

## **LUTSF – 2023 Main Awards – Report by Kirsten Newell**

### **Dance as Yoga**

7th to 28th January 2024

Skandavan, Auroville, Tamil Nadu, India.

3 weeks learning under Rekha Tandon.

### **How far the purpose of your project was achieved;**

The purpose was to travel to Skandavan, Auroville, India to train under Rekha Tandon in her program called Dance as Yoga which would deepen my understanding of Indian classical dance as an integrated physical, mental and spiritual practice. I achieved this and fulfilled all my hopes. It was a very inspiring time for me and I am immensely grateful for this wonderful experience and time of development.

### **Notes about any particular highlights in your travels;**

My BA in Dance from Kalakshetrata Foundation (10 years ago now), renowned for training many great dancers, offered a very technical, traditional and experiential training, but with less emphasis on philosophical understanding of the prana (breath), mudras (hand gestures), body/energy work, which are at the root of Indian classical dance training. Rekha brought the Yoga understanding, spirituality, philosophy and practise to the dance and in this way deepened my understanding of what I have already learnt and practiced separately and enabled me to develop my own practice further based on this knowledge. I found my experience to be much more therapeutic than I expected. I found my own mental health improved over the course of the two weeks. I felt a release of physical and mental tension within her classes because of her process drawing on yoga involving the breath, mudras and chakra centers of focus.

### **Plans to share information about your project with others and how it may offer public benefit;**

Future classes – I am discovering a more holistic approach to dancing and teaching of Bharatanatyam in my Cosmic Dance school as I reflect on what is healthy training (past and present). I have already started to use my findings in my classes in Edinburgh, Inverness and Findhorn and they are responding well and benefitting in terms of wellbeing and I can see that it is strengthening and opening them as dancers. It is helping the students to be more aware of what is happening within their bodies and restoring balance to the body and mind. I am really enjoying interweaving the teachings I received together in my own practice as well as with my students.

I have been extremely inspired and positively affected by ‘Dance as Yoga’ so I know that the wider creative sector will benefit. It has already impacted my day to day teaching and I will continue to develop and explore my learnings further in my personal practise and continue to embed this learning into my dance, teachings and productions.

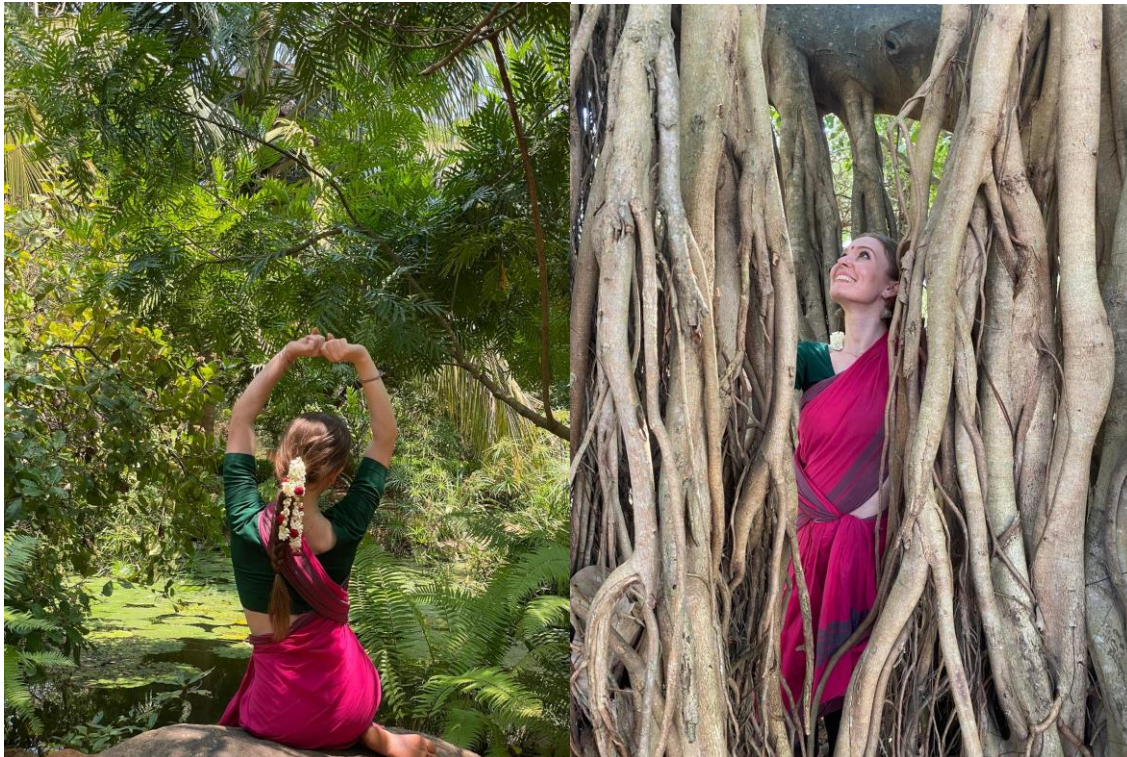
My new work in progress *Rise Goddess Rise* has been further deepened and inspired by my time in India doing ‘dance as yoga’ with Rekha. I will be working with artists and Bharatanatyam dancers in this production which I plan to share widely with the public.

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### Dance as Yoga

I traveled to Skandavan, Auroville, India to train under Rekha Tandon. It was a very inspiring time for me and I am immensely grateful for this wonderful experience and time of development.

Each day began with meditative exercises and body conditioning, followed by morning dance classes and vocal chanting tuition. I cherished every moment of this and being back in the culture of India, from which all the art forms arose.



Wellbeing - My time there deepened my understanding of Indian classical dance as an integrated physical, mental and spiritual practice and has further developed my vision as an artist and strengthened my presence as a performer through deeper connection with my inner-self. I found my experience to be much more therapeutic than I expected. I found my own mental health improved over the course of the two weeks. I felt a release of physical and mental tension within her classes because of her process drawing on yoga involving the breath, mudras and chakra centers of focus.

She spoke about grounding, descending and surrendering to the earth's energy which is very important in my dance form which uses aramandi mostly (half sitting position). She has three very visceral centers called the red bindu (abdomen ), white bindu (heart ) and black bindu (crown) which help us connect to the earth, centring , the heart, opening and the sky, lengthening.

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We experimented with the mudras (hand gestures) and how they affect the breath and therefore the body and release of tension and increase of energy.

Yoga - deepening my understanding within Bharatanatyam

Rekha taught us about the prana (breath), mudras (hand gestures), body/energy work, which are at the root of Indian classical dance training. She brought the Yoga understanding, spirituality, philosophy and practice to the dance and in this way deepened my understanding of my dance practice.

Growth as an artist - Rekha wanted to help me as an artist flourish and grow and help me to understand and find my own unique approach. She asked many questions and was open to my explorations which was a very positive environment in which to learn. Her unique approach allowed me as a classical dancer and yoga practitioner to understand the energy body map, meshing traditional Odissi dance with yoga practice empowering me to shape my personal regimen as a dance artist and teacher in Scotland. Her teaching nourished my personal development as a dance artist. I am currently processing and translating what I have learnt from her within Odissi into my Bharatanatyam form and I am enjoying the process of doing this.

'Dance as Yoga' has helped me to realize that there is a strong wellbeing component inherent within Bharatanatyam. With the passage of time and with new knowledge, I feel ready to examine my experiences through my work and to help others access this.

Future classes – I am discovering a more holistic approach to dancing and teaching of Bharatanatyam in my Cosmic Dance school as I reflect on what is healthy training (past and present). I have already started to use my findings in my classes in Edinburgh, Inverness and Findhorn and they are responding well and benefitting in terms of wellbeing and I can see that it is strengthening and opening them as dancers. It is helping the students to be more aware of what is happening within their bodies and restoring balance to the body and mind. I am really enjoying interweaving the teachings I received together in my own practice as well as with my students.

Future projects - *Rise Goddess Rise*

My new work in progress *Rise Goddess Rise* has been further deepened and inspired by my time in India doing "dance as yoga" with Rekha. My knowledge of mantras, chakras, prana, yoga and Indian dance has developed and I have a better sense of how to interweave them authentically. Rekha taught me a dance invoking the Goddess for protection and a sense of the whole body being enlivened by the Goddess spirit and power. This was accompanied by a simple chant to a shruthi box. I explored formations and talked about sacred geometry with her. I was interested in understanding more about this for choreographing group sequencing and patterns. I wanted to explore more the aspects of the sacred feminine and the strength, creativity and energy of the Goddess and I definitely received this while spending my time with her. We danced outside in her outdoor studio and connected to the elemental aspects of goddesses, bringing out their powerful energy and connecting us to nature. I have been envisaging this as I prepare for my goddess project. It was helpful to have this time of exploration outside.

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I have been extremely inspired and positively affected by 'Dance as Yoga' so I know that the wider creative sector will benefit. I plan to work with Bharatanatyam dancers in my *Rise Goddess Rise* project which I plan to share widely with the public. It has already impacted my day to day teaching and I will continue to develop and explore my learnings further in my personal practice. I know I will continue to embed this learning into my dance, teachings and productions.