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Letter To The Editor

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Letter to the Editors and Response

September 11, 2005

Dear *DRJ* Editors,

After much consideration, I am compelled to write this letter to you. This letter is in response to the special issue of *Dance Research Journal* titled "Re-presenting Indian Dance" that was recently published. First let me express that it is heartening to see a whole issue devoted to Indian dance. It is also exciting to see that Indian dance research now extends from the devadasis to Bollywood. The volume is a rich documentation of the new thinking that has reshaped dance history and dance writing from a global context.

Although I am aware that all representations are partial, I am disturbed to see that most of the critical essays that were published in the volume were connected to Bharatnatyam, its diaspora, contemporary dance, or aesthetics pertinent to art practices of southern India. Representation is a contested area, and more care should have been taken to incorporate as much diversity as possible. After all, Indian dance is a vast area of study. Why wasn't research on other Indian styles including Kathak represented in the volume? After I glanced through the issue and saw the title, I felt that the editors presented a very select representation of Indian dance. We have to be careful when considering who speaks for Indian dance, to whom, and for what purposes. The power

dynamics of representation are equally applicable to all of us.

Kathak, as you are aware, is a vital part of Indian culture with a history as deep as Bharatnatyam. I write this not only because I am a researcher and practitioner of Kathak, but also because writings on Kathak give the reader an entry into the hybrid and syncretic nature of Indian culture, especially its relation to Islam. Moreover, in this political climate it acquaints the reader with a version of Islam that is secular and embracing of music and dance. So this is also about how India is represented. Personally, I am very interested in generating a critical post-colonial discourse on Kathak, something that is long overdue. How can we as dance scholars engage with issues of representation? Is it possible, through inclusivity and democratic processes, to create particular visions and perspectives about a culture? I know research on Kathak does not need me or the *Dance Research Journal* to survive or progress, but this would have been a perfect opportunity to showcase the diversity of perspectives that are now used to explore the varied tapestry of India dance and culture.

With all best wishes,

Yours truly,
Pallabi Chakravorty
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