

CONTRIBUTORS

Soumya Swaminathan
Suman Sahai
Barron Joseph Orr
Bharat Dogra
K. J. Joy
Nitoo Das
Ayeshe Sadr
Ghazala Shahabuddin
Nishant M. Srinivasaiah
Kaveri K. Iychettira
Jhuma Datta
Anindya Sinha
Lavanya Rajamani
Janki Andharia
Paulina Lopez
Madhuri Ramesh
Navtej Singh Johar
Srinivas Vaidyanathan
Navroz K. Dubash
Pradeep Kumar Monga
Wagaki Wischnewski
Raman Sukumar
Soumya Dutta
Nitya Rao
Ravi Agarwal
Sagar Dhara
Vandana Singh
Veena Srinivasan
Poornima Prabhakaran
Uttam Kumar Sinha
Aravindhnan Nagarajan

WeatherReport

THE CRISIS OF
CLIMATE CHANGE

WeatherReport

THE CRISIS OF
CLIMATE CHANGE

IIC
WINTER 2019
SPRING 2020
Quarterly



India International Centre
REGISTERED WITH THE REGISTRAR
OF NEWSPAPERS OF INDIA UNDER
R N 26757/74

IIC WINTER 2019
SPRING 2020
Quarterly

IIC WINTER 2019
SPRING 2020
Quarterly

WeatherReport

PRESIDENT

N. N. VOHRA

DIRECTOR

K. N. SHRIVASTAVA

EDITORIAL BOARD

KARAN SINGH (CHAIRMAN)

ASHIS NANDY

MALAVIKA KARLEKAR

PRATIK KANJILAL

K. N. SHRIVASTAVA

KANWAL WALI

OMITA GOYAL

L. S. TOCHHAWNG

USHA M. MUNSHI (EX-OFFICIO)

EDITORIAL STAFF**CHIEF EDITOR**

OMITA GOYAL

DEPUTY EDITOR

RITU SINGH

SR. ASSISTANT EDITOR

RACHNA JOSHI

PHOTO ESSAY AND COVER DESIGN

TANIA DAS GUPTA

COVER PHOTOGRAPH

JHUMA DATTA

The clouds, the only birds that never sleep

© 2020 India International Centre. All articles are copyright and may not be reproduced without permission

Opinions expressed by our Contributors are not necessarily those of the Centre

Winter 2019–Spring 2020
Volume 46, Numbers 3 & 4

India International Centre Quarterly is printed and published by Kanwal Wali for India International Centre, 40, Max Mueller Marg, New Delhi 110 003

Price: ₹ 250

Annual Rate

IIC MEMBERS

India: ₹ 350; Abroad: \$ 35 (by airmail)

NON-MEMBERS

India: ₹ 500; Abroad: \$ 45 (by airmail)

INSTITUTIONS

India: ₹ 750; Abroad: \$ 55 (by airmail)

BANK CHARGES for Outstation Cheques:
₹ 50 / \$ 15

Payments should be made by money order or bank draft or cheque payable to **INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE** at New Delhi

Enquiries may be addressed to
Rohit Singh (Tel: 24609330);
E-mail: publication.iic@nic.in

Typeset at Glyph Graphics Private Limited, Delhi 110 096
glyphgraphics2013@gmail.com

The India International Centre is a society promoting understanding and amity between the different communities of the world by undertaking or supporting the study of their past and present cultures, by disseminating or exchanging knowledge thereof and by providing such other facilities as would lead to their universal appreciation

WeatherReport

THE CRISIS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

EDITED BY

RAVI AGARWAL
OMITA GOYAL



India International Centre

IIC WINTER 2019
SPRING 2020
Quarterly

ISSN NO. 0376-9771

CONTENTS

VOLUME 46 NUMBERS 3 & 4
WINTER 2019–SPRING 2020

ix: Editorial

OMITA GOYAL

xi: Foreword

KARAN SINGH

1: Introduction

RAVI AGARWAL

ARTICLES

I BROAD PERSPECTIVES

7: New Imperatives for International and Domestic
Climate Policy: Rethinking India's Approach

NAVROZ K. DUBASH, LAVANYA RAJAMANI

18: India's Moment to Lead the World to Sustainability is Here

WAGAKI WISCHNEWSKI, BARRON JOSEPH ORR, PRADEEP KUMAR MONGA

35: Disaster Management: Institutionalising Risk-Informed
Planning

JANKI ANDHARIA

50: Catch 22 and Double Whammy for South Asia
in a Warming World

SAGAR DHARA

II LANDSCAPES OF CHANGE

72: Forests and Climate Change in the Anthropocene

GHAZALA SHAHABUDDIN

- 83:** Adapting Agriculture to Climate Turbulence
SUMAN SAHAI
- 100:** Elephants on the Move: Implications for Human–Elephant Interaction
NISHANT M. SRINIVASIAH, SRINIVAS VAIDYANATHAN, RAMAN SUKUMAR, ANINDYA SINHA
- 114:** Achieving Gender Equality in the Face of a Climate Crisis
NITYA RAO
- 128:** The Future of Health in a Climate Crisis
SOUMYA SWAMINATHAN, POORNIMA PRABHAKARAN
- 144:** Rethinking Institutions for India’s Transitioning Electricity Sector
KAVERI K. IYCHETTIRA
- 153:** The Coast is Un-Clear
MADHURI RAMESH
- 166:** Climate Change and Rural Water Security
K. J. JOY, VEENA SRINIVASAN
- 184:** Dealing with India’s Plastic Waste: Why Single-Use Plastic Bans may not Work
ARAVINDHAN NAGARAJAN
- 196:** Climate Change and Security
UTTAM KUMAR SINHA

III NEW HORIZONS

PHOTO ESSAY

- 207:** The Lost Home
AYESHE SADR

ARTICLES

- 231:** ‘The Air in Her Lungs is a Destitute Pigeon’
NITOO DAS

- 241:** Climate Change and Beyond: A Holistic View
BHARAT DOGRA

- 251:** A Transdisciplinary Conceptualisation of Climate Change: An Educator’s Journey
VANDANA SINGH

- 264:** Performativity and Ecology
NAVTEJ SINGH JOHAR

- 273:** The Possibility of Acting in Climate Change: A Gandhian Perspective
PAULINA LOPEZ, RAVI AGARWAL

- 285:** From ‘Climate Change’ to ‘Climate Justice’: ‘Civil Society’ Movement(s)
SOUMYA DUTTA

302: CONTRIBUTORS

PERFORMATIVITY AND ECOLOGY

NAVTEJ SINGH
JOHAR

When we think of ‘classical’ Indian dance, we are broadly speaking of the interplay between the body, on the one hand, and a notion of God, on the other; and when we talk of ecology, we evoke Nature, which, too, in varying degrees, may conflate with the idea of God. This paper explores the ideas of nature, body and God, and how linguistic redefinitions may have influenced our perceptions, experience and treatment of them. What I am proposing is that if we are facing an ecological crisis today, it is not so much because of man’s disuse of Nature, but, rather, the unsustainable definitions that may have been crafted over the last few centuries, definitions which may *allow* and sanction such disuse. And considering that all these definitions have been formed from the perspective of Modernity, it would be imperative to define the dream and scope of modernity as well, and the manner in which this dream might influence our relationship with God, nature and the body. I present my case from the perspective of a dancer, evoking the aesthetic theory of *Bhava-Rasa* (particularly the aspects of *anubhava*, *vibhava* and *satvika-bhava*), which calls into play both the body and an imagined poetic-object (*vibhava*) that can become contiguous to the notion of God.

Trying to trace the genealogy of this crisis that is not merely ecological but equally sociological, cultural, political, aesthetic and linguistic, my limited conclusion points to the gross lacuna in modernity and, even, Enlightenment—a lacuna that has been vociferously glossed over by sweeping idealisms of morality, rationality, production, ethics and purity.

Winter 2019–Spring 2020, Volume 46, Numbers 3 & 4

THE PROBLEM

At the outset, I would like to state that ecology is not a category, something distinct or distant or, more precisely, something that can be removed from day-to-day life, lying somewhere beyond the protective insulation of urbanity. Ecology lies in our very engagement with the material. Similarly, performance is not an event that takes place in the theatre, removed from ordinary life. The human body is ever-performative; we are continuously performing our concerns, functions, beliefs, isms, culture, gender, politics, etc. Performativity can be imposed and/or acquired, or else it can viscerally preoccupy our bodies from the inside. Here, I am advocating a visceral variety of performativity, not merely because I find it aesthetically more satisfying, but simply because I see it as ‘ecological’.

ECOLOGY

David Abram, philosopher, cultural ecologist and performance artiste, opens his evocative book, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, with these lines:

Humans are tuned for relationship. The eyes, the skin, the tongue, ears and nostrils—all are gates where our body receives the nourishment of otherness. This landscape of shadowed voices, these feathered bodies and antlers and tumbling streams—these breathing shapes are our family, the being with whom we are engaged, with whom we struggle and suffer and celebrate....The color of the sky, the rush of waves—every aspect of the earthly sensuous could draw us into a relationship fed with curiosity and spiced with danger. Every sound was a voice, every scrape or blunder was a meeting—with Thunder, with Oak, with Dragonfly (1996).

To be ecological in our engagement with matter, we need to not only see, feel, experience, or, in other words, ‘consume’ nature, but necessarily become willing to view nature as reciprocal, endowed with a will of its own that is unpredictable, risky, even dangerous. However, our encounters with nature have been so effectively insulated and ‘landscaped’ that its potency has become almost completely undermined in our imagination. We have grown so accustomed to nature being tamed, controlled or ‘pruned’ that we almost see it as normal (read ‘natural’), and even expect, in fact, demand it. What we

have lost in the bargain is a primal life-partner, one that is capricious, beautiful, giving, frightful, dangerous, awe-inspiring, and infinitely greater than ourselves. In fact, it is this relationship, and more so with such an ambivalent partner, which makes us human. To look upon nature as an object and define it as a resource that can be appropriated and emptied at will for the larger human purpose of Order is un-ecological.

MODERNITY AND ORDER

By definition, modernity can only operate within the categories of order, and therefore, it is intolerant of both randomness and ambivalence. It disallows ambivalence through a variety of ways—by shaming it, colonising it, labelling it, overshadowing or overwhelming it, policing, erasing, reforming, mocking, moralising, obliterating, bulldozing, capturing or othering it; in fact, it never stops reinventing new ways of overpowering ambivalence which, in reality, can never, ever, be fully contained. It almost seems that the order of the day is employing the generous, albeit limited, resources of the planet to fight this unwinnable battle. In fact, the insanity of modernity is that it continues to remain willing to put the planet at stake for the sake of its ideal—i.e., order, which places mind over matter. This can also be translated as morality over body. This drive to control ambivalence from the outside with idealisms, and to capture the body with notions of purity and perfect discipline from the inside, is obsessive, compulsive, addictive, self-willed, self-policing and, eventually, self-destructive.

At the heart of modernity is this insatiable, obsessive desire for perfect action, perfect design, perfect technology to fix all that has the potential to move randomly or *involuntarily*, because of it being unpredictable, disruptive and disturbing of what may be the idealised design. Its stress is thus upon perpetual *doing*, countering, bettering, excelling—in short, relentlessly striving to outsmart the randomness of nature with perfectly premeditated action. It is a vicious cycle that warrants yet more stringent manipulation and redefinition that must take place both within and without; simultaneously rendering rigid our imaginations, perceptions and conditioning, on the one hand, while parallelly controlling and hollowing the world outside and around us, on the other.

That the phenomena of materiality and nature have been

rendered subordinate to a constructed ‘idea’ of order is problematic. But what is more troublesome is the drive to fix the internal ‘unfixity’ of things, ideas and concepts that may abound in our heads.

The pre-modern conception of God has historically been ambivalent. Within pre-modern religions, including in the Indian subcontinent, and more so amongst the minor religions that revolved around local or village deities, the idea of God has remained dialectical—an unfixed and unpredictable God or Goddess who could be equally benign/wrathful, sacred/erotic, a liminal entity that simultaneously embodied both-and-neither oppositional categories. I would like to point out here that exactly this unpredictability of being both/neither is what gives God ‘life’ in the human mind. And that this ‘life’ is a matter of its uncategorical definitions, i.e., God’s life is linguistically assigned. A God only benign or sacred is in reality no God at all. Because, it is precisely in the erasure of the two mutually oppositional, but equally complementary, dialectical forces that a sacred middle space of potent emptiness may open up *perchance*, within which the resonant God-space may come alive.

However, over the last two centuries, our Gods have been progressively relegated to calendars, standardised and divested of their ambivalence, rendered categorically benign—thus flatted and robbed of their treacherous liminality that equated them with life, agency and ‘sacredness’. Today, the flattened God appears a passive, even harmless, signifier of omniscience and auspice, reduced to an inanimate object, ‘un-live’ without the ‘breath of flux’ enlivening it from the inside. And it is to such a God—categorical, fixed and un-reciprocal—that classical dancers like me address in our beseeching *varnams*, *padams*, *ashtapadis* and *thumris*. A poetic conversation, otherwise rife with erotic devotion with a sacred/erotic God, has become reduced to making pre-learned gestures that remain, at best, empty platitudes. However seductive in its finesse, the dance remains empty, because the God, the poetic-object or the vibhava that elicits the emotions in the dancer, has been linguistically castrated of its potent flux and, in turn, poetic reciprocity.

ABHINAYA IN INDIAN DANCE

Vibhava in *abhinaya*, a central component of Indian dance, is the poetic-object that the dancer fictitiously engages with in order to externalise an interiority of lived-feeling called bhava. The

externalisation of this inner feeling can be of two varieties: voluntary or involuntary. The voluntary includes the repertoire of appropriate gestures called *anubaava* that are either learnt or improvised in the moment. However, if that moment is rightfully configured, and if the *vibhava* is deemed dialectical and reciprocal, the moment can become alive, even heated, resulting in things happening involuntarily in the imagination and within/upon the body of the dancer–subject. But such a moment, filled with a sense of anticipation and suspension of time, may happen only perchance. And such a perchance occurrence, to me, is the promise of Indian poetics and aesthetics which I long to experience both as performer and viewer—a moment of aesthetic surprise and delight where the studied script is exceeded. Such surprising and involuntary release or surge of *bhava*—*satvika*-*bhava*—that enriches the moment is for me the very purpose and promise of Indian dance—*satva* meaning buoyant, luminous, lucid.

However, what we see today is a sequence of rehearsed reproductions of learnt and sanctioned cultural behaviours that are empty in their engagements with poetic objects that are, in turn, un-live. With God, and subsequently the *vibhava* becoming unidimensional, un-reciprocal and, thereby, unyielding, we are left with dance becoming a simulative act of show-and-tell, a dispensing of rehearsed emotion, rather than a live engagement, a one-way transaction empty of even expectation, possibility or anticipation of a live poetic–other. This, then, renders dance merely a lone and companionless, ever-excavating act of dispensing archived behaviours, reducing it to pure artistic labour with no room for play, surprise, anticipation, resonance or beauty. And the harder we labour, the more we encroach upon and vanquish that delicate middle-space of chance. Ironically, it might be our hard work, our perfectionist drive, our calculative premeditation, and most of all our earnestness which is drying up the middle-pool of resonance and making Indian dance empty of any chance happening or experiencing.

Thus, my strong contention is that with fixity attributed to God within modernity, which cannot allow either dialectically alive Gods, poetic–objects or, for that matter, muses, nor involuntary and unpredictable expression such as *satvika*-*bhavas*, the entire practice of representing ‘sacred-dancing’ has become unperformative and is actually reduced to being a sham.

NATURE

Nature, unpredictable and in flux, has also been meted with a fate similar to God. The improbability of nature has been tamed and landscaped rather effectively. We have grown accustomed and conditioned to living in the bubble of mock safety, where our bodies experience and even expect insulation from its improbability. Mock existence and mock engagement seem to have become the order of our times.

Modernity has been relentless in pushing nature to the margins; but nature, like the body, never stops leaking and bleeding and overstepping its bounds. Nature is not only unbound, but again, like the body, can also be incorrigibly abject which, in turn, makes the modern drive to plug the leak and contain the bleed equally relentless. Relentlessness becomes the emblem of the modern era, making rest or repose invalid, in fact, a foul—therefore the slogan: *aaram haram hai* (to rest is to sin).

PERFORMATIVITY

Modernity permeates and percolates our lives and bodies through its own modes of performativity. Today, all of us who find ourselves, willingly or unwittingly, subscribing to that call of order that modernity proclaims and promises are implicated in the mockery of insulated engagement with the world around us—and this includes ecology. Modernity manifests itself as both an invisible antiseptic sheath that separates us from that which surrounds us, and at the same time lives in the body as a perpetual bodily tension. A portion of our energies remains continuously locked in upholding this mockery. We continuously uphold, perform and embody the rites of insulation through our stances, mannerisms, actions, attitudes, attires, judgements, opinions, presentations, and in how we design our spaces and divide our time. And we need to remind ourselves that modernity’s dream of order is categorically anti-matter and anti-ecology. Thus, our bodies, which are preoccupied in holding, performing and reinforcing the tensions and anxieties tied to the fragility of this order, are also fully implicated in this un-ecological project.

Along with improbabilities, even chance is viewed as anomaly. Within the larger design of efficiency, production and deliverability, chance does not really have a place, or, for that matter, stand a chance. The risk-free zones that are promised to us, and which we

demand and presume as our right, are designed to erase or minimise chance. Within modernity, chance almost seems a violation. We see ourselves impatient and intolerant of improbabilities; they read as failures to us, reek of unmanageability, inefficiency, irresponsibility, stupidity. And this may extend to include the improbable or chance performativity of the body, i.e., the involuntary happenings that may visit upon and within the body.

Today, within the design of dance, almost everything is pre-set, rigorously rehearsed—in fact, the rehearsal process today is designed to rule out chance, i.e., dance is made today without even the expectancy of chance. In present times, then, the very model of Indian performance aesthetics is turned upside-down, and rendered defunct of chance and reciprocity.

Thus, the crises that both ecology and performance are facing today seem to arise from the popular definitions, perceptions or conceptions of the same. My strong proposition is to place ‘engagement’ at the centre and begin to see the two as verbs as opposed to nouns. Both are live and will become verbs only, and only if that with which they are engaged is ‘live’. And as long as we see them as nouns that can be defined, formed, reformed, preserved or saved, then we see them as inactive, inanimate objects. It is these definitions, defined by some idealism, that are not ecological.

If ecology is coming to ‘bite us back’, it is on account of the hubris of the mind and its by-products—the idea, the message, the paradigm, the ism, et al. The dismissal of ecology and disavowal of the body in favour of an idea, personal or collective, is tantamount to the same thing.

As I point out at the start, ecology is not distant or remote, nor does it lie outside the borders of our ‘safe’ time and space—it is disintegrating right under our feet. Now is the time when the euphemism ‘fools dance where wise men dread to tread’ feels pertinent. It is time to stop pushing harder, dancing to the glory of a higher idea, brandishing yet another idea with more pomp and cry, including the lofty ideas of preserving the nation, tradition, culture or even ecology. It is exactly the dream of the greater good that has brought us to the breaking point where we are today—ecologically, culturally, politically. It is time to stop, to take stock, to accept our powerlessness and our misapprehension of so much, and listen to and register the unrest within matter, beginning with our bodies.

The body has been used for too long as an instrument of doing, producing, showing-and-telling predetermined, fixed ideas. To assign the body the task of replicating, representing prefixed ideas is in a way dishonouring and devaluing it. The body is not the means to replicate, but to live and experience the moment—it is with this body that I enter the moment. And the moment is never still, it is never fixed, it is always rife with chance, surprise, anticipation and possibilities. And that is what renders life to the body. The body’s life lies in its sensory attentiveness, alertness and responsiveness. The body is meant for and desires real interface, real play, real engagement with all things sensible, illusionary and unpredictable. To risk is to desire for the body. To risk is to be alive for the body. Therein lies the capacity of the body not to be subordinated to the safety of a fixed idea.

What I would like to propose is immersive performance that takes into account the very in-the-moment engagement with the materiality of the body, irrespective of the idea. Such an engagement with the body would be an exercise in ecology, where the body is heard and conversed with, as opposed to the body being tamed to carry and embody a message or a moral that may be seen to be loftier.

Without linguistically defining and viewing God, nature, and/or vibhava as being dialectical, the engagement with the same would be reduced to becoming a task, a repetitive labour of reiterating, dispensing, reproducing of archived performativity, as in the case of classical Indian dance that continues to reproduce a learnt cultural behaviour, and repeatedly excavates an already hollowed and emptied archive. To continue to excavate that which is neither alive nor yielding is direly un-ecological. And this exemplifies our times!

CONCLUSION

To conclude, ecology is not so much a matter of what we do wrong or right—of course, it is that, too—but, more importantly, it is a matter of definition. As long as we continue to define ecology as a thing that we need to protect, preserve, exploit and harness, our engagement with matter and the planet will remain un-ecological. To clarify, I would like to say that I am not proposing a non-intrusive relationship with nature, because to be human is also to be discontent with nature and to wish to improve or manipulate it. What I am proposing is to see—nay, define—nature as something reciprocal and live, as

opposed to being an object for gratification. To engage with it is to not use but to also to recognise resonance with it.

Ecology does not need our protection; all it needs is allowance plus a resonant engagement. It requires us to sidestep our own definitions and let go of our obsession with categorisation, management, perfectionism and order. The irony today is that if we lose our hold on categories, then modernity collapses, but if we continue to hold on to categories, our planet perishes under our very feet. In fact, the definiteness of all things with which we stabilise our modern-day world is the very root of crisis. It is our certitude that is poisoning the planet; our certitude about an undialectical God, nature, body, and so on. To hark back to the words of Abram, we will continue to die and kill our planet till such time as we begin to somatically deliver ourselves to *relate* and, subsequently, tune in to recognise a part of ourselves in whatever we see and engage with. I end by borrowing from Arindam Chakrabarti, as he cites Abhinavagupta, who, while translating the ninth 'Hand' chapter of the *Natyashastra*, says, 'We sing the praises of that Supreme Lord, who assumes the form of touchable sense-essence when the body wears the natural ornament of goose-flesh, due to a rapture caused by His inner touch felt all over' (Chapple and Chakrabarti, 2015: 224).

It is imperative, I feel, that 'sense-essence' be linguistically allowed to co-mingle, opening the body to 'receive the nourishment of otherness' through a 'touchy-feely' engagement with objects—real, fictitious or divined. Because these objects are not only sensible but *also* sentient. It is only through such a thrilling engagement that both performativity and ecology can become sustainable.



REFERENCES

- Abram, David. 1996. *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*. New York: Penguin Random House.
- Chapple, Christopher Key and Arindam Chakrabarti (eds.). 2015. *Engaged Emancipation: Mind, Morals, and Make-Believe in the Moksopaya (Yogavasistha)*. New York: SUNY Press.



THE POSSIBILITY OF ACTING IN CLIMATE CHANGE

A Gandhian Perspective

PAULINA
LOPEZ
RAVI
AGARWAL

INTRODUCTION

Hardly a week goes by without a major news story about the threatened destruction of a valuable natural resource (Ostrom, 1990). These are the opening lines of *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*, in which Elinor Ostrom (awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2009) provided a crucial path to mitigate climate change and adapt to its impacts. On the one hand she informs us about the depletion of natural resources as a consequence of overconsumption, while, on the other, she expresses a more optimistic view than that proposed by Garrett Hardin (1968). Ostrom suggests that local communities have the capacity to implement effective systems for collective action, and reach a balance between consumption and resource availability. From this perspective, local action becomes essential to face the challenges of climate change.

Indeed, the capacity to self-organise and adapt to stresses and changes are two important dimensions of resilience.¹ Furthermore, there is a growing appeal from the scientific community and policy makers to promote Community Based Adaptation to climate change (McNamara and Buggy, 2016), which embodies small-scale and grassroots-driven adaptation practices.

Notwithstanding Ostrom's valuable contribution, even 30 years after the publication of her book we have still not been able to stop global warming, and face enormous difficulties in adapting to a highly disturbed environment. Indeed, the detection of the highest air temperature (~18°C) in the White Continent, since records exist,

¹ Winter 2019–Spring 2020, Volume 46, Numbers 3 & 4