

# Movements of Interweaving

*Movements of Interweaving* is a rich collection of essays exploring the concept of interweaving performance cultures in the realms of movement, dance, and corporeality. Focusing on dance performances as well as on scenarios of cultural movements on a global scale, it not only challenges the concept of intercultural dance performances, but through its innovative approach also calls attention to the specific qualities of “interweaving” as a form of movement itself.

Divided into four sections, this volume features an international team of scholars uniting to develop a new critical perspective on the cultural practices of movement, travel, and migration in and beyond dance.

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# **Movements of Interweaving**

## **Dance and Corporeality in Times of Travel and Migration**

*Edited by*  
**Gabriele Brandstetter, Gerko Egert, and  
Holger Hartung**

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### Seeing as a mode of stilling mind

*Navtej Singh Johar*

This chapter deals with a personal dilemma—that of being a practitioner of Yoga and *Bharatanatyam* (a form of classical Indian dance) within a socio-political Indian context that has for very long been culturally chauvinistic and now stands on the brink of religious fundamentalism. To my mind, this growth of chauvinism and fundamentalism is a direct result of a progressive collapse between religion and philosophy. Today, Indian philosophy seems to be viewed as less empirical, discursive, or reflexive, since it has come to be so closely associated with religion, doctrine, and myth. My attempt here is to identify and historically trace the monopolistic tendencies of religion and its steady silencing or co-option of rational philosophies into a theistic fold. I will do this by reviewing some philosophical schools that emerged on the Indian subcontinent over the last two millennia, and which offered rational perspectives in opposition to the theistic brand of Indian thought. The differing, radical, even transgressive, metaphysical equations between self and the cosmos that they offered determined a series of shifts in the positioning of the “self” as well as the scope of its reach. However, all these diverse and oppositional perspectives have today been either effectively sidelined or else morphed into what we call “Hinduism.” The blurring of boundaries between “conformist” religious belief and “rational/radical/transgressive” philosophies is troubling and has far-reaching ramifications. It has succeeded in shrinking, if not obliterating, “plurality” within Indian thought, making faith uncomplex and akin to “true-believing,” which can be dangerously predisposed to fundamentalism; furthermore, it has succeeded in reducing philosophical discourse to theology, which then becomes open to moral policing by the heresy-hunters. Thus, with a view to first wresting open a space of philosophical inquiry, and then placing my personal practice of Yoga and dance within such an informed clearance, I proceed to evoke the history of unorthodoxy within systems of Indian thought.

Much has been said about the theistic orthodoxy of India but very little about the alternative perspectives that rejected, dismissed, or ignored this orthodoxy from very early on. Some of these alternate systems did not only express disbelief in the doctrine and supremacy of the *Vedas* or the Brahmanic notions of “purity” and “caste” (upon which mainstream

Brahmanism is based), but some even disavowed belief in God. Somewhere between the eighth and sixth centuries BCE, two schools of thought, the *Charvaka* and the *Samkhya*, emerged on the Indian subcontinent. These schools fall under the category of the rational philosophies called *anviksiki*, which give no credence to the idea of God. Their indifference to God was both significant and radical within the then-prevalent *Vedic* context of “believers” or *astikas*. The *astikas* advocated belief in the authority of God, as well as the hegemony of the Vedas—a set of practices that revolved around the appeasement of volatile gods through intricate, secretive, and highly exclusivist mediations comprising sacrifice and ritual. The efficacy of the Vedic formula depended upon caste purity and the secrecy of knowledge. For this reason, maintenance of caste segregation, morality, and hierarchy was of critical importance.

### The Charvakas

The Charvakas are bold, almost belligerent, in their rejection of both God and the Vedic social order. They not only openly reject but also ridicule the propositions of the Brahmins and their Vedic belief systems, claiming that religion is a human invention. In the *Brihaspati Sutra* (ca. third century BCE), the founder of this school says:

There is no heaven, no final liberation, nor any soul in another world,  
Nor do the actions of the four castes, orders, &c., produce any real effect.

The Agnihotra, the three Vedas, the ascetic’s three staves, and  
smearing one’s self with ashes,

Were made by Nature as the livelihood of those destitute of knowledge  
and manliness [i.e. Brahmin priests].

If a beast slain in the Jyotishtoma rite will itself go to heaven,  
Why then does not the sacrificer forthwith offer his own father?

[...]

Hence it is only as a means of livelihood that Brahmins have  
established here

All these ceremonies for the dead—there is no other fruit anywhere.

The three authors of the Vedas were buffoons, knaves, and demons.

All the well-known formulæ of the pandits, [...].

And all the obscene rites [...],

These were invented by buffoons [for the purpose of] various kinds of  
presents to the priests [...].

Hence in kindness to the mass of living beings must we fly for refuge to  
the doctrine of Chárváka.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to note that though the Charvakas (literally meaning “sweet talkers”) may come across as reactionaries, they are rebels with compelling

cause and serious consequence. Rightfully viewed, they are the first formal dissenters against mechanisms that link religious belief with sociopolitical control—affording the Brahmins the self-appointed power to be the sole mediators between man and the cosmos, simply due to the merit of their birth. Their attack is not only on the power structure, which induces submission or plain oppression, but is based upon a philosophical and philological ground that disagrees with and openly challenges the Vedic mode of knowledge, i.e., that of *vyapti* or “inference.” The Vedas are also called *shrutis*, i.e., that which was “heard” or divined by the *rishis* or “ancient seers.” For the Charvakas, the idea of divining or inferring is spurious and promotes “the inflation of the world of fancy.”<sup>2</sup> They assert that “inference cannot be employed for establishing any dogma regarding the transcendental world, or life after death or the law of *karma* which cannot be available to ordinary perceptual experience.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, they historically disrupt the idealist mode of Brahmanic belief and replace it with an empiricist school of thought rooted in the materiality of the phenomenal world, which considers “perceptual experience” as the only valid mode of inferring knowledge. Out of the informed resistance that they pose, many non-believing traditions of Indian philosophy, or the *nastikas*, emerge—most prominent among them being the *Ajivikas* (who, like the Charvakas, disappeared around the thirteenth century CE), in addition to the Jains and the Buddhists. In fact, the Buddha, the most “god-less and most god-like” person, is also called a Charvaka by many. Interestingly, in the epic *Mahabharata*, a theist narrative, a villain is named Charvaka.

## The Samkhya

The Samkhya philosophy is attributed to the sage Kapila (estimated to have lived around the sixth century BCE), who does not openly reject but totally avoids the idea of God and limits the focus of his inquiry strictly within the confines of the ever-in-flux, phenomenal, material world. Samkhya is committed to the tempering, calibrating analysis and the emphatic observation of matter, which comprises the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, and ether). According to this school, matter can be put through an effective process of calibration and distilled from gross to subtle, transformed from its tangible to its “essential” state, or re-ensconced within its “spiritual” nature. Historically, Samkhya has been co-opted into the theistic fold since the time of the *Bhagavad Gita* (fourth century BCE), a major text that is central to *Vedanta*, the predominant philosophy underlying mainstream Hinduism. Today, many would decree that Samkhya indeed is a theistic philosophy. However, we cannot overlook the fact that two out of the three major existing Samkhya texts, the *Samkhyakarika* (fourth century CE) and the *Tattvasamasa Sutra* (arguably, fourteenth century CE),<sup>4</sup> are absolutely silent on the matter of God, while the third, *Samkhya Pravachana Sutra* (fourteenth century CE), “explicitly reject[s] God,” on the ground that none of the “three means of valid knowledge (*pramanas*) accepted by Samkhya school [...] can establish the existence of God.”<sup>5</sup>

“Samkhya” quite literary means numbers, and it can be said to be a system of numbering or enumerating for the purpose of the organization and reconfiguration of matter. It involves the breaking down of the objective reality into computable units, thereby converting the flux of reality into an infinity of permutations and combinations of dynamic units. These computable units in turn form a multi-graded filter to facilitate a “distillation” process of matter, converting it from gross to subtle. This shifting, sifting, transforming matter can be symbiotically shared by and mirrored in the *mindful observing eye*; thus, the coupling of the distilling calibration of matter, along with the mindful observation of the same, can affect a corresponding distilling shift in the eye, and subsequently, in the mind of the mindful observer.

Another pertinent point upon which Samkhya is based is the theory of cause and effect that rests on the law of causation. This theory states that (a) the effect, no matter how subtle or intangible, is “real”; (b) the effect potentially already exists in the cause, i.e., it is preexisting in the material cause; and (c) the cause is always subtler than the effect. So, if the effect brought about due to the manipulation and reconfiguration of matter at hand is subtle, then the cause that is instigating that material effect is even subtler. In other words, that refined effect will actually be resonant and evocative of an even subtler cause. Then the observation of the distilling matter is not a clinical observation but an empathetic and pondering investigation that is invested in gauging a subtler cause that may surface in the aftereffect of this distilling process. An aftereffect then may coincide with, or at least hover in the vicinity of, the subtle cause. The distilling process, or shall we call it “practice,” can be said to be tantamount to an experiment, which is first performed with utmost care and skill, and whose aftereffects are then observed, absorbed, and further speculated upon to deepen and enlighten the experiment.

What is notable about Samkhya is that it is, in effect, proposing: (a) the tempering of materiality, and (b) a symbiotic relationship between mind and matter. Patanjali’s Yoga—which is a direct offshoot of Samkhya—on the physical plane, might involve the distilling of the material body to become self-aware and sensitive to its inherent intuitive capacities; however, it also affects a simultaneous, symbiotic transformation in the observing mind. The desired transformation in the body/mind that simultaneously becomes the subject and object of observation is due to (a) the distilling capacities of the material body, and (b) the nature of attention which can simultaneously observe the sensory shifts in the body, reciprocally prompt these shifts, as well as register and mirror this sensitization process within the body as it becomes super subtle and arrives unto its inherent “essence” or “spirit.” Essence, or spirit, then becomes realistically achievable, since it is seen as a contiguous extension of matter and not an external, “divine” entity.

The philosophical and political assertions of the Charvaka and the Samkhya, though independent schools of thought, seem to work in tandem.

Whereas the boldness of the Charvakas helps carve an autonomous space for a valid, nontheistic social positioning, Samkhya is able to offer a purely rational philosophy that is untouched by the magical entity of God. The Charvaka is more strident and political, while the Samkhya is committed to offering an alternative and sustainable philosophical system. Considered together, both of these schools mark the start of the Indian materialist and rational traditions. They work together to open valid and informed spaces of resistance and autonomous inquiry independent of belief in God. Together, these schools launched a long line of *nastika*, or quasi-*astika*, traditions of nonbelievers and “abelievers” in India.

### Elimination of *Dukkha*

The last millennium before the Christian era saw the emergence of over half a dozen prominent philosophical movements on the Indian subcontinent. All of them had a common aim: the elimination of suffering or *dukkha*. The opening line of the *Samkhyakarika* (*Samkhya-karika*) of Isvarakrsna (Ishvara Krishna) clearly states this purpose: “From the torment by the three-fold (causes of) pain (there arises) a desire for inquiry into the means of terminating it.”<sup>6</sup> The threefold pain or suffering is categorized as:

- *Aadhyatmik*—or self-suffering due to body and mind afflictions, i.e., illness, insanity, delusion, death, etc.;
- *Aadhibouthik*—suffering due to afflictions by other beings like animals, enemies, etc.;
- *Aadhidaivik*—suffering due to afflictions by nature’s fury like floods, storms, drought, etc.

The first category of self-suffering, *Aadhyatmik*, is further divided into:

- Suffering associated with life processes, such as birth, growing old, illness, and dying;
- Suffering due to anxiety caused by desire to hold onto things;
- Suffering due to a basic dissatisfaction with life that is ever-changing, impermanent, and without any inner core or substance.

Thus, a major part of self-suffering is attributed to (a) the ramifications of flux and the human desire to resist, deny, or control change, and (b) the general emptiness of mundane life caught in the repetitive loop of limited existence. Whatever the affliction or the experience of this suffering, the root cause of all suffering is considered to be conditioning, a result of in-born tendencies and dispositions called *vasanaas*, which are direct results of past karma. Karma means both “action” and the result or “aftereffect” of action. As action, it essentially implies movement in the present moment, which can potentially leave a sensory aftereffect in the mind—due to the

pleasant/painful experiences that it may produce—and thereby program and predispose the mind to subsequent sets of participative or resistive movements. The dual nature of karma then helps loop a pattern of both cause and effect that may lead to the patterning of automated if not compulsive behavior, which in its eventuality can be limiting, self-destructive, and cause for suffering. The Indian remedial strategy across a number of transformative philosophies has been to not tackle the “content” or narratives that compulsively replay in the mind and cause self-suffering (as in the case with psychotherapy) but instead target the medium or the facility upon which these compulsive loops ride. And the remedy is deemed to lie in the disabling or reversing of these mediums or facilities. Since the nature of the loop is to move, the facility of “movement” becomes the point of focus.

Each of the philosophical schools that were prevalent in the subcontinent during the last millennium before the Common Era, namely the *Brahmana* (Hindu), *Jaina* (Jain), and *Bauddha* (Buddhist), devised ascetic practices to counter the consequences of past action by targeting the facility of movement.

The *Yajnavalkyasmṛiti*, a Hindu text, proposes that the seeker-ascetic:

should spend the time with fasts regulated by the moon, or he should continually be engaged in painful exercise. Or, alternatively, he should eat when a fortnight has passed, or when a month, or a day, has passed. Being pure [...] he should perform asceticism in the midst of five fires in summer, lying on bare ground during the rains, and wearing wet clothes in winter, or he should perform asceticism according to his power.<sup>7</sup>

We learn about the Jain ascetic practice through the questioning of the Gautama Buddha:

“Why, dear Niganthas,” [asks Gautama], “are you standing erect, refusing to sit down, and [why] do you experience painful, sharp, severe sensations [...] due to [self-inflicted] torture?” [They answer that Nigantha Nathaputta, the Mahavira, their teacher has said,] “Formerly, Niganthas, you performed sinful activities; you must exhaust that [sinful activity] by means of this severe and difficult practice.” Being here and now restrained in body, speech and mind, amounts to not performing sinful activity in the future.<sup>8</sup>

The Buddha too puts himself through arduous experimentation before he eventually questions the popular notion that “happiness should not be reached through happiness; happiness should be reached through hardship.” The *Ekottara Agama* tells Aggivessana about the Buddha’s experimental meditation without breath and with his food-intake reduced: “‘Aggivessana,’ he says, recounting his experiments with hunger, ‘I shall touch the skin of my belly,’ I got hold of my backbone, [thinking:] ‘I shall touch my



backbone,’ I got hold of the skin of my belly, since, Aggivessana, the skin of my belly had become stuck to my backbone on account of taking so little food.”<sup>9</sup> And at another place, he says: “at that time I thought: ‘Now I can eat a residue of sesamum and rice.’ Then I ate per day one [seed of] sesamum and one [grain of] rice.”<sup>10</sup>

In these examples, arresting movement, enduring severe deprivation, and the self-infliction of physical pain are adopted to either put a stop to the cycle of self-looping karma and/or to thwart the pleasure-seeking, habit-forming, pattern-generating seed of instinct within the body/mind, which is seen as the seat of karma-generation. The target of such physical self-infliction is the seed of willful desire within the body, and it is the thwarting of this seed that is the goal of traumatizing the “field” of the body. Such self-control and self-infliction of discomfort seem to have been common religious practices across cultures throughout history. In fact, submission to painful action or inaction is seen as the way of salvation in many world religions, even today.

However, something then changed dramatically in the spring of 589 BCE. Sitting under the Banyan tree at Gaya, the Buddha reaches enlightenment. After six years of self-torture, he awakens to the fallacy and inefficacy of such practices and makes two revolutionary proclamations: (a) he rejects pain and self-control as means to self-realization, and (b) he declares self-realization to be a pleasant experience. He then offers the practice of four *dhyanas* (literally meaning “meditations”)—*vitarka*, *vichara*, *pitti* (or *preeti* in Sanskrit), and *sukha*—which loosely translate to meditative practices of mindful calibration, reflection, contemplation, and absorption in the state of pleasantness, and finally, absorption in comforting (even pleasurable) repose. The replacement of self-denying practices of pain-infliction, deprivation, and physical arrest with the self-enhancing experiences of deep comfort and pleasurable repose marks a momentous turning point in the history of spirituality and mindfulness and is nothing short of a revolution!

The mindfulness proposed by the Buddha is based not on arresting movement, but instead, on the mindful observation of the movement of the mind. Though the outlook and orientation radically change, movement still remains central to this insightful discovery. The focus shifted from action—which needs to be controlled, arrested, policed, punished, or corrected—to seeing things as they are. Practice now involved refining the quality of seeing, making it un-grasping, un-attaching, un-ambitious, un-reacting, and un-judging, yet fully present, awake, alert, respectful, and sensitive. This practice of mindful observation defines *vipassana* meditation (*vi*, meaning “special,” and *passana*, meaning “seeing”) that is still commonly practiced today, whereby the practitioner submits to detached-witnessing the involuntary movements upon the screen of the mind for long periods of time, with the underlying understanding that these self-generated, involuntary movements that emerge out of the ocean of the mind are actually triggered by the accumulated and embedded *vasanaas*—or tendencies, dispositions, conditioning—of past karma. The practice of the unengaged and un-proactive



witnessing of the externalization of Consciousness upon the mind has a three-pronged effect: (a) it gradually exhausts and disables the vasana-driven involuntary turnings of the mind by not offering it any fuel for attention and engagement (thereby letting it lose its steam); (b) the unflinching-ness of the mindful observing eye begins to mirror the true nature of the self, the uneventful and continuous substrata of being, which is being continuously glossed over by the eventful drama of the compulsive-turnings of the mind; and (c) this unflinching mirroring further anchors the mindful observing eye deeper into its free and autonomous center of initiative, the station of aware/detached selfhood. In doing so, it brings the condition of permanent “uneventfulness” of Consciousness into alignment with the center of selfhood.

### The Yoga Sutras

A few centuries after the Buddha, Patanjali compiled the *Yoga Sutras*, which lay out the philosophy of Yoga. The Yoga of Patanjali is also termed Samkhya Yoga, as it is firmly based upon the philosophy of Samkhya—I would even say that the *Sutras* formally propose the philosophical “practice” of Samkhya. In sutra 1.2, Patanjali defines Yoga as “yoga-citta-vritti-nirodha,” which David Gordon White aptly translates as “the stoppage of the turnings of thought.”<sup>11</sup> More commonly, this sutra is also translated as the “cessation of the fluctuations of the mind,” or “the looping of the mind.” In the same chapter, in sutra 1.20, *Isvarapranidhanadva*, Patanjali categorically states that this ideal state of Yoga can be achieved with or without belief in or surrender to *Iswara*, or God. One may concur that the inclusion of *Iswara* in a Samkhya text, even if optional, could be both in deference to and, at the same time, to mark a differentiation from the theistic twist that Samkhya is accorded through its absorption into the *Bhagavad Gita*. A Vedantic text, it views the self and the cosmos as impossibly unequal and disparately divided between the lower self, called the *atma*, or “soul,” and an authoritative Higher Self, or *Paramatma*, quite literally “God.” The idealized state according to this school is the union of the *atma* with the *Paramatma*, or in simpler words “union with God,” in which the lower self surrenders and supplicates to the Higher Self, losing all distinction and entity. Patanjali’s sutras could then be seen to both delineate a philosophical “practice” based on Samkhya and to reassert the option of a nontheistic spiritual practice by making belief in (and union with) God categorically optional.

Like Samkhya, the philosophical practice of Yoga maintains that both the materiality of the body and the movement of the mind are interdependent. Yoga aims to still and absorb the movements of the elusive mind by focusing observation upon the calibrations that it proposes to exercise on the tangible materiality of the body. The goal of Yoga is the stilling of the mind, and to this end, Patanjali proposes, amongst other observations and practices, *asana* (posture), *pranayama* (breath-meditation), and *dhyana* (absorption). One could claim that *asana*, the submission of the body into a

physical posture (which can be sometimes quite challenging), is reminiscent of the physical austerities of the ascetics mentioned earlier. However, Patanjali categorically qualifies asana as *sthira* and *sukha*, as “stable” and “comfortable.” He does advocate the tempering of the body through physical strife (*tapas*), but categorically requires that the body/mind in asana be not only stable but also in deep comfort. *Sukha* is a difficult word to translate; it can denote a vast range of body/mind experiences, such as comforting, reposeful, contented, contained, serene, pleasant, intimate, and even pleasurable. We see a clear Buddhist influence in the inclusion of *sukha* in the *Yoga Sūtras*. In fact, Patanjali borrows liberally from the Buddhist canon. He transplants the idea of “mindful witnessing of the movements of the mind,” or vipassana, upon the practice of breath-meditation called pranayama. In sūtra 2.50, he lists the various components related to the practice of breath refinement. One of them is *paridrishtah*, a practice of observing the breath as though it belongs to another, i.e., at one remove, detached, unengaged, un-reacting, and un-judging. There is, however, also a significant difference between the two practices. Whereas the Buddha proposes observation of the random and involuntary movements of the mind, Patanjali’s practice involves observing the movement of an instigated breath that has been repatterned using the arithmetical elements of *kala* (time duration) and *saṃkhyā* (number of repetitions), and even “relocated” by placing attention on a particular *deśa* or a prescribed location in the body. Yoga practice, then, does not only involve self-assigned observation but also the observation of the self-instigated movement of breath. The trajectory of spiritual self-upliftment then moves from self-infliction of pain, as in the case with the earlier ascetics, to disengaged witnessing of involuntary movements of the mind, to now disengaged witnessing of voluntarily modulated patterns of breathing.

In the first chapter, Patanjali also offers a modified version of the Buddhist four dhyānas or meditations of vitarka, vichara, pitti, and *sukha*. While he moves *sukha* or repose/comfort out of this four-part model to become an attribute of asana, as mentioned before, he completes the model by replacing it with an even more elevated state of satisfaction, that of *ananda*, “bliss,” or “pleasure.” Thus, we see three parallel and interrelated lines of progression in the evolution of spirituality: the first, centering around the experience of *sukha* or repose; the second, maintaining that the aim of an embodied practice is eventually the mind; and the third, claiming that the stilling of the mind is directly dependent upon detached observation of “movement,” be it involuntary or instigated. *Samkhya* Yoga thus offers a model of spirituality couched in the experience of *sukha*, brought about by mindful observation of the movements of mind and breath.

### Vedantic Commentaries on the *Yoga Sūtras*

The *Yoga Sūtras* spawned a number of commentaries over the next millennium and a half, most of them from the theistic perspective of Vedānta. These

commentaries progressively succeeded in deflecting the “option” of belief in Iswara, or God, which Patanjali offers, by floating a counter speculation about the nature of Patanjali’s Iswara. In his book, *The Yoga Sutra of Patanjali: A Biography*, White offers a series of such readings. He tells us that “the ninth-century Shankaracharya<sup>12</sup> flatly reject[ed] the ‘stoppage of the turnings of thought’ of *Yoga Sutra* 1.2 as a means to release from suffering existence.”<sup>13</sup> Instead, Shankaracharya “devotes the longest passages of his ‘Exposition’ to demonstrating that Patanjali’s Iswara is none other than the supreme being who created the universe and who is the object of Hindu devotion.”<sup>14</sup> White further notes that out of all the *Puranas*,<sup>15</sup> “[n]one respect the *Yoga Sutra*’s account of Ishvara, but rather speak of Yoga as union with a supreme creator god, identified with both the Brahman of Vedanta philosophy and either Vishnu, Shiva, or Devi, the three supreme deities of Hindu theism.”<sup>16</sup> White continues by explaining that in the year 1340, Madhavacharya, the author of the *Sarva-Darsana-Samgraha* [Compendium of All the Systems]:

tailored Yoga philosophy to conform to Vedanta doctrines. So it is that while he supported Vyasa’s<sup>17</sup> emphatic reading of the *Yoga Sutra* 1.2—that Yoga was to be defined as Samadhi and *not* union—he nonetheless argued [...] that the word samadhi itself could also be read to mean “union.” In the same spirit of devotion that was the hallmark of medieval Hindu theism, but not of Patanjali’s system, Madhava equated Ishvara with Krishna [...].<sup>18</sup>

In fact, by the tenth century, even the personage of Patanjali is mythologized. Notwithstanding the fact that he not only does not advocate the idea of God, but does not ever divulge his creed, getting decorated with *Vaishnava* symbols of conch and disc (the iconographic accretions of the Hindu god, Vishnu). The repeated, if not relentless, speculation over the exact nature or identity of Patanjali’s Iswara succeeds in overshadowing, if not overwriting, the original definition of his Yoga, according to which God is optional within the project of spiritual enlightenment. A radical option that is categorically areligious and based on the rational philosophy of Samkhya is obscured and replaced by the theistic definition of “yoga as union with God.” The sophisticated and rationalistic philosophical model of Patanjali’s practice thus begins to appear theistic to popular perception. In fact, when Hegel put together a history of world philosophy in the early nineteenth century, he seriously considered including the *Yoga Sutras*, but after much deliberation decided not to on the grounds of its being religious. As White tells us, “the Indian mind,” as Hegel saw it, “was nonphilosophical, with what passed for Indian philosophy being nothing more than Indian religion.”<sup>19</sup>

### ***Kashmir Shaivism***

The last philosophical school that I am going to touch upon is that of Kashmir Shaivism (a monist Tantric Shaiva school that emerged in Kashmir

around 850 CE), and I will, in particular, talk about the theory of *Pratyabhijna* that branches out of it. Kashmir Shaivism is a non-dualistic, monistic school of “abstract theism” that firmly believes in the human capacity of transformation through a process of poetic consummation between the self and the cosmos. According to this school, the embodied being is a microcosm of the cosmic macrocosm, and the essence of the cosmos is Consciousness. The school makes bold to assert a reciprocal identification between the two, i.e., the self and Consciousness. *Siva* is viewed as this Consciousness, and thus the aim of Kashmir Shaivism is to become aware of, identify with, and thus become an integrated partner, as opposed to part, of this Consciousness. Consciousness and Awareness thus become two mirroring streams of parallel engagement, the synchronicity of which could be stilling, enlightening, and infinitely pleasurable. Awareness of the self as penultimate Consciousness (*caitanyamatma*<sup>20</sup>) is however not a straightforward or linear affair. “It is in the context of elaborating this cosmogony—narrated entirely in terms of Consciousness and its non-duality—that Abhinavagupta [the venerable votary of this school] is able to expound a spiritual perspective in which the usual notions of the person, of time, of language, of sexuality—in fact all aspects of reality—are reversed. This reversal contributes directly to the transgressive posture taken by the realized individual toward the Embodied Cosmos (*kula*).”<sup>21</sup> The *kula* is the body, the clan, the community that not only provides and facilitates but also restricts and binds to social norm and convention. Without going deeper into the complexity of this school, we can suffice to say that transgression of norm, which in the premodern Indian context was closely tied to caste segregation and purity, was central to this school. Moreover, this school, which accords *Siva* the status of Cosmic Consciousness, is theistically abstract or complex and definitely paradoxical, as it proactively invites the involvement of all that is socially transgressive and taboo, including sex, death, liquor, meat, and even body fluids. Thus, it is a path of no-holds-barred pursuit of enlightenment that does not defer to the decorous niceties of social order, but which, as we shall soon discover, hinges on the resonant delicacy of poetics and aesthetics.

The leitmotif underlying all schools mentioned in this chapter has been to temper perception and draw attention to and attend upon the continuous mediums and facilities, upon which the essential givens such as the mind, thoughts, feelings, and breath ride. These underlying, involuntary facilities are consistent, subtle, and pervasive, to the point of being imperceptible and thus easily blanked out or else taken for granted—e.g., the movement of the ever-in-flux nature of matter, the involuntary movement of thoughts on the screen of the mind, the continuous inward/outward movement of the breath, and the all-expansive, continuous Consciousness. The one difference between the prior schools and Shaivism is that, while movement, breath, the mind, and thoughts pertain to the individual, Consciousness is universal and co-shared by the individual and the cosmos, thus being intrinsically expansive and one! In order to enter that vast, if not infinite, realm of the

all-inclusive, pervasive Consciousness, the “I-ness” within this school has the sanction to reject exclusivist social norms such as caste and creed, mentioned before. As opposed to being two separate smaller/bigger, inferior/superior, mortal/divine halves, the self and the cosmos are, in this case, contiguously, equally, and even viscerally mixed as One. Consciousness then is not a superior superimposition from the top as in the case of God-centric religions, and the aware self is indeed that cohesive I-ness that reflexively perceives and holds “the world in its active multiplicity [as] a real manifestation (*spanda*) [literally meaning “vibration”] of a single conscious essence.”<sup>22</sup>

*Pratyabhijna*, which according to Raffaele Torella, “constitutes one of the highest and most original moments of all Indian thought,”<sup>23</sup> is quite literally a theory of “re-cognizing” this free, fluid, and, most importantly, reciprocal correspondence between the self and Consciousness, which results in a cohesive sense of I-ness. “[*P*]ratyabhijna means ‘backward (*pratipam*) knowing (*jnana*) a thing while being in front of it (*abhimukhyena*).’”<sup>24</sup> It thus involves a backward progression of becoming re-known-to, re-called-to, or re-cognizing an abiding, continuous, yet forgotten, reality when ushered into a resonant interface with a sensory “spectacle” (either real or visualized) that is evocative of the cohesive I-ness.

What is of note is that the spiritual cohesion is brought about through the means of a resonant spectacle that could be made up of imagery spun out of words, sounds, textures, sensations, or visuals. A spectacle made up of stuff from the manifest reality could be engaging, even gripping at the mundane level, but at the subtler level of abstraction, it could then become engrossing in a disorienting manner and make attention open to the draw of an inner calling that retains the memory of a more cohesive sense of I-ness. The operative shift then takes place in the manner of seeing—from cognition to a specialized manner of recognitive recollection or reflection. And such a reflexive and transformative shift in the eye while viewing a resonance-filled spectacle is inherently poetic and aesthetic. Art then becomes the means to orchestrate Awareness by becoming an effective reminder of something that is integral, continuous, and abiding within the human condition; which is to say, it offers some kind of a “home-coming” experience. For this reason, according to Kashmir Shaivism, spirituality is inherently and intrinsically an aesthetic and poetic enterprise that offers the experience of *vishranti*, a deeply satisfying experience that is simultaneously filled with awareness and aesthetically pleasurable repose.

### Abhinavagupta

We cannot talk of Kashmir Shaivism without mentioning its most notable votaries, the tenth-century Shaiva master, philosopher, mystic, aesthete, and multifaceted genius, Abhinavagupta. Strongly influenced by Buddhist logic, he emerges as one of India’s most prominent philosophers and literary critics. There are more than forty major texts ascribed to his

name, which cover topics such as metaphysics, *tantra*, Yoga, logic, poetics, and aesthetics, almost all of which are exhaustive and remain authoritative to this day. Notable amongst these, and also pertaining to this chapter, are: the *Tantraloka*, an encyclopedic treatise on tantra, which also includes an explicit chapter on “ritual sex”; a commentary on the *Dhvanyaloka*, which proposes a revolutionized Sanskrit literary theory, claiming that the main goal of poetry is the evocation of a mood or “flavor” (*rasa*), and that this process can be explained only by “recognizing” a semantic power of suggestion beyond denotation and metaphor; and last but not least, the *Abhinavabharati*, the monumental commentary on the *Natyasastra*, the treatise of Indian performing arts (second century BCE to second century CE, attributed to Bharata Muni) in which he explains the *rasa sutra*, or the “*rasa* theory,” in consonance with the theory of poetics, that of *abhivyakti*, or “expression and resonance,” propounded by Anandavardhana (820–890 CE) in his *Dhvanyaloka*. One of the most significant contributions that Abhinavagupta makes to aesthetics, or shall we call it “spiritual aesthetics,” is the introduction of a ninth *rasa*, namely the *santa-rasa*, which is added to the existing eight *rasas* that are listed in the *Natyasastra*. A *rasa* is an aesthetic experience that the viewer/reader/listener feels in correspondence to the various emotional states, called *bhavas*, that are generated by the poet/performer. “*Santa*” can be essentially translated as “tranquility” or “serenity,” a state wherein the agitation and drama of the manifest world, expressed through a variety of *bhavas*, becomes disabled, is rendered redundant, or loses steam. The aesthetic theory of the *Natyasastra* firmly operates upon the underlying principle that each aesthetic experience, or *rasa*, felt by the viewer—though evoked by the emotion-laden spectacle created by the performer—becomes resonant for the viewer, only because the seed of such an experience already lies permanently embedded, though dormant, in the subconscious of the viewer. Thus, the *bhava-rasa* theory is squarely placed within the cause-and-effect trajectory, as proposed by Samkhya. However,

[t]he ninth *rasa* is a *rasa* in a different sense than the other eight of the tradition. To assert it as a *rasa* involves an aesthetic paradox, for while the eight *rasas* are clearly understood as modifications of the basic emotional constituents [*bhava*] of our mundane personality, the new *rasa* implies rather a suppression of those very constituents: it is a state untroubled by emotion of any sort.<sup>25</sup>

This implies that *santa* does not necessarily have a corresponding *bhava* or cause; rather, it is a permanent, pervasive, continuous, and imperceptible condition that lies embedded in the depth of Consciousness and, in fact, offers a ground or a vehicle to other emotional states. Furthermore, an awareness of this pervasiveness arises within a separation, or an emotional emptiness, that opens up between subsiding interest in the spectacle, on one hand, and a simultaneous deepening of engrossment with a sense of recalling from within,



on the other, in a sense defragmenting the self so it becomes whole, continuous, and one with the embedded nature. It is a moment when the drama or narrative of manifestation divulges its inherent opposite-nature of essentially being “un-dramatic,” or “uneventful.” According to this school of thought, this fluid play between the manifest and the unmanifest rides upon the inherent facilities of involution and evolution. “Involution” is the process of agitation, prompting the unmanifest to become manifest, while “evolution” is that which awakens in manifestation, the memory, and subsequently the desire to remerge into its inherent nature of restful repose, in order to once again become stationed in the santa-laden state of blissful awareness, i.e., *vishranti*.

“[C]entral both to [Abhinavagupta’s] poetics and his metaphysics [is the fact that] pleasure [*ananda*] is the predominant mode of aesthetic experience, not instruction [*sasana*, *vidhi*]; that the locus of the aesthetic experience in its primary form is the contemplative spectator, not the working actor.”<sup>26</sup> What is interesting to note is that even though it is only Kashmir Shaivism that directly talks in terms of a performative spectacle, the idea of “contemplative spectator” has remained central to the project of achieving spiritual repose in all schools listed previously. The specialized methods of “unflinching seeing” or “passive witnessing” of the turnings of the mind or the patterns of the breath, proposed by the Buddha and Patanjali respectively, or the mindful observation of the autonomous configurations of matter in Samkhya, now graduate into a more comprehensive mode of disengaged seeing while being emotionally, aesthetically, poetically, and even viscerally mesmerized by the drama of the manifest world.

Likewise, we can also clearly see the trajectory of the *sukha* that the Buddha ushers into the realm of spiritual practice: getting replaced by the blissful *ananda* by Patanjali, and now graduating into a fulsome, aesthetically pleasurable, poetically resonant, and reposefully aware state of *santa*-imbued *vishranti*. *Santa* then may not be seen as just one more additional aesthetic component in the revised scheme of classical dramaturgy, but as a reversing agent that humanizes the mindful observing eye, making it emphatic and self-pondering, and turns cognition from being clinical and strictly objective to becoming self-investigative, or self-reflecting, to recognize the cohesive sense of I-ness that Pratyabhijna proposes:

[Santa] is a *rasa* essentially different from the other *rasas*, pointing us toward philosophy; yet as having a psychic configuration similar to that of *moksa*,<sup>27</sup> it risks, by its generality and ease, to make salvation “aesthetic.” In aesthetic terms, it appears to lead us away from aesthetics; in philosophical terms, it appears to make philosophy unnecessary. If we can see that these conundra are versions of the same problem, perhaps we will get closer to Abhinava’s meaning.<sup>28</sup>

In various musical traditions, particularly the Hindustani style of Northern Indian singing, the singer often repeats the same short, haiku-like phrase over

and over again, each time with a different musical deflection within the structure of a *raga*. Each time, this repetition reflects yet another gross/subtle configuration as it glides through the grid of distillation. A simple word such as “red” can be put through innumerable renditions, till such time that the “redness” of the red has been explored in numerous dimensions and has even been allowed to exceed beyond redness, evoking the redness in all that is not red, till it is all red! But for the viewer/listener, the experience is not that of “redness.” “Red” is just the agent, and the experience is that of pervasiveness—a pervasiveness through various dimensions of all that is red and also all that is not red. This experience of “pervasiveness” is deeply stilling.

In its barest terms the Kasmir Saivites admit the reality of the objective world and posit cognition not as a solitary, but a series of perceptive events, with each succeeding cognition leading to remembrance and thence realisation on the part of the cognising subject.<sup>29</sup>

Within a seamless, multihued, repetitive rendering of a tangible image like “red,” a still interval may open, an interval of fleeting recognition. It is common to find audience members at an Indian music or dance recital swaying with the flow, nodding their heads, even smacking their lips as though they are tasting *rasa*, the juice, and making approving utterances like “*wah! shaabash! besh! yeh baat! kya baat hai, jiyo!*” which translate to “Wow! Wonderful! Well done!” and most pointedly, “That’s it!” Such endorsements are not only made in appreciation of artistic skill or virtuosity, but also recognition of and marking the “that’s it!”-moment of interval that may open between experience and recognition of the poetic suggestion. I want to suggest that therein lies the spirituality of Indian music and dance. I also want to add that if the idea of Indian art as sacred can be attributed to Samkhya, which believes in distilling matter unto spirit, the idea of Indian dance and music as being sacred/erotic rests singularly upon Kashmir Shaivism and, more so, on Abhinavagupta’s interpretation of the *Natyasastra*.

### The Vedanta perspective

The dilemma that I mentioned at the start of this chapter about practicing Yoga and Indian classical dance—both of which are considered “spiritual”—in chauvinistic or fundamentalist times is actually about practicing in times when theism seems to have gained a monopoly. “Vedanta,” in a nutshell, can be categorized as a mainstream religion that is conventional in its definition and shares with other world religions the idea of God, as Creator, Perpetual Doer, or Primary Cause, as well as the authoritative, moralizing judge of merit and demerit. It represents the orthodoxy of the Brahmanic order and the preservation of caste purity. According to Vedanta, the phenomenal world is unreal, “because what is real has neither a coming-into-being nor a disappearing. The analysis of the relationship of



causality leads to the conclusion that both cause and effect are unreal.”<sup>30</sup> It therefore defines the material world in opposition to the absolute brahman and defines religiosity as rejection of the material world, including supplication, self-denial, and sublimation of desire and attachment. Moreover, it considers “[r]ational argument [...] incapable of leading to the absolute *brahman*, access to which is given only by intimate experience wholly lacking any discursive representation.”<sup>31</sup>

In the fourteenth century CE, Madhavacharya, the 14th *Jagadguru* (or pontiff) of the Sringeri Sharada *Peetham*, put together a doxography called the *Sarva-Darsana-Samgraha*, in which the various systems of Indian philosophy were presented in sequence of their theistic efficacy. It lists sixteen philosophical schools, including all the schools that have found mention in this paper—i.e., Charvaka, Samkhya, Buddhism, Jainism, Yoga, Shaivism, and Pratyabhijna—along with a host of other schools,<sup>32</sup> culminating with *Advaita Vedanta* as the most evolved option. Somewhere during the subsequent centuries, this grouping again is revised and separating the *astikas* (believers) from the *nastikas* (nonbelievers), excluding the latter, as they do not rely upon an idea of God as well as the hegemony of the Vedas. However, apart from the *nastikas*, a lot of other schools are also sidelined, such as the Shaiva and Pratyabhijna, and the revised doxography gets pared down to six. These six—namely, *Samkhya*, *Mimamsa*, *Nyaya*, *Vaisheshika*, *Yoga*, and the most perfected *Vedanta*—are what students of Indian philosophy today learn as the *shad darsanas*, or the six Indian philosophies that reveal ways of valid seeing. Both these doxographies are clearly drawn from the perspective of Vedanta and directly suggest its superiority over all other schools. Today, however, even the six schools that find mention in the new doxography seem to have become morphed into Vedanta. Though study of all schools must still continue in selective circles, a common man on the street would be hard put to even name most of them. Apart from Buddhism and Jainism, which are still living religions in India, and of course Yoga (but understood mainly as a regime of physical asana and not an independent philosophy), the only school that is not only popularly known but seen as synonymous with Hinduism is that of Vedanta.

The way in which the rational, discursive, and atheistic ways of seeing have been silenced or co-opted by Vedanta can be attributed to (a) the writing of commentaries on important philosophical texts from the perspective of Vedanta—with every subsequent commentary steering the text to align more with its theistic doctrine, such as in the case of the *Yoga Sutras*; (b) the drawing up of doxographies (which happen to bear tremendous authority in posterity), again from a strictly Vedanta-centric point of view, and then proceeding to categorically nix the *nastika* schools, going silent on abstract or paradoxical theisms such as Kashmir Shaivism, and effectively reinterpreting the nontheistic, rationalist schools such as Samkhya and others to fall into the theistic fold; and finally (c) strategically positioning themselves at the four corners of the subcontinent by opening the four powerful *mathas*,

monasteries, or centers of learning, and assigning them with authoritative pontiffs with the aim of propagating and installing Advaita<sup>33</sup> Vedanta as the definitive and most superior doctrine across the subcontinent.

Today, with Vedanta alone being recognized as the all-encompassing school of Hindu thought, unopposed from the inside, the monopolizing theistic project of establishing God or Iswara as unquestionably central to Indian thought is complete. To think of Indian thought within a seriously nontheistic mode of reasoning is almost impossible today; God has come to rule the Indian philosophical stratosphere. The result is that Yoga today is popularly postulated as “union with God,” and Indian classical dance is presented as a means of sublimation or surrender of the atma—lower self or soul—to the Supreme God, *Paramatma*. To question these models is close to heresy, even “un-nationalistic.” Indian dance was reconstructed just less than a century ago, cleansed of the erotic component that was an integral part of it, and is since presented as an “unbroken line of spiritual heritage,” untouched by paradox. The unwritten agenda of classical dance is to maintain this morally correct, “representational” stance—which does not allow room for reflexivity of the involution/evolution variety that I described—and offers virtually no scope for the opening up of a self-reflexive space. Indian dance today is self-endorsing, even self-congratulatory, but it is certainly not self-recognitive. Thus, as a practitioner of these two disciplines, I have embarked on this exercise of deliberately evoking alternative philosophical systems, which have historically countered and challenged the monopolistic-theistic modes of first Vedic and later Vedantic assertions. I am not here challenging theism, but the monopolizing tendencies of theism. The scope of critical discourse that philosophy offers is imperative to freedom, autonomy, creativity, and art. And these have become even more important in times when cultural chauvinism and religious fundamentalism are threatening to scale new and even more monopolistic heights. It can be said that today in India, religion has quite literally swallowed the critical discourse of philosophy and that culture, the classical arts, and philosophy have all been reduced to an appendage of religion, whose monopoly depends upon tightfistedly maintaining a philosophical vacuum.

### **Conclusion: a personal note**

The one aspect that emerges as a common thread through all the rational schools of thought mentioned here is that their spirituality depends upon a specialized mode of unengaged seeing, a manner of witnessing at one remove, that has the potential to still the mindful observing eye, quieten the mind, promote reflexivity, and eventually foster self-recognition. Fundamental to this kind of specialized mode of “inhibited” seeing is the absence of the reactionary instinct, as it necessarily involves cognitive seeing but devoid of the will or instinct to react, project upon, or correct what is being seen. It is precisely in the gap between an engaged, even absorbed, but

dispassionate cognition that the reflexive space of recognition may open. In my case, the quelling of the reactive instinct has been a direct result, not of the embodied practice alone, but also the rigorous inquiry that complements it. Personally, the more I have been able to gain information about not just political and social history, but precisely the history of Indian philosophy pertaining to premodern embodied practices, the more have the questions, hunches, and misgivings that lurk at the back of my mind been validated, and thus quelled, and the less do I need to react. The more “I know,” the less I have the need to assert my oppositional position or prove myself right. The moral warp with which nationalism shrouds and obscures the once paradoxical practices of Yoga and Bharatanatyam is programed to deflect and invalidate any “troubling” questions regarding sexuality and transgression that have been historically intrinsic to these practices. “Traditional” practices are deemed precious, fragile, and even under threat from modernity, for their “authenticity” to be righteously preserved and not tampered with. Yet historical information offers me the freedom to make autonomous decisions and independent interventions—which to my mind is integral to the practice of both Yoga and Bharatanatyam. Thus, I now deeply believe that embodied practice warrants the full, free, creative, and, most of all, lush (and of course respectful!) occupation of the station of my I-ness—which is the center of my initiative—and that the fiercely independent and autonomous stance is critical to both art and spirituality within these traditions that I practice.

The Yoga that I practice and teach focuses singularly on the “no God” option that has been clearly proposed by Patanjali, based upon the tenets of the purely materialist Samkhya. I thus entertain the idea of a nontheistic practice that: is deeply spiritual and aspires to be imbued with sukha, or sensually pleasing repose; is delicately crafted; involves the in-tandem working of body, breath, and mindfulness; is rigorous both physically and mentally; and more than anything else, entails continuous inquiry. Incidentally, in the first chapter of the *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali emphatically proposes inquiry as a major component of Yoga practice; however, it is not highlighted by the commentaries and not even registered by most practitioners today. Having said that, I also strongly believe that today it is almost impossible to isolate Patanjali Yoga from Hatha Yoga, which is rooted in the tantra practices of Kashmir Shaivism and became popular only at the beginning of the second millennium. Thus, Yoga to me is a rich mix of the Samkhya-based, cerebral speculations of Patanjali, plus the santa-imbued and vishranti-instilling juicy practices and techniques such as *dharanas* (visualizations), *nyasa* (the method of highly sensitive self-touching), *bijamantras* (the phonetic sounds based on vowels), *bandhas* (the internal locks), and even the asana and pranayama techniques, which Patanjali very briefly mentions but does not specify. Other such methods have all been devised to “celebrate,” harness, and finely hone the sensuality of the body/mind toward the construction of a wholesome and cohesive sense of I-ness that is equally one with a reciprocal

Consciousness. That is the definition of a spiritual and a liberating practice that I lay claim to and which, to my mind, has been developed, refined, and distilled through millennia by the greats—Kapila, Buddha, Patanjali, and Abhinavagupta—each one of them being a revolutionary thinker and not a conformist, supplicant, or a “sublimationist” by a long shot.

Bharatanatyam, on the other hand, is a more complicated issue. The dance was reconstructed—rather, reimagined—in the first half of the twentieth century and emerged cleansed of the sacred/profane paradox that was attached to it, not only due to the richly erotic content of its lyrics and gestures, but more so, because of the “pleasure women” status of its traditional practitioners (the *devadasis*) who were closely attached to temple service. The devadasis became the prime target for European moralists, both missionaries and the colonists, and instrumental in the shaming and labeling of Hinduism as a “degenerate” religion within colonial times. Therefore, the postindependence, Indian national identity hinged very tightly on the de-eroticizing and singularly spiritualizing of the temple dance. For that reason, this dance has come to be very highly policed by the custodians of national pride, which is closely linked to a “tradition” that, in the case of dance, is said to hark back to antiquity, but was actually crafted within the last 150 years. Eroticizing the sacred has been the mainstay of Kashmir Shaivism, whereas self-denial and the sublimation of desire have been the hallmarks of Vedanta (which was internationally popularized by Swami Vivekananda, toward the end of the nineteenth century). Thus, the self-restraint and the morality of Vedanta held promise for the self-pride-building project central to reinventing India as a modern nation. The new India could no longer afford, and thus no longer tolerate, any odd (and, in some cases, even bizarre!) mixtures of binaries such as the sacred and the profane.

Indian dance for that reason has become too eager to be understood correctly. It has almost become convention for any dance performance to begin with an enacted explanation of what is going to follow. This can often be long and detailed, explaining not only the narrative that is to be enacted but even the symbolism and even the deep “philosophy” underlying the mythic events. The reduction of performance to a show-and-tell format leaves no room for abstraction, as it is prescribed by the agenda to correctly “instruct,” if not edify, the viewer. The constraints placed on reconstructed Bharatanatyam are blatantly nationalistic, representational, explanatory, exhibitory, i.e., highly self-conscious, and therefore devoid of any possibility of reflexivity. As opposed to the Pratyabhijna sense of a fiercely autonomous and all-inclusive I-ness, the “I” that the nationalistic Bharatanatyam fosters falls within the parameters of the rather defensive self-pride project. As opposed to affording the reposeful state of awareness and being expansive and continuous, it is in this case rife with the anxieties of national pride and identity, which are exclusivist, self-congratulatory, and even culturally chauvinistic. There seems to be really no way out for Bharatanatyam to touch any extremes, cause any sort of poetic reversals that santa warrants,

and engage in the spiritual-aesthetics upon which it so loudly lays claim. It is therefore caught in an impossible bind!

My dance practice is directly influenced and inspired by my Yoga practice, which convincingly offers the scope of distilling matter into essence or spirit. I am to this day fascinated by how a few physical postures along with breathing can actually significantly alter the state of mind (and heart!) of the practitioner, and furthermore, that this altered state caused by the effective shift from gross to subtle is not only deeply experiential but even visible to the mindful observing eye. Thus, it has the making of a “spectacle” that can in turn even engage and foster a mirroring process in the spectator. It holds a performative kernel that I highly value; to me, this in-the-moment visible transformation holds promise for the most “spectacular” act and beats any reenactment of an event that is borrowed from another time and context, be it real, imagined, or mythic. Given the possibility that we might have lost a critical transformative element in dance due to its defensive-reconstruction, Yoga offers me the belief and the conviction to experiment with my dance in order to find ways to reinstate a similar process of “being-in-the-moment” in dance.

Another thing that I am getting more and more inclined to resist is the proscenium presentations of Bharatanatyam, because that kind of framing, very conducive to the spectacle of the show-and-tell variety, actually mars the intimacy that is necessary between dancer and viewer in order for the mindful observing eye to relax and wander into self-reflection. I hope to experiment with more salon-like contexts, where the viewer is viewed more like a guest-customer who expects to be pampered, relaxed, humored, and even “pleasured,” and at the same time, invited to partake of delicately crafted performative acts that may cause “reversal” and “transformation,” albeit in a somewhat casual setting. The informal and casual—though pleasing and intimate—setting seems important in order to allow for a moment of perchance-ness! According to Shaivism, the recognitive shift, even though it may be craftily orchestrated, actually takes place in the mindful observing eye perchance, unexpectedly, spontaneously.

Thus, to me, dance and Yoga have become interrelated practices, but they have become so because of enquiry, both historical and philosophical. Both share a common history, not only of being embodied practices that stem from the same ethos and the same systems of thought, but also for being singled out as odd, bizarre, and “shameful” by the British. Enquiry into the “history of philosophy” clearly tells me that not only did the efficacy of premodern, embodied practices in India hinge characteristically on fierce autonomy, but that they have historically been subversive and challenging of the status quo over millennia. Furthermore, it shows that they have been paradoxical, radical, and nonconformist, in contrast to the conventions of imposed morality, purity, and simplistic theism, which seem to plague the Indian mind within the postindependence, modern period. Another thing that becomes evident to me is that the deeply affirming, pleasurable,

empowering, and spiritual mode of self-recognition is dependent upon the cultivation and “farming” of aftereffects that may arise surprisingly and spontaneously out of experimental calibrations exercised upon the materiality of the body and not out of blind and earnest following of instruction and text alone.

As a concluding note, I would like to add that though I premise this chapter within times that are turning overtly fundamentalist, the seed of this fundamentalism has been present since the time India decided to make its culture an object of exhibition. The religious fundamentalism of today just helps to de-cloak the cultural chauvinism that has been present since the beginning, notwithstanding the political dispensations that were in power, be it the progressive liberals or the extreme communalists, both governed by secular and communal nationalism respectively.

## Notes

- 1 Mādhava Āchárya, *The Sarva-Darsana-Samgraha, or Review of the Different Systems of Hindu Philosophy*, trans. E. B. Cowell and A. E. Gough (London: Trübner & Co. Ludgate Hill, 1882), 10–11.
- 2 Ibid., 5.
- 3 S. N. Dasgupta, quoted in Mujibul Hasan Siddiqui, *Philosophical and Sociological Foundations of Education* (New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 2008), 64.
- 4 Mikel Burley, *Classical Samkhya and Yoga: An Indian Metaphysics of Experience* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 34.
- 5 Andrew J. Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism: Philosophy and Identity in Medieval India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2011), 74.
- 6 Isvarakrsna, *Samkhyakarika*, trans. Swami Virupakshananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1995), 1.
- 7 Johannes Bronkhorst, *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*, 2nd ed. (1993; repr., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000), 26–27.
- 8 Ibid., 2.
- 9 Ibid., 9.
- 10 Ibid., 13.
- 11 David Gordon White, *The “Yoga Sutra of Patanjali”: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 12.
- 12 Also called Adi Shankara, he was an intellectual giant and the most influential *Advaita Vedanta* theologian and founder of a confederation of Brahmanic religious orders known as the *Dasnamis*.
- 13 White, *Yoga Sutra*, 41–42.
- 14 Ibid., 42; however, White notes: “While the Shankaracharya may have been the author of a *Yoga Sutra* commentary titled the *Patanjalayogashastrabhashyavivarana* (‘Exposition of the Commentary on the Yoga Teaching of Patanjali’), a number of scholars consider this to have been the work of another Shankara, who lived in the fourteenth century” (Ibid., xi).
- 15 *Puranas* are ancient Hindu texts eulogizing various deities, primarily the divine *Trimurti*, or trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh.
- 16 Ibid., 46.
- 17 The first commentator of Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*; though his date cannot be clearly determined, he is believed by some to be none other than Patanjali



himself, and his commentary is considered the most important, enjoying the status of “original” commentary.

18 Ibid., 49, original emphasis.

19 Ibid., 85.

20 The first of the *Siva Sutras*, a ninth-century CE, Kashmir Shaivism text attributed to Vasugupta.

21 Paul E. Muller-Ortega, “Tantric Meditation: Vocalic Beginnings,” in *Ritual and Speculation in Early Tantrism: Studies in Honor of André Padoux*, ed. Teun Goudriaan (New York: SUNY Press, 1992), 230.

22 Edwin Gerow, “Abhinavagupta’s Aesthetics as a Speculative Paradigm,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114, no. 2 (April–June 1994): 187.

23 Raffaele Torella, *The Philosophical Traditions of India: An Appraisal*, trans. Kenneth F. Hurry (Varanasi: Indica Books, 2011), 117.

24 Ibid., 215.

25 Gerow, “Abhinavagupta’s Aesthetics,” 187.

26 Ibid., 188.

27 *Moksa* is a Vedantic concept that defines the final state of liberation, freedom from the bondage of *samskara*, and the cycle of life and death.

28 Ibid., 189.

29 Harsha V. Dehejia, *The Advita of Art* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), 160.

30 Torella, *Philosophical Traditions of India*, 112.

31 Ibid., 113.

32 The list of sixteen philosophical schools includes: Charvaka, Buddhism, Jainism, Ramanuja System, Purnaprajna, Pasupata, Shaivism, Pratyabhijna, Rasesvara, Vaisheshika, Nyaya, Jaimini, Paniniya, Samkhya, Patanjala, and Vedanta.

33 The most popular, non-dualistic brand of Vedanta attributed to the tenth-century Shankaracharya, the other ones being *dvait* (dualist) and *bhedabheda*.

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