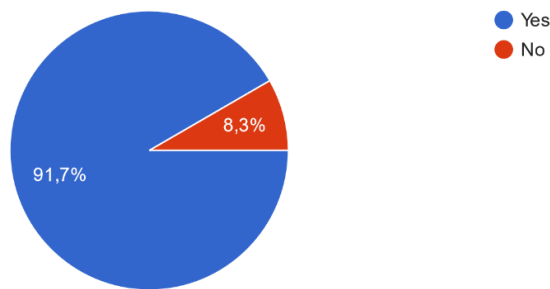

Figure 8. Question 3: I think it is important that my teacher tells me about the original context of the dance and its history

Question number 4: On a scale from 1-4, how interested are you in the authenticity of the dance? 4 being very interested, 1 being not at all interested

Likewise, question number four (Figure 9) shows that most of the dance students finds it very important to learn about the authenticity of the dance styles. One Indian student is not very interested.
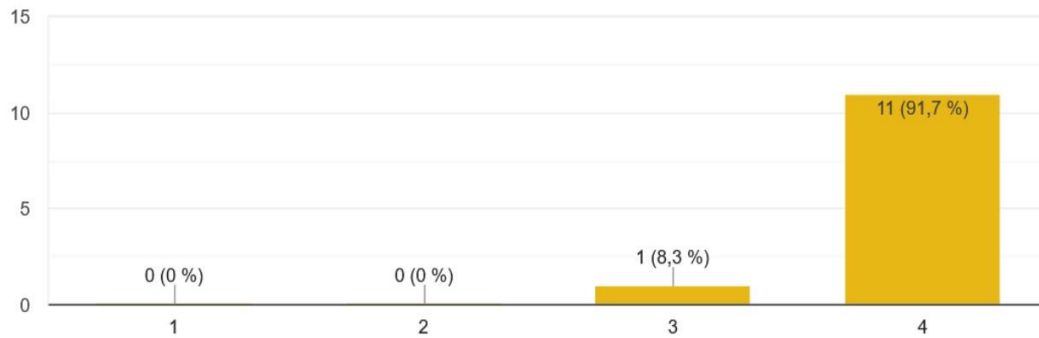
Figure 9. Question 4: On a scale from 1-4, how interested are you in the authenticity of the dance? 4 being very interested, 1 being not at all interested

Question number 5: I prefer that my teacher comes from the country of the origin of the dance form, India

Question five (Figure 10) has divided opinions. Half of the dance students prefer that their dance teacher is from India. For the other half, the origin of the dance teacher doesn't matter. Four out of seven non-Indians prefer an Indian teacher, whereas two of five Indians prefer an Indian teacher.
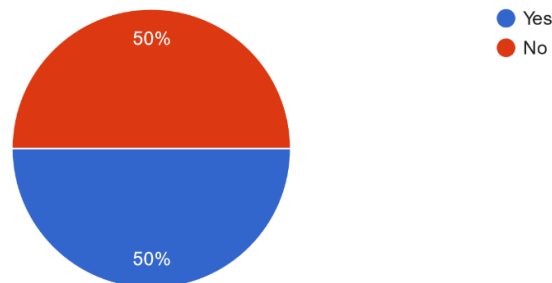

Figure 10. Question 5: I prefer that my teacher comes from the country of the origin of the dance form, India

Question number 6: My teacher is Indian/Non-Indian

In questions six (Figure 11) the dance students answered about the origin of their teacher. Seven out of 12 have a non-Indian dance teacher. All five Indian dance student have an Indian teacher. All Non-Indians have a non-Indian teacher.
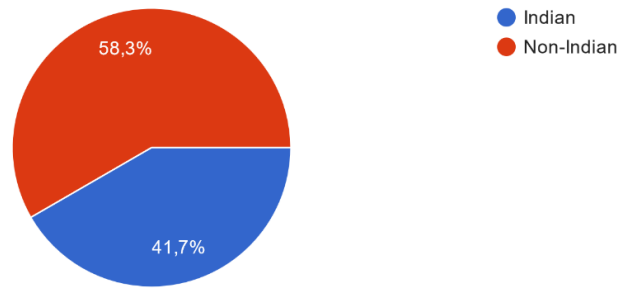
Figure 11. Question 6: My teacher is Indian/Non-Indian

Question number 7: I believe an Indian teacher and/or dancer can deliver authenticity of classical Indian dances better than a non-Indian dance teacher

Seven out of 12 dance students, that is, more than half, believe that an Indian teacher and/or performer can deliver the authenticity better. Four Non-Indians answered yes, only one Indian dance student answered yes. (Figure 12)
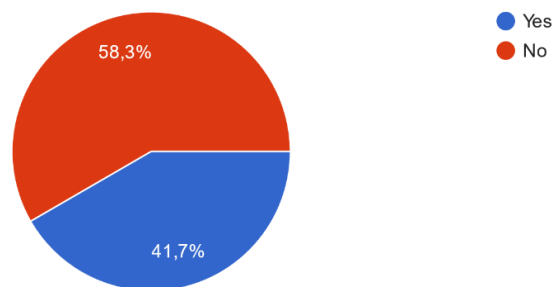
Figure 12. Question 7: I believe an Indian teacher and/or dancer can deliver authenticity of classical Indian dances better than a non-Indian dance teacher

Question number 8: I believe that classical Indian dances can be taught and performed everywhere in the world with the same authenticity as in India

Question eight (Figure 13) wanted to know if the dance students believe that classical Indian dances can be performed anywhere in the world with the same authenticity as in India. Two out of three answered yes. Four Non-Indians and four Indians answered yes. Only one Indian answered no.
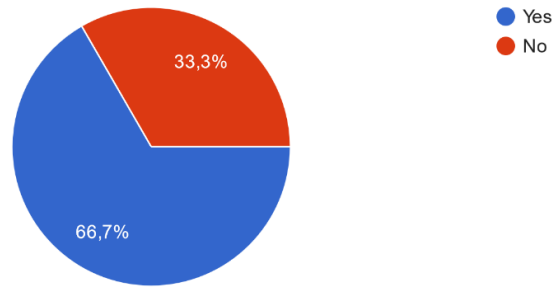
Figure 13. Question 8: I believe that classical Indian dances can be taught and performed everywhere in the world with the same authenticity as in India

Question number 9: I think that classical Indian dances should be performed only by Indians

In question number nine (Figure 14) everyone agrees: classical Indian dances can be performed by anyone, not only Indians.

Figure 14. Question 9: I think that classical Indian dances should be performed only by Indians

Question number 10: I think that classical Indian dances should be preserved as original as possible

Two out of three think that classical Indian dances should be preserved as original as possible. One Indian doesn't agree on this. (Figure 15)
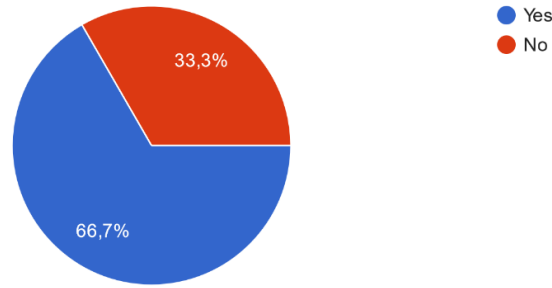
Figure 15. Question 10: I think that classical Indian dances should be preserved as original as possible
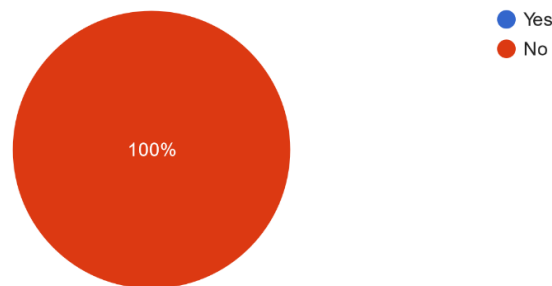
Question number 11: I think classical Indian dances can be adapted to for example Finnish culture and mythologies, there is space for innovation

The majority agrees that there is space for innovation, for example adapting classical Indian dances to Finnish culture and mythologies. All Indian dance students agree on this point, one non-Indian disagrees. (Figure 16)
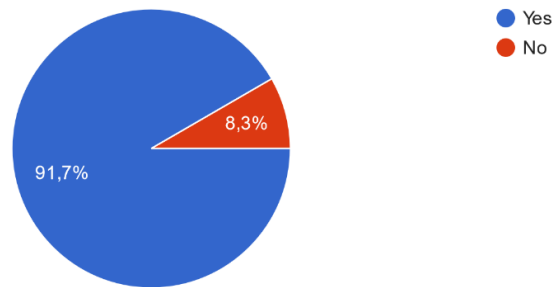
Figure 16. Question 11: I think classical Indian dances can be adapted to for example Finnish culture and mytholo-gies, there is space for innovation

Question number 12: Classical Indian dances can be performed anywhere, for example in shopping malls in Finland

In questions number 12 (Figure 17) two out of three agree that classical Indian dances can be performed anywhere. Two Non-Indians and two Indians answered no.

33,3%

66,7%

Yes
No
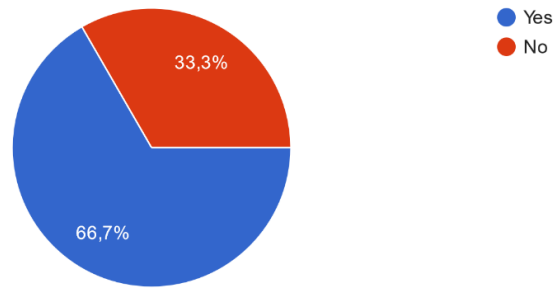
Figure 17. Question 12: Classical Indian dances can be performed anywhere, for example in shopping malls in Finland

Question number 13: I study classical Indian dances online

Half of the dance students are taking online dance classes. The majority are Indian, only one Indian doesn't take online classes. Five Non-Indians doesn't take online classes. (Figure 18)

50%

50%

Yes
No
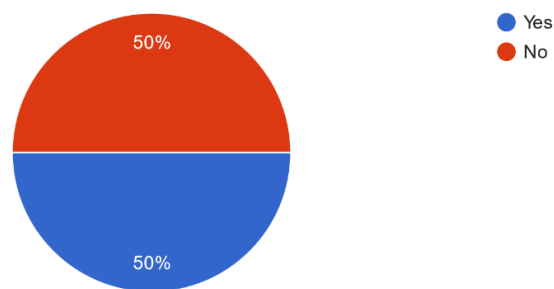
Figure 18. Question 13: I study classical Indian dances online

Question number 14: Online classes are as good as normal live classes

In question 14 (Figure 19) everyone agrees that online classes are not as good as live classes.
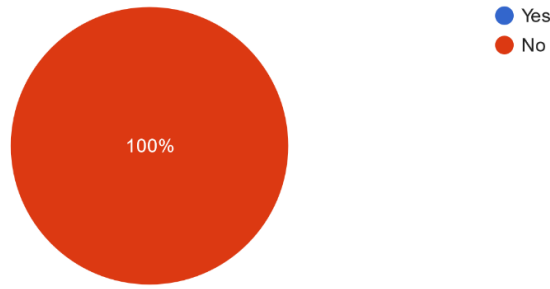
Figure 19. Question 14: Online classes are as good as normal live classes

Question number 15: I get the same feeling and aura of the art when watching classical Indian dance performances from a screen (TV/Laptop/Mobile) as I would get when being in the audience watching a live performance

In question 15 (Figure 20) three out of four dance students answered that they don't get the same feeling of a performance digitally compared to a live performance. One Non-Indian and two Indians answered that they can get the same feeling through a screen.
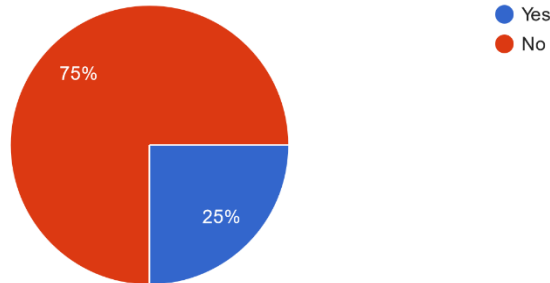
Figure 20. Question 15: I get the same feeling and aura of the art when watching classical Indian dance performances from a screen (TV/Laptop/Mobile) as I would get when being in the audience watching a live performance

Question 16 was a qualitative question. When asked why the dance students take or don't take online classes, they wrote the following:

- I have attended only a few online dances of Indian classical dance and I prefer live ones because the teacher can correct the moves, posture more efficiently. Also learning about expressions online is much harder than it is in a live studio setting.

55

- I'm not taking online classes because I think my foundation in dancing is still not really good. I need more guidance and that is easier face-to-face. I would consider an online class if I got feedback (live situation) and also if the pandemic worsens and that is the only way.
- No corrective immediate feedback, tied to certain angles (as in point of view), hard to get the entire body in the screen with same level of detail as in person
- It is not easy to capture some of the details in online class.
- Often bad internet connection and no space to dance, and I prefer to get personal feedback and corrections which is easier in live.
- It is difficult to arrange time and space for it with small kids in the house.
- There is no space for dancing at my home.
- I take online classes because that is the only option available for me right now and I don't want to stop learning dance.
- I'm taking online classes as there is no other option.
- I want to pursue the art form. Online classes have limitations, but I don't want to create a gap in my studies.
- Because of covid pandemic we had to switch to online class. There was no opportunity for offline sessions.
- Better than nothing.

Some of the anonymous dance students were taking online dance classes and some did not. Many agreed that it is difficult to learn the expressions and perfect postures in online classes. It is difficult to get immediate feedback from the teacher. Also, no space or privacy in home was mentioned and bad internet connection disrupting the learning. Those who are taking online classes wrote that it is better than nothing.

5 ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

This research shows that there are as many opinions about the classical Indian dances, their uniqueness, and authenticity, as there are people. Nothing is black or white and right or wrong when analysing the art form of classical Indian dance. As seen from Lowens prior research about the classical Indian dances, the art has already changed so much in time, that it is difficult to define what is authentic anymore. Most of the professional interviewees agreed on this point. Lowen described, that the dances are evolving as they are living traditions. Dance also reflects society (Lowen 2022). What some might define as authentic Indian dance is not easy to achieve anymore. The visual factors might be there. The dance has come out from the temples and exists today as an art form, not because of a ritual. India as a country has changed, and the times, where dancers of a certain cast that used to live in temples and dance some sort of temple dance, are long gone. The aim of the dance is not anymore to serve the Hindu gods. The civilization has moved forward to current times. As seen in example 1 and 2, the dances are actually constructed after the British occupation, but this image of 2000-year- old, ancient dances is still sold worldwide. It sounds attractive.

Like Gupta explained, this generation is living alongside social media, and classical Indian dances can't serve their former purpose in temples. Rather than trying to be a craftsman, and simply try to preserve the dance as original as possible, dancers should understand they have a responsibility to extend the boundaries and add value to the art, as Gupta described. Then, what is an authentic representation of the dance nowadays?

What the interviewees felt was authentic differed in many aspects. Not all found it important to stick to the original choreographies and use traditional music, but learning the perfect technique, wearing the right costumes, understanding the culture etc. like explained in example 3. was considered important. These factors are still expected by a performer nowadays.

Panda was the only one who mentioned that authenticity can be measured through the exams the dance students in India have to pass. These exams don't exist in Finland. According to her, the most authentic form of the classical Indian dances was when they were kept exactly the same as they have always been.

Her opinion was the opposite of Guptas', even though they represent the same dance form, Odissi. Mannila thought that there is no need to choose between tradition and innovation, both can exist. In Mannilas opinion, dance can evolve. A majority of the dance students in the survey agreed that there is space for innovation and that the dances can be adapted to for example Finnish mythologies. Yet, the majority answered that the dances should be preserved as much as possible in their original form. The teaching and learning about authenticity were found very important.

As Menon pointed out, there will always be people who aren't happy about changes. Those who complain will always find reasons to point out that dancers are insulting and not respecting the traditions enough. In Menon's opinion, no one can own an art form. But if dance is allowed to go anywhere, will it even be recognized as classical Indian dance anymore? If fusion, mixing, and matching is allowed, how can dance remain classical and be called for example Bharatanatyam, if most elements are cut off, like the Hindu stories they have portrayed in temples?

Menon believes that anything genuinely created by an artist is authentic. She didn't find the Hindu mythology as an important part of the dance. Everyone interviewed agreed that religious views of a dancer didn't matter, as long as the artist was able to convey expressions and connect with the audience. Gupta found it very important that the performer is a spiritual person. This means, that the dancer is expected to show some kind of devotional emotions in the dance, not just learn steps. When discussed about the ultimate goal of the classical Indian dances, Panda mentioned it was to portray Indian culture. This shows that Panda has a much more conservative approach to the dance.

Gupta believed that classical Indian dances are supposed to communicate from the heart with the divine, as seen in example 4. He described that the purpose of classical Indian dance is not meant to show off, like Western dances, that are very visual. The ultimate goal is something deeper that the dancer feels. But if dance is not aiming for the visual, is the audience at all needed?

Pärs explained like seen in example 5, that the *rasa* between the performer and the audience created the real *aura* of the dance art. Does this mean, that the *aura* that Benjamin describes, is still existing between a performer and live audience?

But in that case, an audience in India or anywhere else in the world? To be precise, the connection between a knowledgeable audience and the dancer was described as the *aura* of the dance. However, the performances aren't that authentic anymore as what they used to be according to some. Does that mean, that there is no *aura*, if the audience in Finland is viewing the dance without understanding it fully? Can an Indian, sitting in the audience feel the *aura*? Not only in Finland, or anywhere else in the world likewise. Did the art loose its *aura* when it left the original context?

Kunnas found the questions of loss of *aura* difficult to answer, because it is very challenging to define what the original context is anymore. Lowens writings support this, since it is impossible to know how these all eight classical dances actually looked like thousands of years ago. It is also impossible to put the dances back to that context anymore, the kingly courts etc. Does this mean, that the reconstructed classical dances, during the independence movement, are the "new original context"? As seen in example 6, Panda doesn't believe that the dance form exists anymore when it is taken out from its original context. She represents Odissi, the dance form that originates in the temples of Odisha. By saying this, does she mean, that there is no real Odissi anymore, that the dance we see on stage today is something that came out from the original temple dance and is lacking the *aura*? Benjamin agreed that once the art leaves its purpose in ritual and religion, it evolves towards something else, for example politics (Benjamin 1935). Or does she mean, that the only right way of Odissi, with *aura*, is the form that was practised by the senior teacher approximately 50 years ago? Example 8 by Mannila talks about this dilemma. Who decides what is authentic and what is not? Like mentioned before, there are just opinions about art, and they all differ.

This leads us to the question of power of representation. Stuart Hall explains in his theory a very relevant aspect of representation. The word *representation* already contains a "re" in front of presentation, meaning it indicated that something was there already that is now portrayed in a new way. According to Hall, a meaning has already been given to the object in a representation. He argues that nothing has a fixed true meaning before people make up the meaning. However, everyone has their own thoughts and together groups of people can share the same opinions about an objects' meaning (Hall 1997). Everything we know about classical Indian dances have been learnt, it has not been written in humans' genes that this is how the art form should be represented.

Overall, culture is a way to represent the world, to make sense to everything. Thoughts need to be communicated and it is done most efficiently through personal communication between people (Hall 1997). The question becomes, who has the power to circulate what means what? There are always changes happening in history, and if everything would have a thousand different meanings, there would be absolute chaos. Throughout history, humans have tried to fix the issue, meaning, stop the flow of meanings. This has always been done through power and ideology. In Indian dances, the senior teachers used to hold the power. In todays' world, it is not that clear anymore since the new teachers create their own styles, like Menon.

Now, if Stuart Halls theories are applied to the representation of classical Indian dances, we can see that there has been attempts to give the dance form a certain meaning, not only by the senior teachers. The Natya Shastra, the Bible of performing arts, described the perfect image of a classical Indian dancer thousands of years ago. Menon and Gupta pointed out that there are still teachers in India who try to stick to the old norms, senior and new teachers. They believe in this ideology that everything should be preserved as original as possible, and as Gupta explained, this might have to do something with the proudness of exhibiting something truly Indian, which arose during the Independence move. Menon found this way of thinking very narrowminded.

But what if I, a teacher of Indian dances in Finland, start to teach something completely different than what I was taught? What if I create my own meaning of the dances, how they are, how they should look like etc? My dance students might develop an image of a dancer that is very unlike the stereotypical picture of a temple dancer that has been living on for years.

Today, when someone hears the word "classical Indian dancer", they might immediately think about an Indian looking person representing the image. Customers who order Bollywood dance shows want the performers to look Indian, because they might think that this is a way of showing respect to the Indians. However, all the professionals agreed that the dance form can be presented by any nationalities. In todays' world, it is also too narrowminded to assume that all Indians are looking like the stereotypical image. Someone can be Indian yet have a pale white skin.

The media represents a certain image of Indians. After travelling around India in all these years, I have noticed, that every state inhabits people from different ethnicities, religions, and traditions.

Creating an ideal image of classical Indian dances is not bound to origin, ethnicity, or skin colour according to the professionals. Yet, the survey shows, that a big number of dance students believed that an Indian teacher and performer can represent the art in a more authentic way. Is it because the meaning and images that they have created in their minds? What if the Indian teacher has very poor technique compared to a Finnish teacher, but has perfect expressions? Some dance students even preferred an Indian teacher. What is curious, is that most of them were Finnish. The survey also showed, that all Indian had an Indian teacher and all non-Indians had a non-Indian teacher. Is it a coincidence? I don't think so. I believe these are choices people have made.

As the dance forms originate in India, it was relevant for the research to discuss what the professionals feel about cultural appropriation. Menon pointed out that in her opinion India was a privileged country and that appropriation shouldn't be a problem in her opinion. Everyone agreed that as long as a performer does justice to the art form, there are no issues. The problems arise when someone is doing something inappropriate or insulting. As Kunnas explained, the classical dances are already a revived art form and cultural appropriation has already happened in India during the independence move among Indians. The discussion about cultural appropriation became short, as there were not seen any big issues that was described by Lenard about the topic. The survey also shows that all of the dance students agreed that the dance can be done by anyone. Example 11 also shows that Gupta thought it was bizarre in todays' world to question why someone wouldn't have the rights to learn and be part of somebody else's culture.

Likewise, Lowen described the importance of cross-cultural education and interaction. In her opinion, especially children should be encouraged to learn about different cultures because it strengthens their connection to the world. Cross-cultural interactions create empathy and understanding, which is very much welcomed in todays' world. It is also more socially sustainable. If everyone would get to experience multiculturality, others wouldn't be experiences as exotica.

Exotism was also mentioned by Mannila. In example 7 we see that when the dances are taken out from their original context, the *aura* easy transform into exotism. What does Mannila mean by this? She, like everybody else interviewed, knows the importance of the audience. That is an important part of the performance's context. When classical Indian dances are performed in for example Finland, in places where the knowledgeable audience is missing, the ones who see the dance might just find it exotic and interesting. It doesn't serve the deeper meaning. That is why Panda explained, that when she performs in India, where the audience is born and brought up the culture, the performance is much more authentic. When performing to a foreign crowd or outside India, according to her, expressing is tough. I believe she refers to the *rasa*, the connection with the audience. That is why Panda explains, like seen in example 17, that the classical Indian dances should be performed to specific people and specific audience, who have the interest in the dance form and who come to see it because of interest. She would not perform in for example shopping malls. Gupta agreed when saying that the reason to do dance is to communicate an idea, and therefore the audience should be educated. For some professionals it didn't matter, where the dances are showcased, for others it was of big importance to only perform for the knowledgeable audience. The majority of the dance students believed that classical Indian dances can be performed anywhere without limits.

It is a challenge to get a knowledgeable audience anywhere in Finland, and the question is, should the dances be performed at all? The interviewees had different opinions. Lowen has always encouraged her students to perform in various occasions. She mentioned retirement homes for the aged and children's cancer wards. Is the *aura* present in these occasions, or does it even matter? A dancer has to start their career somewhere. It is not possible to become a master performer without experience, no matter how many levels completed, and certificates achieved.

If someone says that the dance forms should be kept as traditional as possible, what will they think of the new digital era? Today, anyone can marvel the dances on for example YouTube and copy moves as they like. The importance of the student-teacher relationship described by Lowen might be changed. Performers post their dance videos and pictures all around social media. Apart from the new generation, there has been a change among the senior teachers in India as well in the past few years.

Digitalization of the classical Indian dances wouldn't have been a big topic some years ago, but since the pandemic Covid-19 the discussion has started. Both professionals and dance students agreed that online classes aren't as good as live classes. Some interviewees thought that it is just a temporary tool that was created to keep the dance style alive during the times when people were forced to stay at home. Gupta explained digital dance classes in humoristic way in example 13; he compared them with a crutch. Everybody, both professionals and students, agreed that the learning is not as efficient and that it is hard to follow the improving of the learning. Most teachers wouldn't want to teach beginners online.

Social media is full of dance clips and the classical dances have also transferred to the screens. Because the screentime is so short, dances have to aim for the spectacular in just seconds. Traditionally the dances would create a connection between the audience and the dancer for hours. Thinking of this, most professionals agreed with Walter Benjamin's theory of the loss of *aura*. The feeling cannot reach the audience through a screen, it is not the same as being physically in the audience, the same time and space. The dance students agreed on this. Examples 14 and 15 describe how a live performance differs from a digital performance. It is the same as comparing theatre to film, as Benjamin describes in the 1930s.

Digitalization was however not considered to be completely useless. Many agreed that teachers get new ideas and tools for teaching from online platforms, and the social media helps to spread the knowledge and interest of the dance forms. Digitalization can also be considered more sustainable for the environment, because the students won't have to travel that far to get the knowledge and the learning.

Together with all the aspects mentioned, it is challenging to represent classical Indian dances in Finland. It is challenging for both teachers, performers and students, non-Indians, and Indians. Apart from culture and language barriers, it is also difficult to engage non-Indians to the Hindu mythology. There are Indian teachers and non-Indians, mostly Finns, teaching in Finland. Still, there was no hostility or competition mentioned in the interviews. It seems like the professionals in Finland, from different nationalities, work in harmony.

There is a lack of students in Finland that all teachers struggle with, and it is challenging to find more people who would get interested in the dance form. It is also challenging for the dance students to improve.

Is Finland at all suitable for classical Indian dances? The research doesn't give any specific answer, just a number of opinions that do have motivations. Teachers must compromise and as shown in example 16, authenticity cannot really be achieved in Finland. Is there even a need to make the dance scene bigger? Probably not in my opinion since there aren't resources enough. On the other hand, more interested students, Indian or non-Indians, would create more competition and that could increase the quality. That would be an increase in authenticity for those who want to respect the roots and preserve the dance styles, and there would also be room for exploring and innovating. That said, engaging more people to the secrets of Indian dance culture would boost the whole dance scene in Finland. Dance could be used more in cross-cultural communications, for example in schools for children. From my experience, this model has already been adapted in some multicultural schools in Helsinki region.

Classical Indian dances originate in India, as Panda mentioned, as seen in example 12, the roots should be respected, and the credits should go to Indians. We might have lost some holiness during the transition, but there seems to be artists who value both the visual and the spiritual. What they should have in common, is the knowledge and understanding of the dance forms, and respect. Every artist creates their own meaning and value to their art. Who knows, maybe the representation is something completely different after 10 years?

This research made my colleagues, the professional teachers, to think about the aura and authenticity of classical Indian dances. Walter Benjamin's theory of *aura* was not familiar to most, but I hope the interviews left a mark in them. Therefore, I recommend, that artists, who work with ancient dance forms that are rooted to specific cultures, would dig into the analysis of Benjamin's *aura*. It made me think differently about my daily profession.

Like it or not, the digital era is here to stay, and therefore the *aura* of the art is lost. Some particles of *aura* might though be found in a live performance though.

Artists in Finland can ponder upon the reasons why they perform classical Indian dances, and when the purpose is clear, the occasion where the dances are performed (or will not be performed) will be easier to choose. But like Lowen puts it, a lifetime is not enough to learn all aspects of arts knowledge and related fields that one needs. The next generations will most likely have a very different view of seeing classical Indian dances. If they are at all called classical anymore. Is there even a need to separate classical and folk dances? They are the same, dances that portray the versatile culture of India. The world classical, and the meaning, was given to the temple dances to boost their value in a Western perspective, thanks to the colonial rule. In my opinion, that doesn't fit to the values that are appreciated today.

6 CONCLUSION

How can the classical Indian dances, a key cultural heritage of India, be represented and reproduced outside their original context? There are many different aspects to this and no directs answer, but most importantly: with respect, knowledge and understanding.

The study focused on diving into the challenges artists, both Indian and non-Indian, face in their work in Finland. The goals were achieved, and the research gave perspective to the status of the classical Indian dance scene in Finland.

Classical Indian dances change with time. They have changed and will continue to change. The dancers themselves are products of their generation, and the original context of the dances doesn't exist anymore. Temple dancing is not anymore a common profession and the dance has left its ritual purpose, but the worship is in some way always attached to the dances on a spiritual level.

Authenticity is hard to define because the dances have changed and are still changing. The original context of the dances is challenging to define. They are living traditions and there is space for innovation. There are only opinions of what an authentic form of classical Indian dance is. Right technique, costume, choreography and music can create authenticity visually. The meaning of the representation is created by humans. The representation changes with time. What once was described in the Natya Shastra is not entirely relevant anymore. There will always be people who criticise and try to stick to what they feel is original authenticity.

Anyone can represent the art form, regardless of skin colour, origin, and religious views. The representation must be done respectfully and with a critical eye. The dancer should make an effort of exploring the Indian culture, understand its history, norms, and regulations before spreading the art form. It is important to understand the topic cultural appropriation, however, classical Indian dances are not the target for accusations if done in a respectful way. Cross-cultural communication is valuable and dance is an excellent method to it.

The age of digital reproduction kills the aura of classical Indian dances. Teaching classical Indian dances online is considered a temporary solution due to the pandemic and the emotional connection between a student and a teacher is missing in this setting. For a dancer to feel the art form, it is crucial that the mentoring happens face to face. There is anxiety among the artists, that if there is no control over the dance students, the quality will decrease, and the representation of the art will worsen. Therefore, it is recommended that only experienced dance students can utilize online classes. It can be an easy access for further learning, but they should return to the live student-teacher learning whenever possible.

The paradox is, that digital platforms help to spread the art globally, but the more it is practised, the more quality of the dance art decreases. Yet, the dance styles have developed skill and repertoire wise in the past 50 years. What is lacking in a virtual setting is the spirit and the ability to engage the audiences. The emotional connection can rarely reach the spectator through a screen. Classical Indian dances should be experiences in a live context, otherwise there is no *aura.*

Representing a culture always brings challenges. The classical Indian dance scene in Finland is very narrow. Only those who already know about the art form or have an interest in India are engaged. This applies for both learning the dance and experiencing it from the audience. Together with an audience which doesn't have knowledge about the art form, the purpose of engaging the viewer providing internal, deep, spiritual connection is lacking and can be replaced with an exotic appearance.

The training of classical Indian dances is rigorous, and it is challenging to engage Finns on long term. It is too much work and requires deep commitment. There are not many, if at all, classical shows in Finland, and students cannot get inspired by professional role models. Therefore, the art is not spreading, and the lack of students cause that there aren't many levels of dance classes and possibility for the dancers to improve. A solution would be to promote the dances more widely.

An ideal authentic performance of classical Indian dance is merely impossible to achieve in Finland. The knowledgeable audience together with live music is missing.

Artists need to compromise constantly. A dancer should ponder upon the purpose of performing; is it purely for entertainment or for connecting to higher meanings? Rather than worrying about the representation regarding looks, the dancer should think about the places where the dance form is performed, whether it is in different venues physically or on social media. It is vital to comprehend that the classical Indian dances have a deep history and a strong connection to Indian identity. Even though times are changing, and art doesn't belong to anybody's copyright, it is a polite courtesy to emphasize the holiness of the art form, rather than making it entertaining and exotic. When representing classical Indian dances in Finland, it should always be done with respect and credits should be given to the original birthplace of the art form.

6.1 Further Work

This thesis is focusing only on classical Indian dances in Finland. I would recommend further work on exploring the challenges the other Indian dance forms are facing today. One interesting research topic, that I encountered during my stay, would be to dive into the depths of folk dances, such as Kalbeliya dancers in Rajasthan, India. These snake charmers, who used to live like nomads before, have suffered an enormous loss in income due to the pandemic since 2020. The Kalbeliyas make their income on tourist shows and teaching international students who used to visit them for dance classes. Specially the aspect of cultural appropriation in the case of Kalbeliyas is interesting. The same conclusion this thesis comes to about the rights of representation is not necessarily the same for the Kalbeliyas, who used to belong to the lowest casts and communities in India.

I would also like to recommend more research about the digitalization of dance, especially focusing on the teaching of the dance. Will there be any issues in the dance scene that reflect the times of the pandemic, that will show up later in time? It would be interesting to adapt research to any other heritage dance form in the world.

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APPENDICES

Questions for the Interviews:

Authenticity, Aura and Preservation:

1. How can one define what is an authentic performance of classical Indian dance? What would make an ideal performance in your opinion? How is authenticity important to you and your work?

2. What happens with the aura and authenticity of the art of classical Indian dance, when it is taken out from its original context?

3. Do you think that classical Indian dances should be preserved as they are?

Representation and Cultural Appropriation:

4. Are Classical Indian dances made for anyone to perform? Does skin colour, origin, or religious views matter? What are your thoughts on cultural appropriation?

Transition to New Digital Era:

5. In the new digital era, dances are taught and performed online. What are your thoughts on this? What made you start giving online dance classes? What happens with the authenticity of the dance? Can the viewer feel the aura through a screen?

Challenges in Finland:

6. What are the challenges in teaching classical Indian dance in Finland?

Questions for Thesis Research (Google Survey)

by Mikaela Jokinen / Arcada University of Applied Sciences

Classical Indian dances in Finland

1. I am: Indian / Non-Indian
2. My teacher in Finland tells me about the origin and history of the dance style we are learning in class: Yes / No
3. I think it is important that my teacher tells me about the original context of the dance and its history: Yes / No
4. On a scale from 1-4, how interested are you in the authenticity of the dance? 4 being very interested, 1 being not at all interested
5. 5. I prefer that my teacher comes from the country of the origin of the dance form, India: Yes / No
6. My teacher is: Indian / Non-Indian
7. I believe an Indian teacher and/or performer can deliver authenticity of Classical Indian dances better than a non-Indian dance teacher: Yes / No
8. I believe that Classical Indian dances can be taught and performed everywhere in the world with the same authenticity as in India: Yes / No
9. I think that Classical Indian dances should be performed only by Indians: Yes / No
10. I think that Classical Indian dances should be preserved as original as possible: Yes / No
11. I think Classical Indian dances can be adapted to for example Finnish culture and mythologies, there is space for innovation: Yes / No
12. Classical Indian dances can be performed anywhere, for example in shopping malls in Finland: Yes / No
13. I study Classical Indian dances online: Yes / No
14. Online classes are as good as normal live classes: Yes / No
15. I get the same feeling and aura of the art when watching Classical Indian dance performances from a screen (TV/Laptop/Mobile) as I would get when being in the audience watching a live performance: Yes / No
16. Why I take online classes or why I don´t take online classes

Sammanfattning på svenska

Kulturarv i förändring - Utmaningar med att representera klassiska indiska danser i Finland

Det är utmanande att representera klassiska indiska danser i Finland. Det uppstår många intressanta frågor när man diskuterar de indiska danserna och deras äkthet när de framförs i olika sammanhang och under olika omständigheter. Vad händer med dansens djupa väsen, auran och autenticiteten när danserna återskapas utanför sitt ursprungliga sammanhang? Vem får representera danserna? Med ett allt mer digitaliserat samhälle sprids dansen snabbt till olika plattformar. Som alla konstformer, har klassiska indiska danser förändrats genom åren och nu, med Covid-19-pandemin, har lärare tvingats streama sina dansklasser online. Klassiska indiska danser tvingas utvecklas och anpassa sig till moderna tider.

Syftet med forskningen är att undersöka vad autenticitet betyder för dansen och vilka element som skapar en veritabel upplevelse i professionella dansares ögon. Forskningsfrågan för min avhandling är: "Hur kan de klassiska indiska danserna, ett centralt kulturarv i Indien, representeras och reproduceras utanför sitt ursprungliga sammanhang?". Examensarbetet söker även svar till följande frågor:

- Vad krävs för att skapa en autentisk upplevelse av en klassisk indisk dansföreställning?
- Hur förändras dansens aura?
- Spelar dansarens ursprung, hudfärg eller religion roll när man presenterar klassiska indiska danser?
- Hur påverkar digitaliseringen autenticiteten och auran av klassiska indiska danser när de lärs ut och framförs virtuellt?
- Vilka är utmaningarna med att representera klassiska indiska danser i Finland?

Den huvudsakliga metoder en semistrukturerad intervjuer som kompletteras med ett stödjande frågeformulär för elever av klassisk indisk dans. De intervjuade är professionella dansare från Indien, Finland och Estland. Intervjuerna gjordes via Zoom och transkriberades, förutom två som svarade direkt per e-post. Eleverna som deltog i frågaformuläret dansar huvudsakligen i Fusia och Lotus Indian Dance Centre.

Det teoretiska ramverket som valts för denna avhandling bygger på välkända teorier. Walter Benjamins teori om konst i den mekaniska reproduktionens tid (1935), närmare bestämt hans begrepp om aura och autenticitet. Stuart Halls representationsteori är också väl lämpad och relevant för forskningen. Sharon Lowens kunskap om de klassiska indiska danserena och hennes syn på tvärkulturalism har använts. Slutligen används begreppet kulturell appropriering av Patti Tamara Lenard eftersom det också är ett viktigt begrepp som används i analysen.

Arbetet fokuserar endast på de klassiska indiska danserna, vilka är: Bharatanatym, Kathak, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Manipuri, Mohiniattam, Odissi och Sattriya. Folkdanser samt moderna filmindustri danser (t.ex. Bollywood) hör inte till denna forskning. De klassiska indiska danserna är gamla. Efter att ha vårdats i templen och de kungliga hoven, drabbades de indiska danserna av en vändning under kolonialstyret. Konstformerna återupplivades under den nationalistiska rörelsen och därefter startade en dansrenässans i Indien efter självständigheten. Detta var en del av sökandet efter den sanna indiska identiteten under kampen för självständighet. Idag dansas de på scen runtom världen samt i alla sociala medier.

Professionell dansare Sharon Lowen har skrivit ett flertal artiklar, hållit flera konferenser relaterade till konstformerna och anses vara en levande legend i Indien. Hon forskar fortfarande hur klassiska danstraditioner har rekonstruerats och hur tvärkulturell kommunikation genom klassiska indiska danser kan tillämpas idag.

Walter Benjamin har skrivit många inflytelserika och banbrytande essäer om konst och filosofi. De har inspirerat forskning runt om i världen i flera år. I sin framstående essä "Konstverket i den mekaniska reproduktionens tid" från år 1935 diskuterar Benjamin idén om aura, konstens unikhet,i samhälle, kultur och konst. Hans idé om förlusten av aura vid mekanisk reproduktion är relevant i denna forskning. Benjamin hävdade att de tidigaste konstverken har sitt ursprung i en rituals tjänst, att de var avsedda att tjäna i en kult. Likaså skapades tempeldanserna i Indien för att ha en relation och kommunicera med det gudomliga. Benjamin beskrev att konsten har blivit allt mindre bunden till andlig eller rituell tjänst. Han skrev att konstverk upplevs och värderas på olika plan, de har ett kultvärde och utställningsvärde. Benjamin skrev om film, men hans idéer är tillämpliga för dagens online och streamingtjänster. Vad händer med den nära relationen

mellan dansen och publiken när konsten blir digital? Försvinner anknytningen på digitala plattformar? Är det så att i en dansföreställning, där publiken är engagerad i dansaren, finns det aura, medan en inspelning av samma dansföreställning inte har aura? Benjamin hävdade att aura går förlorad i film eftersom publiken är distraherad, vilket betyder att de inte är fokuserade eller närvarande i konstverket, de är inte absorberade i det i samma tid och rum. Benjamin erkände dock, att mekanisk reproduktion har fördelar. Benjamin ogillade att konst endast var tillgängligt för högre klasser, dvs eliten. Han firade idén om att sprida konst till alla. Likaså var tempeldanser i Indien ursprungligen endast för präster och kungar. Nu kan vem som helst njuta av dessa dansformer, konsten är mycket mer demokratiserad nu.

Begreppet representation har kommit att inta en ny och viktig plats i studiet av kultur enligt Stuart Hall. Representation kopplar mening och språk till kultur och är den process genom vilken medlemmar av en kultur använder. Hall menade att objekt i sig inte har någon fast, slutgiltig eller sann mening och att det är vi människor som bestämmer värdet. De betydelser vi skapar kommer alltid att förändras från en kultur eller period till en annan. Eftersom danskonstformen har sitt ursprung i templen i Indien, blir frågan om representation relevant för denna forskning. Detta är direkt kopplat till ämnet kulturell appropriering.

Idag är sociala medier fulla av anklagelser och motanklagelser. Detta problem kallas "kulturell appropriering" skriver Patti Tamara Lenard. Alla typer av handlingar har stämplats som kulturell appropriering: till exempel undervisning i yoga av människor som inte härstammar från den indiska subkontinenten . Samma anklagelser gäller för icke-indier som undervisar och uppträder klassiska indiska danser. Problemet i sin korthet är att många människor runt om i världen uttrycker fientlighet mot invandrare och invandrarkulturer, såväl som mot ursprungsgrupper, samtidigt som de engagerar sig och tillägnar sig dessa andra kulturer. Approprieringsanklagelserna behandlar problematiken av en långvarig historia, där privilegierade individer behandlar de med mindre makt med förakt. Dessa anklagelser säger till exempel att vita människor är bemyndigade och kan göra vad de vill. Indien har en historia av brittisk ockupation. Detta gör det viktigt att undersöka hur appropriation associeras med klassiska indiska danser.

Autenticitet, aura, representation, kulturell appropriering, digitalisering av dans samt utmaningarna danserna möter i Finland diskuterades i intervjuerna. Frågeformuläret omfattade liknande frågor. Denna forskning visar att det finns lika många åsikter om de klassiska indiska danserna, deras unika och autenticitet, som det finns människor. Ingenting är svart eller vitt och rätt eller fel när man analyserar konstformen. Som framgår av Lowens tidigare forskning om de klassiska indiska danserna, har konsten redan förändrats så mycket i tiden att det är svårt att definiera vad som är autentiskt längre. Vad de professionella dansarna ansåg vara autentiskt skilde sig i många aspekter. Det var även svårt att definiera vad som överhuvudtaget är dansens originalkontext och aura.

Att skapa en idealbild av klassiska indiska danser är inte bundet till ursprung, etnicitet eller hudfärg enligt danslärarna. Vem som helst kan representera danserna. Alla var överens om att så länge en artist gör rättvisa åt konstformen är det inga problem. Problemen uppstår när någon gör något olämpligt eller kränkande, då är det kulturell appropriering.

På samma sätt beskrev Lowen vikten av tvärkulturell utbildning och interaktion. Enligt hennes mening bör särskilt barn uppmuntras att lära sig om olika kulturer eftersom det stärker deras koppling till världen. Tvärkulturella interaktioner skapar empati och förståelse, vilket är mycket välkommet i dagens värld. Det är också socialt hållbart.

Den kunniga publiken är viktig. När klassiska indiska danser framförs i till exempel Finland, på platser där den kunniga publiken saknas, kanske dansen bara blir exotisk och intressant och den får ingen djupare mening.

Digitalisering av de klassiska indiska danserna skulle inte ha varit ett så populärt ämne för några år sedan, men sedan pandemin Covid-19 har diskussionen startat. Både danslärarna och danseleverna var överens om att onlinekurser inte är lika bra som livelektioner. De flesta professionella höll med om Walter Benjamins teori om förlusten av aura. Känslan kan inte nå publiken genom en skärm, det är inte samma sak som att vara fysiskt i publiken, i samma tid och rum. Digitaliseringen ansågs dock inte vara helt värdelös. Många var överens om att lärare får nya idéer och verktyg för undervisning från onlineplattformar och de sociala medierna hjälper till att sprida kunskapen och

intresset för dansformerna. Digitalisering kan också anses vara mer hållbar för miljön, eftersom eleverna inte behöver resa så långt för att få kunskapen och lärandet.

Tillsammans med alla nämnda aspekter är det utmanande att representera klassiska indiska danser i Finland. Det är utmanande för både lärare, artister och elever, icke-indier och indier. Det finns en brist på elever i Finland som alla lärare kämpar med, och det är utmanande att hitta fler som skulle intressera sig för dansformen. Det är också utmanande för danseleverna att göra framsteg i lärandet.

En idealisk och autentisk föreställning av klassisk indisk dans är helt enkelt omöjlig att uppnå i Finland. Den kunniga publiken tillsammans med livemusik saknas. Dansarna måste hela tiden kompromissa. En dansare bör fundera över syftet med att uppträda; är det enbart för underhållning eller för att uppnå något personligt heligt och viktigt? Istället för att oroa sig om representationen som gäller utseende, bör dansaren tänka på de platser där dansformen utförs, oavsett om det är på olika platser fysiskt eller på sociala medier. Det är viktigt att förstå att de klassiska indiska danserna har en djup historia och en stark koppling till indisk identitet. Även om tiderna förändras och konsten inte tillhör någons upphovsrätt, är det artigt att betona konstformens helighet, snarare än att göra den underhållande och exotisk. När man representerar klassiska indiska danser i Finland, bör krediter ges till den ursprungliga födelseplatsen av konstformen, dvs. Indien. De klassiska indiska danserna kan representeras i Finland med respekt, kunskap och förståelse.