ARTHAM
EXPLORING DIASPORIC BHARATHANATYAM
Sweta Devarajan and Meera Murti
The Leadership Scholars Certificate Program is a two-year selective, interdisciplinary certificate program that prepares Rutgers undergraduate women to be informed, innovative, and socially responsible leaders.

Leadership Scholars design and implement social action projects to expand their understanding of issues and problems and to develop leadership skills.

This project gives Scholars the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge they have gained about leadership, advocacy, and social change with the practical and experiential knowledge they have developed about a particular policy issue or problem through the field site placement. It also further develops leadership skills by giving undergraduates the opportunity to practice leadership through action.

To find out more please visit the Institute for Women’s Leadership’s website at http://iwl.rutgers.edu.
INITIAL GOALS

- Curate a dance production on campus
- Discuss caste, class, and gender in contemporary Bharathanatyam
- Reach a large audience within the diaspora
DECISION TO MAKE A FILM

- Time, money, space, and network resources were limited
- Ability to address complex issues within our positions of privilege
- Sustainability of our project
- Potential contributions to academia
GOALS FOR FILM

- Short film on contemporary issues in Bharathanatyam in the diaspora
- Interviews with local dancers, teachers, and parents
- Footage of dance programs, classes, and backstage preparation
PARTNERSHIPS

Kamala Murti’s Dance Academy
INTERVIEW PROCESS

- Contacted professional dancers, academics, teachers, parents, and students
- Outlined basic interview questions for each interviewee profile
- Scouted locations for filming
- Coordinated on timing and scheduling
INTERVIEW PROCESS

- Interviews got better as we became more experienced
  - Relevance to film
  - Diversity in representation
  - Flow of content

- We over-shot a lot in terms of content (9 hours of interview film)
BACKGROUND FOOTAGE

- Importance of B-Roll in keeping a film visually interesting and engaging
- Pre-determined important shots and visual themes
- Used this initial list to identify events to shoot
- Updated shot list based on interview content
1. Transcription of full interviews
2. Division into clips
3. Identification of main themes to include
4. Organization by theme/sub-theme/speaker
5. Selection of “top” clips by clarity, content, and phrasing
6. Concatenation of clips into a logical flow
7. Development of transitions between clips

**SCRIPT STRUCTURE:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORDER</th>
<th>KEY</th>
<th>INTERVIEW</th>
<th>START TIME</th>
<th>STOP TIME</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION OF CLIP</th>
<th>DURATION</th>
<th>PRIMARY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Teaching Bhaktarathayanam or taking Bhaktarathayanam is going to keep you really grounded, balanced, and centered.”</td>
<td>0:15:00</td>
<td>&quot;You&quot;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“This is a way to (CUT) bring this insight to others. (CUT) I feel like the way to do that is to not just present the values in an obvious way.”</td>
<td>0:12:00</td>
<td>&quot;You&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>“I have over said DON’T SHOCK!”</td>
<td>0:26:00</td>
<td>&quot;You&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>“It is so fun to watch people’s reactions when I dance.”</td>
<td>0:22:00</td>
<td>&quot;You&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>“It is so fun to watch people’s reactions when I dance.”</td>
<td>0:20:00</td>
<td>&quot;You&quot;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>“The power of a statement comes down to how ready you are to pick up the slack for the other person.”</td>
<td>0:21:00</td>
<td>&quot;You&quot;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>“Bhaktarathayanam doesn’t have to be complex. What (CUT) has happened to me is I just don’t have to explore only these narratives that I’m comfortable with. It’s a very generous art form.”</td>
<td>0:19:00</td>
<td>&quot;You&quot;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>“We’re not bound by rules that are normally in (CUT) being away from us allows us to take big risks with expression that can be used globally for a large number of people.”</td>
<td>0:12:00</td>
<td>&quot;You&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>“This is something I can’t put into words. You need to put your very essential, you need to put it in words.”</td>
<td>0:13:00</td>
<td>&quot;You&quot;</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>“Translation from the original language of Bhaktarathayanam to English and French.”</td>
<td>0:11:00</td>
<td>&quot;You&quot;</td>
<td></td>
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**SEGMENT NAME:** Evolution/Innovation

**B-ROLL TYPE:** Natya pradnya & chronography, Natya performance, Navatman performance, The Fifth youtube videos

1. Indian life outside of the (CUT) that was my main inspiration also it is a performance art.

2. "Although I’m based in the US and I use the internet to contact people, it’s as if I’m doing something that is happening now."

3. "I think this goes to show that I spend time on this and I do this on a regular basis."

4. "When I dance it just makes me happy."

5. "It has given me immense joy."

6. "It has given me immense joy."

7. "It has given me immense joy."

8. "It has given me immense joy."

9. "It has given me immense joy."

10. "It has given me immense joy."
DEVELOPING A SCRIPT

- Most challenging aspect in terms of time, energy, and patience

- We underestimated the work involved in turning 16 hours of footage into a 15-minute film

- Underestimation led to work pileup on a critical weekend
  - We worked for 72 hours straight
  - We only got 4 hours of sleep
  - We were not very happy
VISUAL COHESION

- Sorting through background footage to find usable clips
- Matching B-Roll clips to interview footage based on content
- Covering missing, shaky, or unusable interview footage
- Ensuring that the B-Roll clips added to the flow of the story
EDITING

- Color-corrected and stabilized all footage in the final cut
- Edited audio to remove conversational fillers and unnecessary content
- Any other edits required to maximize clarity and flow
MAIN THEMES OF FILM

1. Cultural and Gender Identity

2. Value Transfer

3. Role of Guru

4. Evolution and Innovation
CULTURAL/GENDER IDENTITY

- Migration and its impact on thoughts around identity
- Performativity of identity
- Dance communities and their impact on young people
VALUE TRANSFER

- Parents are aware of the construction of Indianness, and put their children in spaces that build “Indian” values.

- Bharathanatyam is unique because it viscerally instructs femininity and womanhood alongside traditional cultural values.

- “In its transmigration, Bharathanatyam has become one of the quintessential vehicles for the inculcation of various values particularly for girls. Some of these values are identified as discipline, spirituality, focus, respect, and the ability to discern right from wrong. Thus dance…functions as a corporeal disciplining of the body in these various traits, collectively identified as ‘Indianness’.”
ROLE OF GURU

■ Guru as a teacher, but also as a role model

■ Everything falls to the guru; they are entrusted with the responsibility of shaping children

■ Gurus must acquire and maintain cultural capital by meeting high standards of Indian feminine values

■ Relationship between student and guru allows unique flow of ideas and values
EVOLUTION AND INNOVATION

- Stagnancy of art, and the importance of preservation over evolution
- What is authentic?
- Purpose of innovation for diasporic artists
IMPACT

- We all screened it for our families
  - We cried
  - A lot

- Official release of the film is tomorrow, December 9th
DISTRIBUTION & DISSEMINATION

- Social media promotions + release
- Classroom distribution
- Distribution through dance networks and institutions
- Screenings
ON LEADERSHIP

- We wouldn’t have been able to do this without the funding, support, flexibility, and patience of our partner organizations.

- Having 2 partners who were equally passionate made everything more difficult, but also more meaningful.

- Collaboration between people with unique skill sets and experiences made this film so much more rich.
REFLECTION

- We are so thankful that we had an reason to spend a semester working on something we love

- This project has given us the ability to critically examine our lived experiences

- It is so special to have the vocabulary to discuss why Bharathanatyam is important to us
REFERENCES

- “What’s the Matter? Shakti’s (Re)Collection of Race, Nationhood, and Gender” by Anita Kumar
- *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor* by Priya Srinivasan
- “Dance on! Inter-collegiate Indian dance competitions as a new cultural form” by Meena Khandelwal and Chitra Akkoor
- “Rethinking Global Indian Dance through Local Eyes: The Contemporary Bharatanatyam Scene in Chennai” by Shanti Pillai
- “The Gestures of Bharata Natyam: Migrating Into Diasporic Contemporary Indian Dance” by Ketu Katrak
- “Dancing Krishna in the suburbs: Kinaesthetics in the South Asian American diaspora” by Arthi Devarajan
SPECIAL THANKS

- Aparna Shankar
- Aishwarya Venkatesh
- Melvin Varghese
- Arthi Devarajan
- Kamala Murti
- Sahasra Sambamoorthi
- Jessica Perez
- Ramya Ramnarayan
- Meera Srinivas
- Nanthini Partha
- Sharada Bharadwaj
- Saijyothi Meegada
- Swetha Sakhamuri
- Renuka Srinivasan
- Karizma Kishnani
- Jeff Friedman
- Yana Rodgers
- Joyce Burkhalter Fleckiger
QUESTIONS?