

## FINAL NARRATIVE REPORT

### Gati Summer Dance Residency (GSDR) 2011

April 9 – June 17, 2011

30<sup>th</sup> August 2011

#### INTRODUCTION

##### Aims of GSDR 2011

The annual Gati Summer Dance Residency was conceived of as a space that **supports and enables emerging choreographers to propose, conceptualise and realize their own solo/ensemble choreographic works.** It is specifically designed to allow dancers and emerging choreographers to explore the choreographic process under the **guidance of experienced, senior artists.** This central element of mentoring gives participants access to expertise in the field. It also provides an opportunity for established practitioners to reassess as well as articulate their own processes and methodologies.

The residency aims to assist **six selected choreographers** to produce a 18-20 minute piece each over **a period of 10 weeks.** During this time they have the opportunity to interact with assigned 'mentors', and to receive critical feedback from each other.

The residency ends with a public performance of the works produced at the residency, which emerges out of questions about dance making. In search of their personal choreographic voices, the residents are encouraged to ask – what is my choreographic intention and why? How do I develop tools and tasks to explore my concept? How do I translate an idea into movement? What vocabulary do I use or develop and how? How will I use lights, sets, props, music, image to support the dance? How do I communicate with dancers and collaborators?

**The facilities that the residency provides to its resident-choreographers include rehearsal space, a production budget, an honorarium, a final public performance and guidance and feedback under the mentorship programme.**

#### Sponsors

GSDR 2011 was jointly supported by Max Mueller Bhavan, New Delhi, India Foundation for the Arts, French Embassy, Japan Foundation, Norwegian Embassy, Global Arts Village and Meeto Memorial Award.

#### CHOICE OF PARTICIPANTS

##### Choice of Mentors

The three full time mentors for GSDR 2010 **Maya Krishna Rao, Chris Lechner,** and **Anusha Lall,** are dance and theatre practitioners, who have

been experimenting for the last decade or more with their traditional/classical training to create innovative work. While Maya is a theatre artist, Chris is an improvisation teacher; he gave up dancing classical ballet to find his own creative voice. Anusha is a Bharatanatyam dancer and contemporary choreographer. The reason for the choice of these artists as mentors for the residency is to widen the nature of experience and expertise available to the residents. In addition to choreography within the strict parameters of "dance", we believe that dancers would benefit greatly from exposure to creative processes employed in theatre as well as other art forms.

In addition to the full-time mentors, the residency invited 2 guest mentors who have contributed very significantly to the residents' process. **Victoria Hauke** from Germany, also an improvisation artist and teacher, workshopped the residents in the first Intensive Week of the residency. The second mentor, scenographer **Jean Christophe Lanquetin**, whose participation in the residency was supported by The French Embassy, mentored the residents in stage design for three weeks. He was in Delhi and working with the residents during the formative stage of their work.

A short biodata of each mentor is provided in Appendix I

### **Selection Process for Resident Choreographers**

An open call for applications was made in February 2011 via emails and posters posted at performance venues and dance institutions in Delhi, as well as through circulars in other cities, especially Bangalore, Chennai and Kolkata. Applicants were given 1 month to submit a proposal. In addition they were also asked to submit visual material relating to their past dance and choreographic experience. There were 25 applicants in all.

A shortlist of applicants was made by the facilitators, mentors, as well as by 2 invited guests. The shortlisted participants were interviewed by the committee in person or over Skype in the case of applicants from outside Delhi.

This year the residency selected slightly more experienced participants who have had some years of working in the field, as well as some experience in making their own work. This was a deliberate choice, as we identified in these emerging choreographers a common urgency to discover their own, personal voice, which is something that the residency wanted to address.

**Our 6 residents for GSDR 2009 selected after the interviews were Mayuka Ueno Gayer, Mehneer Sudan, Rukmini Vijaykumar, Nongmeikapam Surjit, Deepak Surjit Shivaswamy and Niranjani Aiyer.**

The biodata of the 6 residents are included in Appendix II.

## **Mentoring Meeting**

The residency this year was preceded by a Mentoring Meeting, a 2-day workshop, when the mentors and facilitators of the residency and some invited guests reflected on the role of "mentoring" in GSDR. As a central principle of the residency, it was felt necessary that an intensive brainstorming be done on what mentoring means and entails in the context of contemporary dance in India, and how should we approach it in the specific context of the residency. In the absence of much mentoring experience in the country, this workshop was a very useful exercise for the mentors. It enabled them to approach the residency with an awareness and mutual understanding of their role in responding to the residents in their individual processes.

The mentoring meeting was attended by Maya Krishna Rao, Chris Lechner, Navtej Singh Johar, Briar Chatterjea, Anusha Lall, Mandeep Raikhy, Ewa Ferens, Abantee Dutta and Urmimala Sarkar.

A detailed report on this meeting has been added as an attachment with this document.

## **THE RESIDENCY**

### **First Intensive Week**

The 7 days-Intensive Week was a period of very focused workshoping on how to create new work. Led by the guest mentors Chris Lechner and Victoria Hauke, and attended by the selected residents of GSDR 2011 as well as other guest residents, this week consisted of workshops, discussions and individual exploration/work time. This was also an opportunity for the residents to share their concepts as well as their previous work, with each other and with the mentors. These discussions generated exchange about the projects and processes engaged in by each resident, as well as about their present search/questions.

Both Victoria Hauke and Chris Lechner have an extended experience as artists and teachers in improvisation, central to which is the body itself. Over the 7 days, they devised and led workshops and exercises in which the residents were encouraged to look for material in their body that was essential and at the same time exciting/ important/sustaining in some way. Each resident was, through this process, invited to strip themselves of their learnt forms and discover something more 'personal'. At the same time, they were asked to keep generating material and playing with it, varying it, extending its potential and meaning.

This input brought the resident to a very particular point by the second week of the residency. They had, to various degrees, abandoned their previous ideas and 'baggage' about what it was to create a contemporary dance piece, (one abandoned her proposal altogether!), subjected their decisions to open questioning, and confronted the space of 'not knowing' in the journey they were about to begin.

The Intensive week was open to other 'invited residents' to participate along with the selected residents. Some of them were applicants for GSDR, who had not been selected due to lack of experience, others were dancers in the city who we wished to give the opportunity to. We feel that the intensive week is a valuable experience that can contribute to the development of dancers, as well as sensitise them to what a choreographic process could be. It is also a way of enabling people to re-apply for future residencies, as well as of building an active and vital dance community.

### **Daily Class**

The residents were required to attend a daily technique class. The classes - yoga and release technique - were led by Lokesh Bharadwaj and Mandeep Raikhy respectively. Following a morning class the residents went to their respective rehearsal spaces. Each resident was provided with a rehearsal space for 4 hours a day, 5 days a week.

### **Mentor-Resident Relationship**

Apart from **daily classes and rehearsals**, the residency is structured around **mentor-resident meetings and joint presentations**.

It must be clarified here that 'mentorship' in the context of GSDR implies being the critical outside eye during the choreographic processes undertaken by the residents rather than being teachers or trainers. The structure of the residency ensured weekly contact between the residents and mentors, both on a one-to-one basis and through group presentations. Each mentor-resident meeting served as an opportunity for intensive work with a mentor on a particular aspect of the work that was being developed, be it movement vocabulary, structure or supporting components such as lights, soundscape, sets and costume. Each of these meetings was documented and reported. This was to keep the other mentors and facilitators informed about the developments in each meeting, as well as to provide a record for the residents to refer to in case they felt the need.

Each resident, therefore, had the opportunity to meet with each mentor on a one to one basis at least once, and in some cases twice.

Apart from the 2 planned joint presentations towards the middle and end of the residency, the foci of which were vocabulary and structure, and production respectively, there were several 'group' presentations this year, with residents meeting two or more mentors together. These group presentations were very useful as residents receive feedback, often conflicting feedback, from different sources. While this was confusing sometimes, it was also interesting for the residents to hear several perspectives.

The process for each resident this year, as compared with previous years, was marked with a degree of self-awareness and intentionality. This was partly because of the maturity and experience that the residents already

came with, but it was precipitated by the register of self-questioning that was established in the first week. The interrogation - what one was wanting to communicate, through which vocabulary, indeed, why was dance the medium in the first place – was the basis of work through out the residency. Most residents experienced moments of serious introspection about their journey as artists and their choices about agency, modes of production and their way of 'being' and working. For the organisers of the residency this was a massive shift in the quality of the residency – it is critical that the residency serves as a space that triggers these questions. Needless to say these questions are not, and cannot be, resolved here.

### **Peer Sharing**

This year 'peer sharing' was introduced to the structure of the residency as a direct result of the Mentoring Meeting. The residents met once a week, amongst themselves, to show and discuss what they have been working on in the recent days. Peer sharing proved to be a very useful tool. Not only did the residents share their individual work, processes and experiences with each other, they also built an admirable degree of trust and camaraderie amongst themselves. Over time, they were influenced by each others' ideas and also developed a vocabulary for sharing their ideas and concerns.

### **Scenography Component at GSDR 2011**

One of the major questions that has emerged at the residency this year, has to do with the participation of the scenography mentor. **Jean Christophe Lanquetin**, whose participation in the residency is supported by The French Embassy. JC came in to the residency at the formative stages of the residents' work in order to help them devise a stage plan for their piece. To kick start his work with GSDR we organized an open 2 day workshop in New Delhi that was attended by the residents as well as other members of the artisti community.

JC's participation, as an intervention, was interesting because it introduced the residents to the concept of space at a very early stage in their choreographic process. With JC's entry they found they were forced to think about space, presentation and the possibilities that objects, sets and light brought to their work. This influenced some critical decisions each resident made in the visualization of their work. At the same time, it was too early in their processes to actually settle on, let alone build on, any specific idea. In the last weeks of the residency many of the specific scenographic ideas for the individual works developed with JC were dropped. What did remain was the unifying spatial concept of a black box that was constructed in the Shri Ram Centre theatre space. The idea of a black box emerged out of the residents' desire to create a neutral space that held all the pieces.

JC introduced the residents to a method or a system for thinking about space and objects, as well a rigour in testing ideas that emerge.

## Set Up and Final Performance

The team had 2 days to set up before the performances. To be able to test and experiment with the theatre space is a luxury in India. For the residents this was particularly crucial as the scenography for a couple of the works was quite complex and had to be tested out in the theatre. Because of the work that had happened previously with the scenography mentor, the residents had an awareness of, and ownership over, the stage space when they arrived for the set up (much more so than in previous years, when residents had not considered it carefully until they were actually there!).

The final pieces were presented to the public on 2 days – Surjit, Rukmini and Niranjani on the first day and Deepak, Mehneer and Mayuka on the second. A brief description of each individual work, as it appeared in the brochure, is included in Appendix III. Both evenings were well attended. GSDR now has a regular audience who has been attending the annual event for past years. Each year the response has been very encouraging.

## REFLECTIONS & CONCERNS

**As this was the third year of the residency, the machinery, so to speak, is in place. The organisation and management of the residency, and its components, are now routine and require less effort and thought. This, therefore, is an ideal time to return to the intention of the residency and fine-tune existing programmes and devise new ones to better fulfill it.**

1. Is the residency truly plural in the aesthetics and traditions that it represents, and do we have the skill and the capacity to make it so? This, in the view of the facilitators, is the central question of the residency. If the principal aim of GSDR is to encourage the emergence of new work in the area of Indian contemporary dance, **we must be able to offer concrete perspectives on how to rework/explore/interrogate our traditional knowledge and training as impetus for new work.** To be sure, this has to be complemented by the knowledge and experience of teachers and choreographers from other traditions. But this latter should be one of the inputs and not the only, or dominant, one.
2. Devising methodologies, techniques and vocabularies for transmitting traditional knowledge in the context of experimentation and innovation is a mammoth task. It will result from the evolution of these forms over time, and of course, this is our joint goal/responsibility. At the same time, the residency provides a perfect opportunity for exploring and realising some of these methods. One of the ways of doing this would

be to invite 2 or 3 very different Indian contemporary choreographers to conduct workshops on how they work with tradition. Very few are able to articulate their process, so these workshops will have to be carefully designed. Another possibility is to have a researcher during the entire period of the residency to not only document the work that emerges in rehearsals and workshops, but also to contribute to ideating and creating a language for the processes that occur.

(It is very important for the mentors to be able to articulate/explain what they mean. „How about bringing in some of your experience of Odissi into this phrase“, can we be explicit about what we mean by that? The question is whether we have the vocabulary to talk about experimentation within these forms, and clear tools that introduce the residents to modes of experimentation that are not illustrative.)

3. GSDR 2011 once again brought the structure of the mentoring programme into focus. Each year the most difficult area of the residency is identifying mentors for it. Due to financial restrictions, the long duration of the residency, and the serious dearth of experienced mentors in field of dance the country, our choice is ridiculously restricted. This is something we need to solve for the coming years. While the mentoring workshop this year was a step in this direction, it was a tiny step. More thought has to be given to how to develop an indigenous mentoring pool. While developing a mentoring pool it is necessary also to look across disciplines for input, both for the mentoring workshop , as well as for the residency itself.
4. The further questions of how the mentoring aspect of the residency should be structured, and how the mentors should meet the residents also need to be resolved. This year the feedback from the residents was that they would have liked to have met a particular mentor much earlier in their process, and that it was confusing for them to have so many divergent opinions.
5. Last but not least, while there has been a tendency for the residents and mentors to focus on vocabulary, not enough attention has been paid to the dramaturgy of the works. This is a very important aspect of dance creation and must be addressed in the future. Many of the works that have come out the residency have been the poorer for this reason.
6. The quality of the „residency experience“ will be transformed if GSDR can provide its residents a single residential space. This is something we want to work towards.

## CONCLUSION

The creation of 6 new works apart, the most important contribution that the residency makes is in the form of an opportunity for dancers and choreographers to exchange, share and contribute to each others' development as artists. In the context of an absence of any infrastructural

support for independent artists, this opportunity comes as a relief for residents. This year was no different. The residents communicated the sense of community and support that they felt during the residency, and also the impact it made on their individual work and artistic journeys. Some felt that their work at the residency will radically shift their artistic engagement in the future. Others felt that the residency had given them a sense of support in an otherwise isolated world.

## Appendix I

### MENTORS FOR GSDR 2011

**Maya Krishna Rao** is a theatre artist who has worked on and off stage for the last twenty-five years. She is particularly known for her solo performances that have a distinct form and style, and for her collaborative multi media performances. Maya does stand up comedy built on current events and popular issues. She is visiting faculty at the National School of Drama where she teaches Acting.

**Chris Lechner** is a movement artist who works with dance and installation art. Brought up in Kolkata, Chris has been based in India for several years where he has lead workshops since 1996 in solo and partner movement, and has mentored young artists in different fields in their effort to find their work. He has choreographed and improvised in a wide range of collaborations, and performed with some of the leading companies across the world, both classical and contemporary.

**Anusha Lall** works in the field of classical dance and contemporary performance. Anusha's interest in dance spans choreography, performance, teaching and research. Her recent choreographic works attempt to discover fresh dynamics and create new perspectives in the way Bharatanatyam is performed and viewed. She is director and founder member of The Gati Dance Forum.

### GUEST MENTORS

**Victoria Hauke** is a Hamburg-based choreographer and dancer, who combines her experience in contemporary dance, ballet, yoga and tai chi into a deeply investigative teaching methodology. Since 1999, she has been repeatedly realizing projects in collaboration with visual artists and has shown her work at several international venues. Victoria is regularly invited to teach at K3, Choreografic Centre in Hamburg and at Tanzlabor21 in Frankfurt.

**Jean Christophe Lanquetin** is a scenographer and artist based in France. His work focuses on devising scenographies for theatre and contemporary dance, especially with choreographers from the African continent. He develops personal artistic projects, using multiple mediums, especially around the ideas of space in the urban context.

### GUEST TRAINERS

**Mandeep Raikhy** is a dance practitioner currently based in New Delhi. Mandeep studied Dance Theatre at Laban, London, and subsequently toured with Shobana Jeyasingh Dance



Company between 2005-09. Last year, *Inhabited Geometry*, Raikhy's first full-length work, premiered at Shri Ram Centre, New Delhi. He regularly conducts release-based contemporary technique classes for professional dancers in Delhi.

**Lokesh Bhardwaj** has been a serious dancer and yoga practitioner for several years. He trained in yoga under Navtej Johar at Studio Abhyas, which specializes in the Krishnamacharya/ Desikachar style of yoga. A Yoga teacher since 2004, Lokesh teaches regularly at Studio Abhyas apart from conducting workshops. He is currently enrolled for KHYF, teacher training certified programme, Chennai.

## Appendix II

### RESIDENT CHOREOGRAPHERS' BIOS

**Niranjani Iyer** is a performer and director who studied at the Ecole Jacques Lecoq, Paris and trained with Ariane Mnouchkine of the Theatre du Soleil and Yoshi Oida among others. She has been performing and giving workshops for over ten years. She works and travels between France, India and Ethiopia.

**Mehneer Sudan** works in the field of Contemporary and Jazz Dance as choreographer, performer and teacher. A former member of The Danceworx Performing Arts Academy, her training in dance includes Contemporary, Jazz, Modern, Ballet and Kathak. She also studied at the Northern School of Contemporary Dance in Leeds, UK. Currently based in Mumbai, her interest in dance-theatre has led to her work with emerging young directors in the city. In addition, her interest in dance education is borne out in her engagement with pre-school and primary school work.

**Deepak Kurki Shivaswamy** has been engaged in artistic work as a performer, creator and teacher since year 2000. He has trained and worked with dance companies like Attakkalari in India, Bodhi project in Austria, Danshuisstationzuid in Netherlands, Hausgemacht in Germany. He completed a post-graduate diploma in choreography at S.E.A.D in Austria. His dance creations have been showcased in many venues in India and Europe.

**Mayuka Ueno Gayer** was born in Japan. After studying political science at Keio University in Tokyo, she left for France for further studies in Sociology and Arts. In parallel with her academic studies, she has been working with several artists and choreographers and started her own production such as « Millilittle » co-choreographed with Ray Nakazawa and presented at the festival of « la Biennale nationale de danse du Val de Marne ». Since 2006, she has been living in New Delhi and studying Odissi under **Guru Mrs. Pratibha Jena** at Triveni Kala Sangam. She is the mother of a baby girl who has been a constant source of inspiration.

**Rukmini Vijayakumar** has been dancing for over 20 years. She graduated with a BFA in Modern dance and Ballet from the Boston Conservatory in 2008. From the age of 8, she pursued an intense study of Bharatanatyam under Guru Narmada, Guru Padmini Rao and Guru Sundari Santhanam and continues to extensively perform as a Bharatanatyam soloist. She has studied acting at the New York Film Academy and the Ivana Chubbuck

*Studios in Los Angeles and under Director, Prakash Belawadi, Bangalore. She has her own dance company, Raadha Kalpa, where she teaches and choreographs new work.*

**Bonbon** studied Choreography from Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography. He was part of the Natya Stem Dance Kampni and Natya Maya, Bangalore as a contemporary and traditional dancer. He has trained in different forms of movement and continues to learn from different Gurus/Mentors. He is the founder of "Nachom Arts of Contemporary Dance Company" based in Manipur (2008). He also performs with other choreographers and directors as freelance dancer.

### **Appendix III**

#### **RESIDENT CHOREOGRAPHERS' WORKS**

**... around the wandering shadow...**

**by Niranjani Iyer**

**...around the wandering shadow...** is a questioning on displacement, movement, nostalgia, a longing for home. Partly inspired by the book "Why the child was cooked in Polenta" by Aglaja Veteranyi, the piece looks at the outsider, the foreigner, the performer. How does one feel among strangers, in strange places? How do our bodies move through unfamiliar spaces? How does one stay together / fall apart?

**Inside Bodies, Talking Comfort**

**by Mehneer Sudan**

This piece is inspired by the artist's encounters with masseuses. It attempts to explore what passes between the masseuse and her client in a brief moment of exchange. Relief or surrender, intimacy within unfamiliarity, and the effect of touch on the body; these were some of the themes looked into during the choreographic process.

**"LVOE"**

**by Deepak Kurki Shivaswamy**

A non-romantic solo invites the audience in questioning the unnecessary romanticism of materialistic things in life by questioning what is "appropriate" and what is "apparent" in present society. The artist uses socially indicative headgear juxtaposed with romantic idealistic music in order to communicate his ideas through the play of time, space and body movement.

**Floating Sphere**

**by Mayuka Ueno Gayer**

This work focuses on the « in-between-ness » : between the seen and the unseen , between inside and outside, between the vertical and the horizontal, between gravity and anti-gravity, between the everyday and the sacred, between the larger kinesphere and the smaller one. The body floating between multiple kinespheres reflects on my floating self.

“ ”

**by Rukmini Vijayakumar**

“ ” is a piece of discovery. Rukmini has found kinetic form that arises from an organic

physical plane. " " draws on inspirations of movement, from, shape, physical initiation and textual phrases. The *idea* or *story* in the piece arises from the quality of the movement itself. The choreographic study is primarily on 'movement initiation'. The emotional state, if any, is a result of the movement and a consequence of the study of kinetic initiation; as opposed to gesture and dance arising from the intellectual analysis of a preconceived "emotional state" or "theme".

### **One Voice**

#### **by Nongmeikapam Surjit (Bonbon)**

"You know exactly how and specifically where I Feel, Wonder, Love, Pain, Hurt. I know you feel the same. Still, you keep hurting me. And yourself too. You still poison yourself. And me too! Why?"

This piece is a reflection on the nature of torture and the shared trauma of the victim and the torturer. There is not only a connection between the victim and the torturer, they can also be present in the same person. This solo is performed in silence. The silence of the spectators and the performer's voice provides the soundscape for the piece.