

1-1-2011

Performing Marginal Identities: Understanding the Cultural Significance of Tawa'if and Rudali Through the Language of the Body in South Asian Cinema

Lise Danielle Hurlstone
Portland State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/open_access_etds

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Hurlstone, Lise Danielle, "Performing Marginal Identities: Understanding the Cultural Significance of Tawa'if and Rudali Through the Language of the Body in South Asian Cinema" (2011). *Dissertations and Theses*. Paper 154.

<https://doi.org/10.15760/etd.154>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

Performing Marginal Identities: Understanding the Cultural Significance of Tawa'if and
Rudali Through the Language of the Body in South Asian Cinema

by

Lise Danielle Hurlstone

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science
in
Communication

Thesis Committee:
Priya Kapoor, Chair
Charlotte Schell
Clare Wilkinson-Weber

Portland State University
©2011

Abstract

This thesis examines the representation of the lives and performances of tawa'if and rudali in South Asian cinema to understand their marginalization as performers, and their significance in the collective consciousness of the producers and consumers of Indian cultural artifacts. The critical textual analysis of six South Asian films reveals these women as caste-amorphous within the system of social stratification in India, and therefore captivating in the potential they present to achieve a complex and multi-faceted definition of culture. Qualitative interviews with 4 Indian classical dance instructors in Portland, Oregon and performative observations of dance events indicate the importance of these performers in perpetuating and developing Indian cultural artifacts, and illustrate the value of a multi-layered, performative methodological approach. These findings suggest that marginality in performance is a useful and dynamic site from which to investigate the processes of cultural communication, producing findings that augment sole textual analysis.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I must acknowledge my interview participants who were so generous with their time, and refreshingly honest in their responses. Much inspiration and insight for my analysis and conclusions came from my conversations and dance lessons with them.

I am most indebted to my advisor Dr. Priya Kapoor who encouraged me to not shy away from a topic I was interested in because it seemed obscure, and provided me with the tools to carry out the project to the best of my ability. Without her academic guidance and willingness to accommodate long discussions on theory and culture at all hours this work would not have been possible. Also, I must thank my other committee members, Dr. Charlotte Schell and Dr. Clare Wilkinson-Weber, who graciously accommodated my tight schedule. Dr. Schell's keen methodological eye and Dr. Wilkinson-Weber's topical expertise provided me welcome insight in both orienting the direction of my research and the final edits.

My parents, in-laws, siblings and extended family both in Cayman and Portland have been invaluable throughout this process. To mum and dad especially, thank you for encouraging me pursue my education with wild abandon. It has served me well.

I spent countless hours with friends and classmates mulling over the theories, definitions, frustrations, processes and paperwork involved in writing this thesis, and I can't thank them enough for their patience. Especially to Amanda Sanford, Claire Gregory, Courtney Phipps, Du Juan, Miriam Foster, and Tamara DePue, thank you.

Finally, to my proofreader, critical analyst, personal chef, caregiver, and husband, Ben Leftwich, thank you for everything. I am quite sure that without his love and support

this thesis writing process would have compromised my sanity.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Glossary of Terms.....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Definitions and Contextual Information	2
South Asian Cinema	7
The Rudali.....	10
The Tawa'if.....	12
Summary	16
Purpose Statement.....	17
Rationale	18
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	20
Postcolonial Theory	20
Pierre Bourdieu	28
The Performative	33
Research Questions.....	40
Chapter 3: Methodology	41
Setting	43
Sample.....	45
Data Collection	47
Filmic data collection.....	48
Interview data collection.....	49
Observation and performance data collection.....	50
Analysis.....	51

Bias and Validity.....	53
Bias	54
Validity	56
Chapter 4: Results and Analysis	59
Fieldnotes: Key Observations and Points of Interest.....	60
Bharatanatyam lessons – Focusing on the internal state.....	61
Bharatanatyam lessons – Dance vs. life.....	62
Dance as culture	63
Interviews with Dance Instructors: Perceptions of Performance.....	64
Who are tawa'if?.....	65
Who are rudali?.....	69
Perceptions of the cultural value of tawa'if and rudali.	71
Final thoughts on marginalized dance and context.....	77
Representations of Tawa'if and Rudali in Film	81
Overview of filmic data.	81
Thematization of Films	86
Ambivalence.	86
Mysticism.....	89
Fatalism.....	91
Classism.....	95
Power, authority and gender.	98
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	103
Interpretation of Findings	103
Research question 1	103
Research question 2	107
Research question 3	110
Significance.....	112
Limitations	115
Suggestions for Future Research	116
References.....	118
Appendices.....	126
Appendix A: The Codes of Television	126
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form	127
Appendix C: Interview Questions.....	128
Appendix D: <i>Devdas</i> (1955) Plot Summary and Key Observations.....	129
Appendix E: <i>Devdas</i> (2002) Plot Summary and Key Observations	133
Appendix F: <i>Pakeezah</i> (1972) Plot Summary and Key Points	137

Appendix G: <i>Rudaali</i> (1993) Plot Summary and Key Points	141
Appendix H: <i>Umrao Jaan</i> (1981) Plot Summary and Key Points.....	146
Appendix I: <i>Umrao Jaan</i> (2006) Plot Summary and Key Points	150

Glossary of Terms

- alta:** A bright red dye that is used to decorate the hands and feet of women in certain parts of India for special occasions such as weddings. In other parts of India the darker brown/orange dye henna is used. Alta and henna designs are common features of tawa'if are used as decoration for modern classical dancers.
- Bhangra:** Folk dance of the Punjab region of Northern India and part of Pakistan. Traditionally this dance is performed by farmers at harvest, but in recent years has been fused with other Western genres such as hip-hop, reggae and techno and popularized internationally.
- Bharatanatyam:** Popular form of Indian classical dance that originated in the Southern region of India, especially the modern state of Tamil Nadu. Styles vary and can include Kalakshetra, Vallur, and Mysore among others.
- Bombay:** The former name of the most populous city in India, now known as Mumbai. Bombay has been the heart of the Indian film industry since its beginnings. The term 'Bollywood' is a portmanteau of Bombay and Hollywood.
- caste:** A term that denotes the social group to which an individual belongs, and is stratified within a hierarchy known as the caste system. The relationships between castes is a complex system determined by many features including but not limited to heredity, tribal affiliation, and occupation.
- devadasi:** Female temple attendants whose role was to worship the gods through dance - a style of dance that was later developed into modern Bharatanatyam. Because of their perceived mystical spiritual connections, devadasis took on male patrons who supported them financially and fathered children with them. These children would grow up to follow in their mothers' footsteps.
- Durga puja:** A spiritual festival that celebrates the goddess Durga, considered to be one of the manifestations of the wife of Shiva, whose purpose is to fight against evil. Durga puja is particularly celebrated in Bengal and is featured in the film Devdas.
- filmi:** The word used to describe a facet of the Bollywood film industry. For example, filmi dance describes the styles of dance common in movies produced in Bombay, such as Bollywood or Bhangra styles.
- gharana:** A term whose root is from the Hindi word for "house", referring to styles of music or dance that originate within a particular region or

	social group. Kathak dance has developed several gharanas, including Lucknow, Jaipur and Banaras (named for Indian cities).
Hindi:	One of the official languages of India (the other being English), mainly spoken in the North of India. Hindi is the most prominent language of Bollywood films, along with Urdu and English.
Kathak:	A form of Indian classical dance that is prominent in the Northern regions of India, especially the state of Uttar Pradesh. Styles, called gharanas, vary according to location. Kathak is the style of dance practiced by tawa'if.
Kathakali:	A style of Indian classical dance/theatre that originated in the Southerly state of Kerala. Though it shares the root word "kathak" (which literally means 'storyteller') with the dance of tawa'if, there is little similarity between the two.
kohl:	Black chalky substance that is applied to the eyes of Indian women like eyeliner.
kotha:	The word for the dwellings where tawa'if lived and held court performances when they were not at the royal courts. Sometimes translated as "brothel".
Kuchipudi:	A style of Indian classical dance that originated in the Southerly state of Andhra Pradesh.
lehenga choli:	A women's outfit most popular in the North of India (especially the state of Rajasthan) that consists of a midriff-bearing, tightly fitted short sleeve top and a floor-length a-line skirt. Both items can be elaborately embroidered with designs and beading.
Lucknow:	A northern Indian town that was the seat of courtesan culture for much of the golden age of the tawa'if.
Manipuri:	A style of Indian classical dance that originated in the far Northeastern state of Manipur.
Mohiniyattam:	A style of Indian classical dance that originated in the Southerly state of Kerala.
mudra:	The word used for the different hand/finger gestures employed in most Indian classical dances. The gestures each have different meanings (some meanings have several different gestures that can be used for them) and are used in combination to tell stories.
mujra:	One of the various performance styles given by tawa'if that focuses on the performance of song and poetry. Poems were often composed by each individual performer, who was trained in the art of poetry composition and recitation. Mujras were performed as special events that may have been related to auspicious occasions,

or at court gatherings.

- Natyastra: A thousands-year-old ancient Indian text that lays out the codes of performance for what is now known as Indian classical dance. The text addresses all forms of performance, but the majority is dedicated to detailing the systems and procedures of sacred dance and performance. The book is attributed to an author only known as Bharata.
- Odissi: A style of Indian classical dance that originated in the state of Orissa, which is located along the middle-Southeastern coast of India.
- paan: The term used for a chewing product made up of various natural, edible components such as tobacco, lime powder and spices, wrapped in a betel leaf. Like chewing tobacco, using this product requires the use of a spittoon, and is a common feature of the brothels depicted in the films in this paper.
- Rajasthan: A Northwesterly state of India that has a desert climate, and borders Pakistan. Rajasthan is known for its preservation of ancient customs and buildings, boasting some of India's most beautiful historical cities such as Jaipur.
- rudali: The name for a (typically low-caste) woman who works as a professional mourner for remuneration. Rudali are typically seen in the state of Rajasthan or the Punjabi regions of the north of India, and are employed by wealthy widows who are expected to mourn extravagantly upon their husband's death, but cannot do so publicly themselves. Hence, rudali are hired for this purpose. Their performance may consist of crying, wailing, thumping the chest, rolling on the ground, twirling around and tossing the hair.
- sari: An item of clothing common in India, especially in the Southern states, that consists of one very long, wide section of cloth that can be wrapped around the female body in a variety of ways. Paired with a choli, the sari may leave the midriff exposed or covered depending on how it's wrapped. Saris can range from simple cotton cloth for every-day, to elaborate brightly dyed silks with intricate beading and embroidery for weddings.
- Tamil Nadu: A state in the South of India which gave rise to the Indian classical dance, Bharatanatyam. Tamil Nadu has its own language (Tamil) and is one of the regions (along with Sri Lanka) occupied by the ethnic Tamil people.
- tawa'if: The term designating unmarried women mostly in the Northern regions of South Asia who were trained in a variety of arts which they would perform for remuneration from noblemen who would

serve as their patrons. Tawa'if lived together in buildings called kothas, and held court performances at the palaces of Mughal royalty up until the British invasion in the mid-19th Century. These women inherited their trade from their mothers, and were trained in poetry, singing, dancing, musical performance, conversation and entertainment from a young age. The form of dance they practiced was Kathak. Since the British Raj their way of life has declined steadily and now the word tawa'if is associated with out-and-out prostitution.

Urdu:

A language used primarily in the North of India that developed out of a combination of elements of Hindi and Arabic languages.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Chapter 1 Introduction

It was mentioned earlier how it was strange that dance had proved of so little interest to sociology and cultural studies. Strange because, despite the absence of a sociological language which would embrace the formal dimensions of dance, there is nonetheless a diversity of wider social questions and issues which are immediately raised even by the most superficial consideration of dance. Some of the most richly coded class practices in contemporary society can be observed in leisure and dance. The various contexts of social dancing tell us a great deal about the everyday lives and expectations of their participants.

Angela McRobbie, 1997, p. 211

Angela McRobbie, a prominent cultural theorist, points out that the field of cultural studies has indeed found it difficult to integrate the analysis of the non-text, bodily-based orientation of the language of dance, despite the fact that as she reveals, there is value to be found in the codes of performance. McRobbie's quote illustrates a recurring perspective one might find when investigating subjective expressions of identity (such as the fine and performing arts) within the field of critical/cultural studies, as the thesis at hand hopes to do. While other epistemological perspectives could be employed for this investigation, a critical/cultural perspective is being used here in order to emphasize the interrelationships between (a) the individual and (b) the overriding power structures in a society (social, national, institutional, etc.). Focusing on these

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

relationships is an approach which critical/cultural studies necessitates (Patton, 2005, p. 130). This study, therefore, is an investigation of the communicative processes involved in, and the communicative significance of, expressing cultural and social interrelationships and identities through performance. While from a cultural studies perspective dance performance may be typically seen as a problematic subject for analysis (Desmond, 1997; Lengel, 2005; McRobbie, 1997; Warren, 2003), increasingly cultural communication scholars are extending their interests to the performative.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide background information on the topic of performance as an expression of interrelationships and identities, and introduce the specific performance context that will be examined in this thesis. Terminology (such as the varying definitions of ‘culture’ and the term ‘marginalization’) and relevant theoretical frameworks (such as The Frankfurt School and critical/cultural studies) being used in this paper are defined below to provide clarification for the analysis ahead. Next, the performance context being examined, that of the filmic representations tawa’if and rudali of India, is introduced. Background information on the film industry in South Asia, and the rudali and tawa’if performers themselves is provided. Finally the chapter will end with statements about the intention of this research as well as justification for why such an investigation is necessary.

Definitions and Contextual Information

The binary definitions of “big C” Culture and “small c” culture is terminology typically used by linguistics scholars (Chavez, 2002; Herron, et al., 1999; Kramsch,

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

1993). “Big C” Culture is often used to describe the cultural art forms that have come to represent iconic symbols of what a particular cultural group is to the outside world. Examples of “big C” Culture include Japanese tea ceremonies, Irish stepdance, Tibetan Buddhist sand mandalas, or American urban graffiti art. “Small c” culture is used to describe the socio-cultural behavioral norms and values that characterize particular cultural groups. Examples of this are use of polychronic time in Latin America, and high-context communication styles in regions of the Middle East. Often in everyday life these two definitions of culture are seen as unrelated, if small c culture is even recognized at all (Hall & Hall, 2002) being as it is so implicit in everyday activity. The relationship between culture (values, identity, etc.) and Culture (performance, ritual, etc.) is worth investigating in cultural studies however, as Lengel (2005) points out that “cultural studies research has historically overlooked the construction of identity through creative practice, particularly in the area of gender and women’s studies” (p. 261), where cultural identity can be considered “small c” and creative practice can be considered “big C” culture (using Hall & Hall’s standards above).

Another type of differentiation of the term ‘culture’ that is worth identifying whilst addressing this topic is that of ‘low culture’ vs. ‘high culture’. This terminology is particularly relevant to research within the critical/cultural studies perspective as the conceptualization of culture on these terms was first presented by theorists from the Frankfurt School, an academic forbearer of critical/cultural studies. Frankfurt School theorists (such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse) based much

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

of their scholarship on the idea that there were primarily two types of what we defined above as big C Culture – high culture, meaning art that was typically created by and performed for society's elite and represented what they considered a sophisticated, refined taste, and was available to and produced by only a few; and low culture, meaning a mass-marketed, popular version of art as entertainment enjoyed typically by the middle or working classes.

Theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/2005), Walter Benjamin (1936/2005), and Raymond Williams (1958/1983) and their work typified the Frankfurt School perspective on these two conceptions of art. Needless to say their perspective saw little societal value in the various forms of low culture they analyzed, such as television, popular music and mechanically (re)produced art, which was viewed more as a capitalist co-opting of culture rather than an organically developed form of culture. Interestingly, while the validity (or lack thereof, as the case may be) which these theorists saw in high and low culture has been critiqued as too dualistic particularly by film scholars (Dudrah, 2009, p. 22), their analysis has set up rich fodder for cultural theorists who have followed in that they presented a unique way of looking at and analyzing cultural products. The classification of some forms of performance as legitimate and others as marginal or unsanctioned by society, and the reasons behind why these divisions are made, is of central importance.

Marginality is a concept that has been especially prominent in sociological theories that focus on the interaction of social groups. From W.E.B. Du Bois (1903), to

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

bell hooks (1984), to Henri Tajfel (1974) social theorists describe a phenomenon where a group (or groups) of people is prevented from accessing power in any of its many forms – social, institutional, political, economic – within a society. This phenomenon is what this study will address as marginalization. Some theorists such as bell hooks (2000) have argued that understanding marginalized populations as well as the process and significance of marginalization is centrally important when it comes to analyzing social issues because of the fact that people at the margins have a broader sense of the larger group in which they exist. Because of their position they are forced to understand mainstream society as well as its fringes, and frequently flow between the two. She states that this is because “to be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body” (2000, p. xvi). This is the position that the population being examined in this study occupy.

The performance context specifically being looked at in this investigation is one where social and political significance is rarely recognized: dance (McRobbie, 1997). Specifically, two groups of Indian dancers and the respective performance styles they occupy will be examined – namely the rudali (mourning performers) and tawa’if (court/entertainment dancers), whose practices will be explained in more detail below. Though these dance forms may seem substantively unrelated, they do have significant commonalities: an emphasis on the body as the primary site of expression (as opposed to the intellect, for example), as well as the performer’s general marginalization to the peripheries of creative expression within Indian society. Because their performances are

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

largely inaccessible due to their cultural specificity and, in the case of the tawa'if are practically obsolete, the portrayals of these dancers are examined through a selection of South Asian films. These films are of a genre that feminist film scholar Sumita Chakravarty (1993) defines as the “courtesan” genre, or films that focus on the lives of certain types of female performers. The films under examination are *Devdas* (1955/2002), *Pakeezah* (1972), *Umrao Jaan* (1981/2006) and *Rudaali* (1993), which each feature tawa'if or rudali characters and life contexts prominently.

Through an analysis of the above films made about these women the intent is to gain an understanding of what these types of dance mean within the collective consciousness¹ of the communities that produce them. In combining data from the textual analysis of films with direct observation of and involvement in dance events, and interviews with classical Indian dance instructors in Portland, Oregon the intent is to come to an understanding of what position marginalized dancers occupy in relation to more mainstream or classical forms of Indian dance. This allows for an examination of what the implications of recognizing such performances as cultural artifacts or products would be. The purpose is to elucidate the roles or significance that these types of performances have in collective consciousness, and in critical qualitative approaches to research. The rationale and purpose for this thesis will be elaborated in greater detail below, but before that some background information on the topic is required.

¹ The term “collective consciousness” was used by sociologist Emile Durkheim (1893/1984) to refer to the commonly shared beliefs and ways of understanding held by members of a particular cultural group.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

South Asian Cinema

It should be noted that in this paper the term South Asian cinema or film will be used to describe the films under examination more often than the more familiar word for films of Indian origin: Bollywood. While throughout the world the word Bollywood is typically seen to describe any film originating in India or possessing the trademark song and dance interludes, Bollywood film in fact only describes a portion of film made in South Asia. Bollywood films are Hindi-language films produced in the Indian city of Mumbai, formerly known as Bombay (Ganti, 2004, p. 2). There are many other film industries in South Asia, including Telugu- and Tamil-language industries (ibid., p. 3), and establishments in Bangladesh and Pakistan (ibid., p. 22) amongst other areas of South Asia. The films under examination are often re-envisionings of previous films or novels that may have been originally produced in languages other than Hindi (Bengali, or Urdu for example). For the purposes of this paper, this makes them less an exclusively Bollywood product, and more a product of the South Asian film industries.

Another common misunderstanding of South Asian cinema is that it is a new product especially when compared to Hollywood or other Western film industries. Notably, Anthropology professor Tejaswini Ganti (2004) wrote in her guide to Bollywood cinema that the history of film production in South Asia began around the same time as it did in Hollywood (p. 6). Having first began in the late 19th Century, this has given South Asian Cinema one hundred plus years to develop a distinct production process and aesthetic. For example, Ganti describes the production process in South

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Asian cinema as markedly different than that in the West, with an organizational structure that is “decentralized, financed primarily by entrepreneurial capital, organized along social and kin networks, and governed mainly by oral rather than written contracts” (2004, p. 53). Consequently, this production structure combined with the particular visual aesthetic in India results in some of the distinct trademarks of Bollywood film such as “song and dance, melodrama, lavish production values, [and] emphasis on stars and spectacle” (Ganti, 2004, p. 3).

These aesthetic markers of Hindi film indicate deeper implications for how these films magnify and problem-solve other attributes of Indian history, society and politics. Adding to the visual and organizational trademarks of South Asian cinema is the connection many Bollywood scholars make between cinema and the collective consciousness of the audience. Theorists such as Chakravarty (1993), Dudrah (2006), Gokulsing & Dissanayake (2004), and Viridi (2003) have all explored from various angles ways in which Indian culture and self-concept becomes manifest in the cinema it produces. Sociologist and film studies scholar Rajinder Dudrah (2003) talks about “the way in which films translate a sense of our social selfhoods as refracted on the screen...films provide an immediate visual encoding of the human form on screen” (p. 41). This connection is important to make in order to understand how representations of certain groups (i.e. – tawa’if and rudali in our case) on screen relates to real life group interaction and socio-cultural negotiation.

Jyotika Viridi writes about the connection between Hindi film and the Indian

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

nation state in her book *The Cinematic ImagiNation: Indian Popular Films as Social History* (2003). She sees the filmic image of the family which is prevalent in Hindi films as a form of reification, or allegory for the population's conceptualization of the nation (or at least its hopes for the ideal nation). Another prominent theme is that of the social position of women, something that comes into sharp focus when a female character's position is at the margins. Such is the case with the courtesan genre of film, which Viridi (2003) notes "elicits an obsessive fascination" (p. 132) in film production and audience consumption. Women whose lives are eked out in defiance of a traditional patriarchal operation of cultural and societal norms would undoubtedly be found fascinating for their ability to exist against the grain.

Sumita Chakravarty has written in her book *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema...* (1993) about the way women who earn incomes independently as tawa'if or rudali are represented on screen. She describes that "courtesans...occupy a separate though special place in Indian culture and consciousness" and that they are "regarded both as cultural capital and social disease" (1993, p. 280). From the older classics such as *Devdas* (1955) which feature tawa'if of the Mughal era, to the more contemporary documentary *India Cabaret* (1985) by acclaimed director/producer Mira Nair which features a more modern take on the "dancing girls" of India – fascination with the fictional representation of this subject has been constant. However, it is necessary to also gain a social and historical understanding of these figures to see their importance in South Asian cinema.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

The Rudali

Rudali, meaning “the crier”, is the term used to identify women of a low caste in Northern India (particularly in the state of Rajasthan) who perform mourning dances and songs at the funerals of higher caste men. Little information exists on these women, particularly in terms of scholarly research that involves direct observation of the lives of rudali and the mourning songs and dances they perform. It is Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi who perhaps presents the most comprehensive look at the lives of rudali in her novella *Rudali*. This story was also made into a play of the same name by Rajasthani/Bengali playwright Usha Ganguli and the two were eventually published together in 1999. In turn this play became a film directed by Kalpana Lajmi in 1993. It is these fictional representations that have garnered the most scholarly responses (Chakravarty, 1999; Kapoor, 2005; Subramanyam, 1996) to the lives of rudali. Upon reading the original novel it is easy to see why – Devi describes the lives of her characters with such richness that it appears almost as an ethnography of the women.

To describe what the rudali do as simply a dance seems like a mischaracterization; rather it should be described as a full-body performance. As is detailed in the novel, rudali mourning performances include expressions of weeping and wailing and singing praises of the dead, “rolling on the ground and beating one’s head...and one’s breast” (Devi, 1999, p. 75). The film elaborates on this description with added rocking and hair tossing, as well as a frantic pirouetting twirl that is reminiscent of folk dances of the region such as the Ghoomar that is performed for happy occasions

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

such as festivals (Sinha, 2006, p. 27). Primarily, however, Devi's story is a commentary on class differences in the region and the hypocrisy of what is deemed acceptable culturally for people of different castes. The characters frequently discuss the fact that it is not acceptable for wealthy families to cry and mourn publicly at a funeral, but they compete to throw the most lavish funerals and hire the best rudali to mourn for them (ibid., p. 72).

The life of the rudali that Devi describes in her story is one of poverty; the occupation of mourning dancer is filled solely by those of the lowest caste of the already poor communities in which they live. From Devi's story (1999) and Lajmi's film (1993) we come to understand that the status of the rudali is equated to that of prostitutes and the infirm despite the spiritual, sacred nature of the service they provide (a plot summary of Lajmi's film can be found in Appendix G). The practice of performing laments for the dead is not exclusive to India – scholarly writings have explored the roles of women who perform similar functions in Romania, Ireland and Greece (Marin, 2005). Through these writings the high social, cultural and political significance of these women and the functions they serve is clear, yet in wider society the roles these women play are under-acknowledged and in the case of the rudali of India the women themselves are outcasts from the rest of society (Kapoor, 2005, p. 95). The social status rudali occupy in India along with the professional services they provide can be compared to another class of female performer in the same country – the tawa'if.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

The Tawa'if

The word 'tawa'if' originally referred to a class of Indian dancer/poet/musician/courtesan who entertained at the courts of Mughal royalty in Northern India. The origins of these performers is caught up in the history of the more well known classical Indian dance of Kathak, which originated in the North. Though Kathak existed as a devotional expression for centuries before the 1500s and 1600s, Kathak historian Reginald Massey (1999) describes the court dance version of Kathak as its "golden era" (p. 21). Though he does not name them outright, Massey describes the evolution of the tawa'if as a court performer, melding Islamic and Hindu traditions that described "imperial, social and contemporary themes...along secular lines" (1999, p. 22) as opposed to the previous religious emphasis.

Tawa'if were what art historian Doris Srinivasan calls "the keepers of culture in pre-colonial India" (2006, p. 161), and were revered as such before British colonization brought with it the degradation of the court system and therefore the status of the tawa'if in Indian society (these processes will be investigated further in the postcolonial theory section of the literature review). Massey also points out this connection between the emergence of European power in India and the degeneration of the status of the court dancers. While he describes that for several decades the style of dance that had been associated with tawa'if was all but lost due to its infamy, it was later resurrected in the 1930s as a sterilized version of itself - classical Kathak (Massey, 1999, pp. 23-24). However, the original group of women (known as tawa'if) who popularized and carried

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

on the performance traditions remained stigmatized, and today tawa'if is synonymous with "prostitute" for most Indians (especially the Northern regions) and Pakistanis (Maciszewski, 2006, pp. 345-346). In fact in all of the films being used for this study, the word "tawa'if" in the Hindi/Urdu dialogue is translated as "prostitute" in the English subtitles. The women who still practice this trade in modern day are viewed with disdain by society at large as well as the managers of cultural performance in India (Qureshi, 2006, p. 312; Hubel, 2005). In contrast to the rudali, there has been a relatively high degree of scholarly attention paid to tawa'if and their history despite their scarcity in modern society.

The tawa'if too have their own equivalencies both within India and in other countries. In Southern India the devadasis, now essentially considered defunct, operated similarly to the tawa'if. The devadasis were women dedicated to temples who performed spiritual rituals and dances. These women also maintained sexual relationships with male temple patrons, who came to them for spiritual advancement (Hubel, 2005) much like the kings and princes of Mughal courts who came to tawa'if for cultural advancement and social refinement. The primary difference between the two is that devadasis have an explicitly religious attribute and tawa'if do not. However, this should not be seen to diminish their significance; in their heyday tawa'if were revered for their knowledge of culture and etiquette and served in the households of the elite Nawabs of Northern Mughal India. The geisha of Japan as well as the courtesans of Italy and Greece have operated similarly to the tawa'if (Gordon & Feldman, 2006). The

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

diminishing cultural importance of the role of the tawa'if in Northern India came about during British colonization, when the British military and high society saw the tawa'if's performance and economic/social autonomy as something to be ashamed of.

The impact of colonization on changing a society's attitudes towards the behavior of women in particular has a parallel in another part of the world. Similarities can be found in the historical figure of the *jamette* in the Caribbean – the black female slave who was literally the embodiment of resistance to British colonialism on the island of Trinidad. The *jamette* would use her body during masquerade (the precursor to modern carnival, and an activity typically reserved for the colonial elites) through scarce clothing and rebellious gyrations to 'voice' her protest to the "controlled and repressed position that women had in society" (Noel, 2010, p. 70). In forcing society (the colonial masters in particular) to pay attention to them and their bodies they became falsely recognized as prostitutes and therefore were seen as even lower in status than male slaves. While a similar fate befell the tawa'if in India, Noel (2010) describes how the *jamette* identity remains a source of pride in some Caribbean folk culture, particularly in soca music and dance, and carnival events. In India, however, it appears that a division was made between what was considered acceptable corporeal expression and what should be discouraged. Marglin summarizes the attitude held by Indian cultural reformers at the time as "they could reclaim the beauty [of the courtesan's arts] only at the cost of separating it from what they themselves came to see as sinful and deserving of moral condemnation" (as cited in Chakravarty, 1993, p. 278).

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

In modern India tawa'if do still exist but for the most part have been relegated to a life of negligible social status and poverty. Maciszewski (2006) describes in her ethnographic account of the lives of modern day tawa'if that their music and dance specializations have

been taken over by non-hereditary musicians and performed on the concert stage.... Except for the outstanding few who have been accepted as mainstream artists, tawa'if lead a precarious existence, living in poverty- and crime-ridden red-light districts where the present-day clientele is more interested in sex than songs, and the songs "patrons" wish to hear often have little, if anything, to do with the rich traditions these women embody (p. 333).

As Maciszewski points out, performance traditions of the tawa'if have been reappropriated and distilled, resulting in the Kathak form of Indian classical dance described above, while the women themselves have been marginalized into the lowest sectors of society. Despite this, various film scholars indicate that courtesan films enjoy widespread popularity (Dwyer & Patel, 2002, p. 69). The national filmic obsession with these courtesan figures contrasts starkly with the status they are relegated to by the middle- and upper classes in India. The story behind how and why they are viewed in this way promises much to be told about the political, cultural and economic dynamics of modern day Indian society.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Summary

As recognized above by Desmond (1997), Lengel (2005) and McRobbie (1997), research on how dance performance relates to cultural identity in the cultural studies approach to communication has been few and far between. This is even truer for looking at this topic through marginalized performers such as the rudali and tawa'if of India, with only three authors having addressed to any significant extent the representations of tawa'if in film (Chakravarty, 1993; Dwyer & Patel, 2002; Viridi, 2003) and the same for rudali (Chakravarty, 1999; Kapoor, 2005; Subramanyam, 1996). Therefore, the potential for an investigation of these performers to reveal a greater understanding of the social, political and economic underpinnings of their respective cultural groups remains unexplored. These types of dance are particularly interesting because of how they are conceptualized within their cultures and internationally – marginalized from within and exoticized from outside. The fact that these performances are viewed as either shameful or frivolous may explain why little research has been done on them. Further investigation into an untapped area such as this can only benefit the field of communication by adding complexity to and broadening the existing knowledge about performance and communication, particularly in the field of cultural studies.

The goals of this research, then, are threefold: to increase the body of literature that exists on these types of dance, to determine the significance of the marginalized performances of tawa'if and rudali in shaping cultural identity, and to determine the role

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

of dance performance as praxis² in facilitating communication. This latter goal is particularly significant, as researchers have previously made note of the problem posed by a lack of attention to how identity is expressed through performance (Warren, 2003). Therefore, this study will be a qualitative and critical examination of how performance articulates culture as well as the role that marginalized performances play in the collective consciousness of a cultural group (in this case, the people of India). The examination will be from a critical theory perspective, which implies that special attention will be paid to the political and economic attributes of the phenomena being researched. The following sections describe the purpose of and rationale for this research, the conceptual framework underpinning the approach, the methodology being adopted, and the validity and bias issues expected for the proposed study.

Purpose Statement

This research focuses on ideas of the performative, cultural identity, and the body as a site for cultural communication. The intention of this research is to articulate the roles of marginalized dance performers in the collective consciousness of the cultural groups they exist in; in this case the roles of tawa'if and rudali in the collective consciousness of the producers and consumers of cultural artifacts from India such as film and dance. The hope is to conduct an exploration of why only certain performances are marginalized and what the implications of this marginalization are for their own cultural groups as well as for cross-cultural understanding. Additionally, this research

² In this context, the term 'praxis' refers to the idea that theoretical knowledge is informed by practical action, and borrows from education theorist Paolo Freire's (1970) interpretation of praxis leading to enhancing critical awareness.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

will add to and develop the body of literature on marginalized dancers such as the rudali and tawa'if by incorporating interviews of classical Indian dance instructors with a textual analysis of courtesan genre films, and establish how their existence relates to the field of cultural studies.

Rationale

Such a topic is worthy of investigation because it demonstrates the relationship between “big C” cultural artifacts, such as culturally specific dance performance, and “small c” cultural values, particularly as they relate to political and socio-economic issues. This information is significant because it fills a gap in the research where there is a recognized lack of attention paid to this connection in cultural studies literature (McRobbie, 1997), and further exploration of this topic could only serve to develop current research on cultural identity and its relevance to addressing social inequity more fully. Research in this area could also serve to demonstrate the utility of performance, or praxis, in education and social activism.

This research is different from other approaches to the topic in its focus on the collective conceptualization of the roles of marginalized dancers by other groups (such as classical dance instructors or performance historians) within Indian society. Current research that addresses the roles of these performers (Chakravarty, 1993, 1999; Dwyer & Patel, 2002; Kapoor, 2005; Subramanyam, 1996; Viridi, 2003) only looks at how they are represented on film. An examination of the ways that other cultural managers such as dance instructors and historians choose to mediate which types of performance are

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

considered legitimate representations of their culture could elucidate issues in the role of performance communication on film that other approaches could not. By looking at the performance contexts through their filmic representations provides a unique and valuable insight into a subject that is largely inaccessible during this day and age. South Asian film is a cultural product not only for those within the region, but also represents India on an international scale (Ganti, 2004, p. 2), and presents a valuable platform for investigating the internal mediation and external consumption of Indian culture.

In addition to gathering data from sources other than film, this research also seeks to employ praxis as a data collection method, as opposed to pure intellectual observation and textual analysis. The researcher's own participation in Indian dance-related events will constitute this performative perspective. This provides an opportunity to illustrate not only the pedagogical value of performance and praxis in research but also the value of investigating performance as a topic. The combination of filmic analysis, the performative perspective, as well as the input garnered from Indian classical dance instructors and historians will help provide an opportunity to create new insights into the portrayal of marginalized performers such as tawa'if and rudali in popular culture.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Chapter 2 Literature Review

The following section is best considered an account of the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the approach adopted for this research, rather than a broad overview of literature relevant to the topic. Joseph Maxwell, qualitative methodologist and professor specializing in writing graduate student research papers recommends this approach for a qualitative research design such as this one, in order to retain the specificity and depth of the literature review versus creating a broad, shallow description of all literature related to the topic (2005, pp. 34-35). Therefore, below the reader will find explications of theoretical perspectives that have proven to be most influential in establishing a theoretical context for this study – postcolonial theory, Pierre Bourdieu’s theories on the social relevance of art, and theories of the performative. The films to be examined and interviews to be undertaken will be approached from the relationships drawn out from the exploration of these perspectives.

Postcolonial Theory

In their 2002 article exploring the interrelationships between postcolonial theory and the discipline of communication, Raka Shome and Radha Hegde discuss the relevance of some of the major themes in postcolonial theory to the field of communication: “representation, identity, hybridity, and agency” (p. 265). In other words, the themes which Hegde and Shome see as mutually relevant to postcolonial theory and communication are examinations of the description of the other (via image or rhetoric), self-conceptualization, how marginal and mainstream practices intersect in

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

culture, and the ability to speak autonomously. This study also seeks to understand the relevance of these themes to the topic at hand. This is why the foundational theoretical perspective adopted to create the framework to investigate what role dance plays in communicating cultural identity is the postcolonial theoretical perspective. While postcolonial theory has had and continues to have many proponents, most (Niblett, 2007) credit its origins to comparative literature scholar Edward Said, and his 1978 publication *Orientalism*³. In this seminal scholarly work, Said laid out a theory which argued that the differentiation that the West has made between the Orient (East) and the Occident (West) is a fabrication which serves to meet the needs of the West to exert its political and hegemonic power. This fabrication insists that the ways of life in the East are abnormal, or have an ‘otherness’, and can only be viewed in contrast to the West which is the template for normality. Said calls this Western view of the East “orientalism”, and labels this as the function by which the West carried out much of its colonialist pursuits in the East.

Said’s theory was broad and had wide-ranging implications for academia beyond his own discipline of comparative literature. Over the years various other theorists (most famously Homi K. Bhabha, 1994; Stuart Hall, 1997; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 1984; Gayatri Spivak, 1988 among others) have modified or extended his theory, illustrating its far-reachingness. Post-colonial theory has been taken up by writers, scholars and theorists from newly independent or developing/newly industrialized nations with vigor, and

³ It should be noted that Said’s *Orientalism* was part of a more general move by some scholars around the same period towards a post-colonial theoretical orientation, as evidenced by Paulo Freire’s (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and Frantz Fanon’s (1967) *Black Skins, White Masks*.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

authors on the study of cultural artifacts and visual communication are no exception. Merle Collins is a Grenadian (from the island of Grenada in the Caribbean) poet, novelist and activist who has been outspoken on issues of colonialism and culture in the Caribbean (Scott, 2010).

Collins provides an excellent, tangible example of the postcolonial theoretical concept of cultural imperialism, which is relevant to helping to understand how performance has been perceived in India throughout history. In her chapter entitled *Channels of Discovery: Perceptions of Culture and Sovereignty in the Caribbean* (1998), she examines the impact of American culture and cultural products on culture in the Caribbean. In this chapter Collins takes one component of Said's theory, that of latent Orientalism (which refers to the implicit assumptions and values of imperial powers which justify their colonial actions), and discusses how it impacts contemporary Caribbean culture. This action is described as cultural imperialism.

Cultural imperialism is a phenomenon whereby local or regional cultures become secondary to, or replaced by external but dominant cultures. In the argument that Collins makes, American culture is dominant over Caribbean culture. Collins identifies the evidence of the submissiveness of Caribbean culture to American culture as the proliferation of American TV shows, TV channels, films and books throughout the region that Caribbean people use to define themselves and their culture. The result is a degradation of cultural worth, and the secondary effect of an acceptance of neo-colonialist U.S. foreign policy within the Caribbean. Perhaps one of the most poignant

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

examples Collins uses to illustrate her point is that of the island of Grenada, when in 1983 the U.S. military was brought in to stage a coup of the New Jewel Movement government, a left-leaning coalition that was seen as a threat to American primacy. After a short but severe battle, lives were lost by American soldiers and Grenadians alike, but after all was said and done it was only the American soldiers to whom a memorial was erected on the island, not the Grenadian people themselves. Collins points out that in providing this example “I am simply noting the kinds of self-effacement that can occur when a culture has its sense of self consistently eroded” (1998, p. 125).

Cultural theorists throughout the Caribbean (such as Collins) echo the concerns of theorists in Asia and the Middle East about the impacts of colonialism throughout these regions. In the arena of colonial and postcolonial attitudes towards dance performance in India for example, there has been a distinctive shift in attitude towards the female purveyors of culture known as *tawa'if* since the imposition of British colonialism in India; this shift in attitude could be described as similar to the cultural imperialism detailed by Collins above. Prominent and valued purveyors of Indian cultural performance artifacts from the late 1500s on, *tawa'if* suffered a degradation of status during and after colonization by the British (Chakravarty, 1993; Qureshi, 2006; Hubel, 2005; Srinivasan, 2006). Amelia Maciszewski explains that the word *tawa'if* described female performers in India who existed in contexts ranging from “court musicians/dancers/poets to street performers who entertain at festivals and weddings” (2006, p. 334). However, the dynamism and nuance of the cultural niche occupied by

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

tawa'if was not recognized by British colonizers, whose

lack of understanding of this simultaneous diversity and solidarity and [whose] frequent insensitivity to these women's performance traditions led them to impose the Victorian label "prostitute" on female members of the community (and, whenever possible, to interact with them in this way) (p. 334).

Maciszewski goes on to explain how since the colonial era Indians themselves have gone on to adopt this phraseology, "along with the judgmental attitude it indexes to refer to courtesans of all types" (p. 334). While the practices of courtesans since the 1500s may not have meshed entirely with the Muslim or Hindu morality of the day, Chakravarty explains that for the court system of the tawa'if "a complex system emerges of an institution that was prevalent in all parts of India and towards which moral opprobrium existed side by side with widespread social acceptance" (1993, p. 277). British cultural imperialism, however, seemed to lend just the right amount of legitimacy to the side of "moral opprobrium" of the tawa'if and left a lasting impression on the collective consciousness of Indians as it relates to women's ability to operate outside of a traditional patriarchal economic system and reproduce culture on their own terms. Sexuality (with its firm rooting in bodily experience) in performance is treated with disdain, and these types of performances have been extracted from the canon of classical Indian dance (Hubel, 2005, p. 133).

Interestingly, recent literature on the more popular offshoot of Indian classical

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

dance currently sweeping the Indian expat and Bollywood-ophile communities known as Bollywood dance or filmi dance echoes the distaste over women presenting their bodies on stage for the purposes of pure entertainment within India. Ann David (2007) explores the role that filmi dance plays in communicating cultural identity for young non-resident Indians (NRIs) living in the U.K., as well as its relationship to classical Indian dance. Interviews with classical dance instructors and temple administrators (temples are traditional venues for classical dance performances in some cases) in the U.K. reveal that the overly sexualized movements and undertones of filmi dance are looked down upon by these groups. One classical dance instructor indicated that “dance is not just for ‘light’ entertainment” (David, 2007, p. 13). Alternatively, these aspects are generally embraced by NRI performers and audiences because these are what make filmi dance more accessible, relieving the pressure of the cultural taboo of expressing sexuality in public without stepping over the line.

The point in bringing this example up is to illustrate the pervasiveness of cultural imperialism, its insidiousness such that dominant attitudes are absorbed even by individuals of the non-dominant culture, and even after the dominant or colonizing force (which in this case was the British) have left the scene. Though the respondents in David’s research may dislike the genre of Bollywood filmi dance, it could be argued that the dislike of filmi dance may have something to do with its popular (read: “low culture”, in the Frankfurt School sense) appeal rather than exclusively the sexuality of the dance style. However, the respondents do explicitly connect the root of their dislike back to the

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

“overt sensuality” of filmi dance as opposed to its pop culture appeal.

As addressed above by Maciszewski and Chakravarty, the expression of sensuality in Indian dance was not always perceived so negatively – colonialist perspectives had an indelible impact on the legitimacy of different styles of dance (or illegitimacy, as the case may be). Another group of dancers that had a similar fate as the tawa’if but in a slightly different context are the devadasis, described briefly in the introduction. Devadasis are known as temple dancers – female religious devotees common in pre-colonial times who serve a specific temple or deity and who may become attached to (typically male) religious patrons (Hubel, 2005). An element of sexuality exists in the services that devadasis provide, though their primary role is as religious devotees. Like the tawa’if and rudali they led relatively autonomous lives on the outskirts of what was typically expected of women in Indian society.

As Hubel describes in her chapter on the contentious relationship between the feminist and nationalist movements in India immediately after independence and the practice of devadasis, colonialism played a more complex role in the eradication of devadasis than we saw with the tawa’if. Devadasis were victims of cultural imperialism marauding as the Indian nationalist and feminist movements that arose to counteract the impact of colonialism. Hubel notes that to Indian nationalists and feminists after independence, devadasis were seen as “an embarrassing remnant of the pre-colonial and pre-nationalist feudal age” (2005, p. 122) that didn’t fit into the homogeneous ideal of the Indian citizen they hoped to create. Though the reasoning used to rationalize the

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

marginalization of this population may have been different from what happened with the tawa'if, the effect was the same – the eradication of the culturally and artistically relevant practices of a unique group. Nationalists and feminists were using devadasis as examples of relics of a feudal past that needed to be extinguished in order to make way for the new India being born free of Mughal monarchies and European colonial hegemony.

Postcolonial feminist scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty offers insight into the eradication of devadasis in the name of feminism. Her famous article *Under Western Eyes...* (1984) discusses the impact of Western feminist theory and literature on the status of women elsewhere in the world. Mohanty's central argument is that the assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality in Western "humanist" feminist rhetoric "discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the Third World, thereby producing/representing a composite, singular Third World Woman" (p. 334). The result of this is that these women are often seen as victims of several systems: violence, colonialism, the economic development process, and the Islamic code, the Hindu caste system; little, if any, attention is paid to the capacity for self-determination of Third World women. Hubel (2005) argues that through the absorption of such dominant feminist/culturally imperialist rhetoric, Indian feminists, nationalists and other cultural institutions achieved the eradication of cultural purveyors such as devadasis. Ultimately the legitimacy of a Western aesthetic superseded the potential offered by legitimizing or improving yet still working within the existing systems of self-determination.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Pierre Bourdieu

Postcolonial scholars Ella Shohat and Robert Stam write about the acute effect of European cultural imperialism on visual artifacts throughout the world in their chapter *Narrativizing Visual Culture* (2002). They make the point that typically any scholarly analysis or interpretation of visual culture is couched in the rhetoric of European art as the ideal specimen. They state, “we want to address visual culture in a way that does not always assume Europe...as the normative culture of reference” (p. 37). Their writing cautions that care should be taken when looking at non-European visual cultural products to not evaluate the aesthetic value, nor determine artistic value based on a Eurocentric palate. Note that Shohat and Stam are not suggesting that the audiences of visual products from other cultures abstract themselves from their own culturally relative aesthetic frame of reference, but rather that such audiences should refrain from attributing relative value to a product based on their own aesthetic frame of reference. This goal requires perhaps a more difficult but undoubtedly worthwhile route, where the end result is one which seeks to understand what unique contributions non-dominant perspectives can offer to comprehending the communication of culture through the visual.

The connection between cultural identity and visual art is one that is explored in depth by socio-cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu spent much of his academic career investigating this connection, and his theory of tastes is the result of his dedication to revealing the social relevance of art and other creative products. Photography is one form of artistic expression which Bourdieu pays particular attention to in his analysis. In

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Photography: A Middle-brow Art, Bourdieu states that

Adequately understanding a photograph, whether it is taken by a Corsican peasant, a *petit-bourgeois* from Bologna or a Parisian professional, means not only recovering the meanings which it *proclaims*, that is, to a certain extent, the explicit intentions of the photographer; it also means deciphering the surplus of meaning which it *betrays* by being a part of the symbolism of an age, a class, or an artistic group [emphasis in the original] (1990, p. 7).

His implication is that photography as an art form is neither simply an expression of individualistic, idiosyncratic creativity confined to the artistic ability of its creator, nor is it the product of capturing (documentary-style) a moment in time as some proponents would have us believe (see Benjamin, 2005 for this debate). Rather, Bourdieu argues that through the creative process a photograph becomes a representation of a social group with the photographer as the mediator. That is to say, the abstraction of the photographer's social history and personal dispositions (i.e. – her *habitus*, which is explained below) becomes reified in the photograph she produces through her creative process. The theoretical framework represented in Bourdieu's theory relates to performance in that a performance is a creative product of a particular cultural group with the performer as the mediator. Furthermore, earlier of Bourdieu's theories (1984, p. 290) state that a performance is an expression of taste for the audience (who are consuming the performance as a cultural product, and in doing so betray the characteristics which their

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

social status legitimates) as well as the institutions of cultural legitimation such as governments, arts councils etc. (who are regulating what should be considered mainstream legitimate cultural products), which indicates the social, political and economic meta-contexts of their particular perspectives.

Bourdieu's basis for this idea is his foundational work on the relationship between the subjective creative expression of art and socio-economic/cultural status, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984). In this exposition Bourdieu posits that patterns in an individual's socio-cultural background can be exhibited not only in the artistic products that they produce, but also in the visual artifacts that they consume. His statement above about photography indicates the sub-consciousness of this process – that socio-cultural background is betrayed in the photographs taken by, for example, a Corsican peasant. In *Distinction...* Bourdieu argues that individual aesthetic tastes can also betray socio-cultural backgrounds and meta-contexts. In fact what is being betrayed is what Bourdieu terms *habitus*.

Widely received as some of Bourdieu's most famous explications are the concepts of *habitus*, *field* and *practice*, which are the primary focus of his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), and developed further in relation to culture in *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993). Though many often attribute the coining of the word "habitus" to Bourdieu himself, this attribution is in fact erroneous as the term existed indeed centuries before Bourdieu utilized it in his theories. Wacquant (2006) lists "Aristotle (under the term *hexis*), Thomas Aquinas, Hegel, Weber, Durkheim, Maus and Husserl, among

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

others” (p. 6) as those who used the term before Bourdieu. Yet among all of these famous thinkers, it is Bourdieu’s definition that has endured.

Bourdieu defines habitus as the abstract set of structures which serves as the point of interaction between the internalized amalgamation of an actor’s⁴ past experiences, culture, education, socio-economic status, etc., and the field which creates the characteristic dispositions of that actor. Field is a term Bourdieu uses to describe the external world in terms of an amalgamation of circumstances, networks and institutions that are socially and externally (not individually) constituted. In his own words, Bourdieu (1977) states that habitus is “an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted” (p. 95). Bourdieu (1993) creates an argument whereby the dispositions of any individual or social class which are created by the habitus interface can be observed objectively through, for example, the art that these actors consume or produce. In order for this intangible subjective history (disposition) to be reified through the creative/performative process, it must first exist as a way of seeing (habitus) that is specific to that individual and the culture that has shaped her.

So an individual’s habitus or way of seeing, then, is represented by their aesthetic choices in the creation or consumption of a visual artifact, which also corresponds with that individual’s social, cultural, historical and economic background. The connections that Bourdieu draws in this theory are essential to understanding how performance can

⁴ In this case the term *actor* refers to a collective social class or an individual.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

have a role in the political and economic attributes of a cultural group. It helps to understand the contexts of the performer, the viewer and the institutions that regulate the legitimacy of the performance. In essence, Bourdieu's theory connects big C Culture with little c culture, by showing how performativity and bodily expression as a cultural product are couched in moral codes, values, and behavioral norms specific to their cultural group. This is a significant connection to make in order to illustrate how a "subjective" medium such as performance can be relevant (through the unique perspective it provides) when seeking to understand social issues.

Bourdieu's theories have been used in a similar way before the research at hand to understand the social context surrounding dance performers in Turner and Wainwright's journal article on ballet dancers and injury. The authors assert in their article *Corps de Ballet...* (2003) that there are "intimate connections between the ballet habitus, embodiment, dance performance and identity" (p. 273), and that Bourdieu's work provides the theoretical underpinnings to explore these connections. In doing so, the authors are able to produce new and refreshing insight on the sociological relevance of dance and other experiences of embodiment and performativity. For these researchers' particular parameters, they determine that the embodiment of the particularistic constitution of a ballet performer's identity is manifested in the difficulties they encounter with managing the social and institutional consequences of injury and pain. Another more pertinent study by Louise Brown (2007) takes an ethnographic approach to examining modern tawa'if/courtesan's performance in Pakistan using some of Bourdieu's

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

central concepts (cultural capital, cultural production) as analytical tools. Brown's study argues that the success, and therefore status, of modern day courtesans depends on her ability to appropriate the new and changing forms of cultural capital to their centuries-old practice of entertainment, and uses the mujra (song and dance) performance as the primary site of investigation.

In a similar way, the research at hand (looking at representations of tawa'if and rudali performances in Bollywood films) seeks to examine how the habitus of the rudali or tawa'if mediates the social and institutional marginalization they face, or vice-versa (how marginalization mediates their habitus). Bourdieu's conceptualization of the habitus is crucial in making this connection because of the way his theory envisions identity and disposition interacting with the other social structures and institutions in our daily lives. Taking this exercise one step further though, this research also seeks to determine the significance of this marginalization to defining relevant segments of Indian culture and how these segments can be represented cross-culturally in a way that avoids the 'otherization' of a Western gaze.

The Performative

In her essay *Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies* (1997), Women's Studies professor and dancer/choreographer Jane Desmond identifies Bourdieu's theory of habitus as one that is particularly suited to a communication and sociological analysis of dance. Desmond points out that as Bourdieu understands the word habitus to mean the "physical embodiment of social structures" (1997, p. 30), so

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

can dance as a physical expression be examined to determine what those social structures are and how they create meaning for performers and audiences. The connections Bourdieu makes in his theories establish a foundation for understanding the significance of dance at a social and cultural level.

Furthermore, Desmond goes on to explain in her chapter how Bourdieu's concept of taste can be applied when distinguishing between different styles or forms of dance. She explains that "movement style is an important mode of distinction between social groups and is usually actively learned or passively absorbed in the home and community...so ubiquitous, so "naturalized"...movement is a primary not secondary social "text"" (1997, p. 31). Desmond argues that dance can be read and analyzed in the same way that other texts are processed by cultural studies scholars; texts such as literature, film and art historical objects. Even more recognized textual analysts concur, such as linguistics and semiotics scholar Norman Fairclough (1999) in his exposition of his critical discourse analysis. Desmond, however, indicates that the primary reason dance has not been addressed as such by cultural studies scholars yet is because of "the academy's aversion to the material body, as well as its fictive separation of mental and physical production" (1997, p. 30).

This 'aversion to the material body' that Desmond points out is not specific to cultural studies, nor has it gone unnoticed by other academics; perhaps the most notable academic to tackle this subject is Judith Butler, whose theories will be discussed later. Firstly, however, we must look to contemporary academic John Warren to understand

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

why an insistence on the significance of the body in the understanding of society and culture is necessary if the hope is to reach a more well-rounded understanding of communicative interaction. John Warren, a Professor of Speech Communication at the Southern Illinois University Carbondale, makes an excellent case for situating an examination of communication within a context of the body and the performative, as opposed to the verbal, in his book *Performing Purity* (2003). Warren takes a critical look at why there is a concentration on the intellectual over the material body, especially in the context of education, and explains that this tendency is due to a constant struggle within Western societies towards an ideal of purity.

By Warren's argument, Western society in particular views the body as in a constant state of impurity which must be controlled and disciplined systematically (by schools, for example) so that it meets the purity hygiene standards. The impure body contrasts directly with the objective of educational institutions which strive for the purity inherent in the abstractness of intellectual advancement, and therefore must eliminate all traces of the body. This argument is influenced by and finds support from other well-known social theorists, such as Michel Foucault in his famous *Discipline and Punish* (1997).

Warren's objective in theorizing education in this way is not to condone it, but rather to present an argument for how education can be more effective if the material body, through performative experience, is added to the experience of the classroom. Likewise, other theorists echo these sentiments but within the context of performance art.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Sarah Amira De La Garza identifies the necessity for employing embodied experience in academia in her autoethnography *Maria Speaks* (1994). Commenting on the potential for performance to reveal unforeseen interpretations, De La Garza comments “performance at once took the ethnographic gaze from the “auto” to the social...I realized that the communal aspect of the cultural transmission of meaning in my life had been left out through emphasis on my own interpretation of my experience without the input of others” (1994, p. 23). Angela McRobbie points out that dance is incongruous in this system of the purity ideal even compared to other expressive art forms, saying “the middle-class preference for music [as a subject of education and a leisure activity] reflects the connotations dance carries as a pleasure of the body rather than of the mind” (1997, p. 210). While music is a creative product and many would argue it could indeed affect the body significantly its corporeality can be abstracted and objectified, unlike dance which necessitates literal embodiment. She continues to argue that an understanding of culture can only be enriched by including an analysis of dance, rather than rejecting or ignoring it.

Judith Butler has wrestled with the ideas of the performative and embodiment since the beginning of her academic career in the late 1980s. While in the broader academic sense the concept of the performative is seen as strictly a verbal/intellectual occurrence (such as in a performative phrase, which is one that necessitates action that is concurrent with the utterance of said phrase, such as ‘I apologize’), Butler has used the term throughout her work to describe the embodiment and physical expression of abstract

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

social categories, such as that of “woman”.

In *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* (1988), Butler lays out a foundational argument for her later work in feminist theory, wherein the act of being a woman is literally a performance necessitated and constituted by the norms and expectations of womanliness in any given social group. She firmly roots her analysis of gender in the body, attending to the material and not the intellectual issue of gender, beginning her argument with the words “philosophers rarely think about acting in the theatrical sense” and proceeding to make a rigorous case for conceptualizing social categories as material and not abstract. In other words, she focuses on how females literally must perform (in the theatrical sense) the act of being a woman in order to be considered as such, as opposed to working from the essentialist assumption that there is a static category of ‘woman is female’. The point in bringing this example up is Butler’s use of a framework for understanding gender from a performative and therefore not purely intellectual standpoint. Such a perspective allows her to create new and insightful ways of understanding a social category, as is the objective of this research.

By Butler’s own determination, her foundation for this conceptualization of the performative is akin to the phenomenological perspective on ‘acts’ promoted by Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and G. H. Mead, though she describes it as “more radical” in that it “takes the social agent as an *object* rather than the subject of constitutive acts” (Butler, 1988, p. 519). By this, Butler means to say that there is no pre-determined assumption of gender identity, that gender identity is constituted through “a stylized repetition of acts” (ibid.),

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

or a performance. The importance of conceptualizing gender identity this way, she says, is that it allows for gender identity to be “capable of being constituted differently” (p. 520) and not considered one static category. It is through this conceptualization of identity as performance that dance can be seen as a significant site of analysis. If dance performance is a venue for the constitution of cultural identity, the changes in stylization and technique, the moving limits of the margin and the legitimate mainstream of acceptable performance, all have the potential to indicate new and precocious insights into how cultural identity is changing and developing in the future. The potential that observing such communication provides for cross-cultural understanding seems undeniable in its innovation.

Dance provides an excellent venue through which the imperatives of Butler, Warren and McRobbie can be achieved. Dance puts the focus almost exclusively on the corporeal, which brings a fresh perspective to cultural communication research. Ann Cooper Albright (2005) indicates that “tracing the layers of kinesthetic, aural, and spatial as well as visual and symbolic meanings in dance can help us to understand the complex interconnectedness of personal experience and cultural representation so critical to contemporary cultural theory” (pp. 52-53). Albright goes on to say that “although it is of the body, dance is not just about the body, it is also about subjectivity” (p. 53), an indicator that social theorists in line with Bourdieu’s theories would say is imperative to understanding and/or challenging traditional and marginal cultural identities.

Albright’s primary argument in her article entitled *Moving Contexts: Dance and*

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Difference in the Twenty-first Century (2005) is that analyses of cultural artifacts such as dance cannot exclude more marginal, less mainstream or even traditional (i.e. – institutionally legitimized) forms of dance with the complaint that they are inauthentic. Instead she argues that it is these emerging dance forms that lead us to a more dynamic and dialectical understanding and less static or stereotyped understanding of culture because they do not stick to the rigidity of historical practice. Paying attention to more marginal dance styles “open up the possibility for a cross-cultural dialogue of multiple influences in contemporary...dance” (Albright, 2005, p. 56). The more informal and marginalized performances of tawa’if and rudali, then, provide a site for a more dynamic analysis than would perhaps a more widely socially condoned mainstream dance form.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Research Questions

1. What is happening, in terms of cultural identity, at the border of acceptable and non-acceptable dance performance in India?
2. What is the characterization of the rudali and tawa'if dancers being portrayed in South Asian films? How do the films being examined portray the lived experiences of these performers?
3. How do the managers of Indian cultural products (performance and film) mediate the presentation of Indian culture and what are the results of this for intercultural communication?

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Chapter 3 Methodology

This research is a critical, qualitative investigation of the communicative potential of the styles of performance adopted by tawa'if and rudali. A qualitative research paradigm is best suited for exploratory, descriptive research questions which aim to identify important patterns, document them and explain possible causal contexts surrounding the phenomenon being researched (Dereshiwski, 1999). This is contrasted with quantitative research which primarily seeks to predict outcomes and forecast behavior (ibid.). The objective in the critical paradigm is “not just to study and understand society, but to critique and change society” (Patton, 2002, p. 131), which enables research to engage with the social and political context of a topic. This study therefore seeks to identify and document patterns of marginalization in the way that tawa'if and rudali performers are portrayed, and explain the contexts surrounding this marginalization while also identifying areas where this context is problematic in the representation of cultural identity and seeking out ways these problems can be resolved.

In order to achieve these objectives this study is primarily a textual examination of the ‘performance language’ of the ways tawa'if and rudali are portrayed, using Bollywood films that feature them as the primary text in order to understand the significance of these performers to the collective consciousness in India. As addressed above in the conceptual framework, researchers have established that by focusing on the performativity of these dancers this research will be providing a unique perspective on the communication of cultural identity (Albright, 2005; Butler, 1988; De La Garza, 1994;

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

McRobbie, 1997; Warren, 2003). The objective in this approach is to analyze the aesthetics of the performances taking place in the films, determining how the stylistic features of the performance link to the social and cultural histories and present realities of tawa'if and rudali and their communities, and what these qualities can stand to contribute to intercultural communication. In line with the critical approach of this research, the production contexts of the films themselves are contributing factors to the examination as the critical theoretical perspective requires. Background information on the dancers and the social contexts in which they are situated are also being sought out to inform the researcher in order to have an appropriate historical and political context in which to situate the analysis.

In addition to this textual analysis of films the findings are supplemented by conducting interviews with classical Indian dance instructors in the Portland, Oregon area, and observing and/or participating in Indian dance classes and dance-related events. This aspect of the research is intended to add context to the thick, rich description required by qualitative research (Dereshiwsky, 1999), and to shed light on reasons behind the marginalization of tawa'if and rudali within the societies they come from. The interviews are intended to fill in gaps which may not be adequately accounted for either by the films themselves, by the existing literature on the topic, or by the researcher's own interpretation of observations made about the use of dance as a cultural product of India. The interviews are qualitative, in-person, semi-structured interviews which incorporate both the interviewees' own personal knowledge and professional experience of Indian

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

dance, as well as their reactions to the films. This type of information will also be helpful in acting as a validity measure to ensure that the analysis is not too weighted on the researcher's own interpretation. The following segments will give a more detailed description of the various aspects of the research design, including setting, sampling method, data collection procedure, methods of analysis, and relevant issues regarding bias and validity.

Setting

The “setting” for the collection of data on the dance forms being examined is the filmic representations of tawa'if and rudali performances – Bollywood films *Devdas* (1951 and 2002), *Pakeezah* (1972), *Umrao Jaan* (1981 and 2006) and *Rudaali* (1993). While this does not constitute a typical research setting per se, it is important to identify that the data is collected through filmic representations and not through direct observation of these traditions. The reasoning behind this is that the objective of this research is to interpret the meaning of these dancers and their dancing to the collective consciousness of the cultures they represent. Several film and Bollywood scholars (Ganti, 2005; Chakravarty, 1993; Viridi, 2003; Dudrah, 2007; Dwyer and Patel, 2002) have noted how popular films in particular represent a mass-mediated abstraction of such collective consciousness. These films then, while also providing access to obscure dance forms, satisfies this requirement. Because most of these films are not readily accessible for rent or purchase in the United States, all of the films have been obtained through the Portland State University Summit inter-library loan system, or through the Multnomah County

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

public library system and watched on a personal television or laptop computer.

For interviewing dance instructors, meetings have taken place at a time/location convenient for the participant as long as it is within the time frame of the research. This is done not only so that interviewing does not intrude on the busy schedules of the instructors, but also to ensure their comfort during the interview. Interview settings then include dance studios, cafés, and personal residences. No special equipment other than a small digital audio recorder (iPhone with voice memo application for digital .mp4 voice recording) has been used for these interviews. Interviews are audio recorded in order to produce transcripts of interview conversations which make analysis easier and more accurate.

Observation of Indian dance-related events have taken place at various locations depending on the context of the event. The researcher's own participation in Bharatanatyam classical dance classes took place at Natya Leela Dance Academy in Southeast Portland, which holds small group dance classes for adults and children for a drop-in fee of \$15. This was a particularly relevant setting due to the fact that it enabled data collection from a performative context as opposed to a more abstract intellectual context such as pure observation, verbal interviewing or research. Other observational events attended include the India Day Festival at Pioneer Courthouse Square in Downtown Portland (a free public event hosted by the India Cultural Association of Portland), and the Jai Ho! Video Dance Party hosted by DJ Prashant at the Mission Theater in Northwest Portland (entrance fee was \$5). Personal reflections from

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

participation in/attendance at these events in the form of fieldnotes were typed up after the fact.

Sample

Films were chosen as the primary source of data collection due to the inaccessibility of observing or interviewing tawa'if and rudali performers live. Additionally, this study seeks to focus more on the ways in which representations of these performers create meaning for film audiences, rather than documenting a detailed characterization of these performers' lives based on direct observation, such as would take place in an ethnography. Compounding the fact that these performances do not exist in the Portland area, tawa'if were most prolific during the period of Mughal Raj and the beginning of the British Raj, all of which took place before the 1950s. While some of these women do still practice a form of this tradition in modern North India and Pakistan (Brown, 2007; Maciszewski, 2006; Srinivasan, 2006; Qureshi, 2006), filmic representation is now the most relevant and information-rich access point from which to garner an understanding of what these women mean to Indian society and culture. The films being examined have been chosen due to the prominence of tawa'if or rudali in the film narrative. While the tropes of female sexuality and the struggle for female autonomy are common in Bollywood film (see Viridi, 2003, whose analysis focuses heavily on representations of females in Bollywood), these particular films highlight these marginalized citizens as the primary characters, providing the opportunity to focus on what meaning Indian society creates for these women.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

The films that have been selected to be examined in-depth are *Devdas* (1951 and 2002), *Pakeezah* (1972), *Umrao Jaan* (1981 and 2006) and *Rudaali* (1993). *Rudaali* is the only film which prominently features rudali performers as main characters. In fact, this film, in combination with the novella it was based on, provides quite a thorough examination of the context of these women's lives and the ways in which they are perceived by the society they exist in. *Devdas*, *Pakeezah* and *Umrao Jaan* were chosen due to their prominence in the genre of romantic/courtesan cinema in India as classic stories (Chakravarty, 1993; Viridi, 2003). Additionally, *Devdas* and *Umrao Jaan* both have the interesting characteristic of having multiple versions; in fact, a Portland State University Library Worldcat search for a video version of "Devdas" returns at least three different versions of the film. One modern and one classic version of each of these films were chosen in order to help provide a more multi-dimensional context of how these women have been perceived by Indian society since the 1950s.

The participation of dance instructors was garnered by employing purposeful sampling methods (snowball sampling and intensity sampling) due to the level of specialization required of the informants. Patton describes that this sampling method can be used in order to locate and access "information-rich key informants or critical cases" (2002, pp. 234, 237). Additionally, qualitative purposeful sampling methods recommend that the sample size is large enough once saturation has been met, or as Lincoln and Guba describe, redundancy/no new information occurs (as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 246). Participants were all female and over 18 years of age. There were no other specific

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

demographic requirements for participation other than the informant's prolonged training in and familiarity with Indian dance practices as dance instructors. Instructors with backgrounds in any classical style were accepted, though most of the instructors specialized in Bharatanatyam. One instructor specialized in Kathak. Most of the instructors also had experience in and taught various classical or folk styles, and one instructor alternated Bollywood/filmi dance and folk dances with her classical repertoire.

Initial contact was made with instructors via Dr. Priya Kapoor of the Portland State University Communication Department due to her familiarity with the Indian dance community in Portland. Other instructors were contacted by phone based on a list of dance instructors in the Portland area found on *PortlandIndian.com* (BroadLink LLC, n.d.). All instructors who participated were self-selecting in that they were given the option of whether or not to respond to the initial contact made by the researcher. Of the 9 instructors contacted, 4 positive responses were garnered which resulted in successfully completed interviews.

Data Collection

As mentioned above, data collection has taken place through the textual analysis of Bollywood films that use tawa'if and rudali as key figures in their narratives, interviews with classical Indian dance instructors in Portland, and observation of/participation in Indian dance classes and events. Data was gathered using a critical, qualitative approach which allows for fleshing out the subtleties of the questions of how and in what way these dancers create meaning for Indian culture. The following is a

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

detailed account of the data collection methods that were used to gather information from each of the various sources.

Filmic data collection.

The only equipment needed for filmic data collection is note-taking apparatus and DVD viewing equipment. Data was gathered from notes taken on the plot and compositional aspects of the films, as well as notes taken on the researcher's personal reactions to film viewings. In the viewing of films, attention was paid to specific compositional aspects of the primary tawa'if or rudali characters and the ways in which other characters in the film react to them, drawn from John Fiske's Codes of Television (2008) schematic (see Appendix A for a description of this schematic). These aspects, or categories, are: the text of the subject's dance performance (body movements, eye contact, facial expressions, dress, etc.), the subject's filmic portrayal (lighting, camera angles, etc.), the subject's characterization (relationships to other characters, conflicts, love interests, casting, etc.), and dialogue (both during song/dance sections and in regular dialogue). The production context for these films (how they were made) was also taken into consideration where possible.

Fiske's framework provides a data collection method which follows a critical perspective, allowing these aspects of cinematic experience to be examined in order to draw conclusions about ideological assumptions underlying the aesthetic features of the films. Notes will be taken for each film in each of the above stated categories and distilled down to ideological assumptions for analysis. This method of understanding

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

filmic data will highlight the ways in which tawa'if and rudali performers are perceived by the social contexts in which they are represented.

Interview data collection.

After a positive response from interview participants, each received an email from the researcher with a brief overview of the purpose of the interviews and the study itself in order to decide whether or not they wanted to be interviewed in-person. Once a participant decided to proceed with the interviews, a mutually agreed-upon location was determined that was convenient and accessible. Before beginning with the interview the participant was given an informed consent letter to sign (see Appendix B), and asked if they were comfortable with having the conversation recorded. Interview questions (see Appendix C) focused on establishing each participant's familiarity with the performance practices of rudali and tawa'if and the films that portray them, discussing the perceptions of these performers both in the general public and within the classical dance system, and discussing the perceived value of these performers as cultural products. Interviews lasted roughly between 40 and 50 minutes. All personal identifying information (such as names) is kept confidential.

The interviews were conducted from a qualitative methodological standpoint with an emphasis on the phenomenological approach to interviewing in order to gain an understanding of the subject matter from the participants' lived experiences as dance instructors in Indian classical dance. The objective of the questioning was to understand how the participants' experiences as classical Indian dance instructors lead them to

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

understand the phenomenon of the marginalization of tawa'if and rudali performers both within Indian society itself and by institutions of mainstream cultural performance in India. This was achieved by asking semi-structured questions, which require the participants to couch their answers in personal experiences or anecdotes related to the topic. Max Van Manen (1990) provides guidance on how best to employ interviews using a phenomenological approach, saying that interviewing "may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon" (p. 66). It should be noted that in this case a phenomenological approach is being differentiated from a phenomenological method, which is a rigorous methodology in its own right that requires specific techniques and research design to understand the commonalities in the lived experiences of a group of people. Instead this research is informed by phenomenology as a theory and philosophy which helps orient the researcher towards asking relevant questions during the semi-structured interview process.

Observation and performance data collection.

In addition to the textual analysis of films and interviewing, data was also gathered from fieldnotes resulting from the researchers own participation in or observation of various dance events in the Portland area. Fieldnotes were written according to James Clifford's (1990) "inscription, transcription, description" structure. The researcher joined a Bharatanatyam dance class in order to better understand embodiment in Indian dance. Bharatanatyam is a style of dance that is popular in the

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Portland, Oregon area among Indian ex-pats and local Portlanders alike. Though this style of dance as it is practiced today does not manifest Indian culture in the same way as the performance styles of tawa'if and rudali, Bharatanatyam was chosen for its accessibility, as well as the assumption that all performance styles originating in South Asia share similar principles based on a common ancestry that goes back thousands of years as documented by Bharata's ancient *Natyastra* text (as cited in Vatsyayan, 1996).

In addressing the justification for incorporating such a performative method in the data collection, because there is such an emphasis on embodiment and performativity in this theoretical approach to the topic it seems fitting that part of the data collection would be conducted according to these principles also. There is also methodological support for this approach from scholars such as Maria Cristina González (2003)/Sarah Amira De La Garza⁵ (1994) who promotes interpretive and embodied ways of data collection to add depth to standard observational research techniques.

Analysis

The approach being used to analyze data gathered from the films will follow Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis guidelines which he lays out in his book *Critical Discourse Analysis* (1999). In fitting with a critical theoretical framework, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) proposes that a text should be studied within a context of power and ideology, which works well with Fiske's schematic being used to collect filmic data. Fairclough asserts that power should be seen in terms of inequalities between

⁵ Maria Cristina González and Sarah Amira De La Garza is in fact one person who has changed her name. Much of De La Garza's published work is under her first name (M. C. González).

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

persons involved in discourse, as well as a socio-cultural imbalance in the ability “to control how texts are produced, distributed and consumed” (1999, p. 1).

While in its initial inception critical discourse analysis was intended to be used with spoken or written texts, Fairclough is very clear in his introduction that he has since recognized the value of applying this method to visual texts also. Fairclough states “I think it is necessary to move further towards [considering cultural artifacts such as pictures, buildings and music as texts] than I have done in these papers, where text is mainly understood as written or spoken language. A strong argument for doing so is that texts in contemporary society are increasingly multi-semiotic” (1999, p. 4). Fairclough argues that including cultural artifacts (such as dance and film in my case) in the understanding of texts can allow for more of a focus on the texture (or the characteristic structure and quality) of a given artifact as opposed to simply context alone. From Fairclough’s perspective this can only provide a richer understanding of the artifact and its entire context, which currently remains quite disjointed from the text itself in this type of research. For this project then, adopting a CDA approach will mean that special attention is paid to the dominant institutional and ideological power structures present in the films’ contexts. This will include relationships between characters in the film narrative, and organizational/production structures of the film.

Analysis of filmic data has taken place on an ongoing, cyclical basis. Once data was gathered from films after an initial viewing in the form of notes, that data was reviewed in order to identify emerging patterns. Once a set of patterns was identified, the

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

data was reviewed again to see if later-identified patterns might apply to earlier-reviewed data. This will also enable the filmic data to be compared with that gathered from observation (journals) and research. Films were viewed from start to finish several times after initial data collection (at least 3 times for each film) in order to ascertain subtleties that may not have been picked up on in initial viewings. This is particularly important as all the films being examined are scripted in an Indian language (Hindi or Urdu) and subtitled in English, which can be distracting to the viewing process.

Interview data collection took place concurrently with filmic data collection in case relevant themes emerged during film viewings that should be incorporated into the interviews. The primary data analysis strategy was categorization, or more specifically thematization (Maxwell, 2005, p. 96; Patton, 2002, p. 452), which involves identifying patterns or consistencies in the data and grouping the relevant segments of the text according to these patterns. Once interviews have been transcribed, they were thematized using pre-established perspectives and emerging themes. Emerging themes are categories or patterns which do not exist prior to analysis, but rather are revealed during the analytical process. Filmic data will include personal reflections on the films. Pre-established perspectives guiding analyses are those established in the conceptual framework: postcolonial theory, Bourdieu's theories of habitus and taste, and the concept of performativity.

Bias and Validity

Joseph Maxwell argues that in qualitative research it is more important to explore

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

the depth and extent of the potential impact the researcher brings to a study than to attempt to minimize or eliminate researcher bias or reactivity (2005, pp. 108-109). This is due to the fact that from a qualitative perspective the actual impact of the researcher can never be entirely eliminated, and using it properly may in fact be helpful to the research process. The objective in qualitative research is not to eliminate variance between researchers as in quantitative research because the assumption is that such elimination is impossible when given the different subjective experiences of different researchers. Rather, as a qualitative researcher, by informing oneself and one's readers on existing biases a more concise explanation of the extent and limitations of the analysis can be created. This is the perspective being adopted for this study, and so the following sections will provide a brief overview of the lens the researcher approaches this study with and will explain the ways in which this research design can help make the best use of this lens to result in data that is evaluated as fairly as possible.

Bias

My position as an international student in the U.S. has greatly influenced my personal and academic worldview. I come from a small set of contiguous islands in the Caribbean which is considered a British Overseas Territory (i.e.: not an independent country). The islands have a population of roughly 55,000 over 100 square miles of land distributed across three islands. The population could be described as a hybrid one, where several generations of African, British and Latin American settlers have joined with nationals of other Caribbean and Commonwealth countries (most recently persons

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

from as far-flung places as South Africa, the Philippines and Australia) to create a unique community. This position has undoubtedly led me towards an affinity for a postcolonial perspective, which critiques the ways in which dominant national political and economic power structures work to subjugate and silence the voices of non-Western cultures. This perspective is particularly relevant and useful in trying to understand the political, social and cultural context of a country such as India that has undergone intensive social changes through the years of colonialism and struggles for independence.

Postcolonial theory fits in easily with the critical/cultural studies perspective of this research. Shome and Hegde (2002) note that one drawback of these perspectives in the discipline of communication is a tendency to get caught up in theory and jargon to the detriment of grounded data, which could lead to an analysis that is abstract and impractical. I agree that this can be a problem with employing a critical perspective in research, and would add that the strong reliance on theory in the critical perspective can lead to ‘tunnel vision’ in data analysis and interpretation which may exclude other relevant explanations for patterns in the data. I hope to avoid these undesirable consequences by ensuring that I remain engaged in the data itself by experiencing the performance contexts as directly as I can. This is part of the reasoning behind attending dance classes and cultural events as opposed to remaining in the realm of books and films. Additionally I hope that maintaining journals of my personal reactions to and reflections on the data collection process will contribute to my analyses and enhance the theoretical perspectives I have adopted.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Another significant theoretical position impacting my lens as a researcher is the feminist perspective. I have long been invested in issues related to gender since my time as an undergraduate student (when I took feminist and gender studies as a minor) and throughout my employment as a program co-ordinator with a women's advocacy organization in the Cayman Islands. This training has led me to focus on issues of gender inequality in my academic work, which is something that is relevant to this study. My familiarity with this background will be useful in helping me to recognize and address gender-specific problems/patterns in the data when conducting my analysis. However, my specialization in this area may also lead me to overlook other elements contributing to patterns in the data. This concern can be remedied by engaging in periodic conversations with peers and advisors during data collection and analysis as well as reviewing my fieldnotes, so that I may be reminded to pay attention other relevant aspects of the data if my perspective begins to get too narrow.

Validity

It should be noted that because this research is being conducted from a critical perspective, there is a strong emphasis on establishing pre-existing theoretical standpoints which will guide the data collection and the identification of elements to pay particular attention to in analysis (Patton, 2002, p. 131). In terms of the conclusions being drawn from the data, this means that the researcher has taken care to not attempt to draw conclusions which are beyond the scope of a critical, qualitative investigation. Examples of poorly drawn conclusions in this context would be answering variance/comparison

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

questions or making “truth” claims. To do so would be to reduce the validity of the conclusions drawn from the data collected (ibid.). Additionally, to draw any conclusions about the actual lived experiences of tawa’if or rudali would be inappropriate, since this research is primarily addressing their representation by secondary and fictional sources such as written stories and films.

The primary tactic being use in this study to bolster validity is data triangulation. Triangulation is the use of multiple sources of data collection, methods of data collection, investigators or theories in order to confirm the conclusions drawn from the data (Maxwell, 2005, pp. 93-94; Patton, 2002, p. 559). This study is employing source and methodological triangulation. The sources being used in this study are films, face-to-face interviews, and participation in and observation of performances. These sources cover three different epistemologies: knowledge from the textual sources of film, from the lived experience of other individuals who produce Indian culture in intercultural contexts, and from the researcher’s own personal experience with Indian dance in Portland. For methodological triangulation, the methods being used are textual analysis, qualitative interviewing, and reflexive journaling and fieldnotes. By continuously cross-referencing the data collection methods and data sources this validity technique provides a self-checking mechanism which allows for easier identification and elimination of conflicting interpretations or conclusions.

In addition to triangulation another validity measure being employed to avoid relying too heavily on the theoretical lenses and not having a broad enough interpretation

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

of the data is what Maxwell (2005) terms “searching for discrepant evidence and negative cases” (p. 112). In other words, this validity measure involves making a conscious attempt to search for or think of exceptional cases which may negate the conclusions that have been drawn from data analysis. Maxwell elaborates that “you need to rigorously examine both the supporting and the discrepant data to assess whether it is more plausible to retain or modify the conclusion, being aware of all of the pressures to ignore data that do not fit your conclusions” (ibid.). In order to support efforts to identify and test discrepant data the researcher consistently reviewed fieldnotes as well as garnered feedback from peers. The fact that conclusions are not being drawn just from one source provides a platform to compare and contextualize the data gathered. Diligence and thoroughness in the comparisons of the data from the different sources and methods, as well as searching for and testing discrepant data, contribute towards increasing validity.

In summary, this critical, qualitative investigation uses the textual analysis of films, interviews with Indian classical dance instructors, and observation and experience of dance events to gain an understanding of the perceptions of tawa’if and rudali as marginalized performers. The next chapter presents and provides clarification on the data gathered from these investigations including the break down of fieldnotes, emerging patterns obtained from interviews and the thematization of films.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Chapter 4 Results and Analysis

The data that was collected for this research addresses the following research questions:

1. What is happening, in terms of cultural identity, at the border of acceptable and non-acceptable dance performance in India?
2. What is the characterization of the rudali and tawa'if dancers being portrayed in South Asian films? How do the films being examined portray the lived experiences of these performers?
3. How do the managers of Indian cultural products (performance and film) mediate the presentation of Indian culture and what are the results of this for cross-cultural communication?

The primary source of data collection is the textual analysis of six South Asian films: *Devdas* (1955), *Pakeezah* (1972), *Umrao Jaan* (1981), *Rudaali* (1993), *Devdas* (2002), and *Umrao Jaan* (2006). Other data gathered consists of observations and experiences from fieldnotes garnered from participating in various Indian dance related events around the Portland area, interviews with Indian classical dance instructors currently living in Portland, and research of texts discussing tawa'if and/or rudali.

All data was analyzed primarily to ascertain the *perceptions* of tawa'if and rudali as cultural performers in India held by film producers, dance instructors and dance historians, as opposed to viewing the data sources as means of understanding the real-life experiences of or circumstances surrounding tawa'if and rudali performances. Therefore,

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

the data that follows speaks to how tawa'if and rudali are perceived in the collective consciousness of the cultures they belong to, and what role they play in the intra-cultural and inter-cultural communication of Indian cultural products. The presentation and analysis of results below is arranged according to the source from which the data has been obtained. Therefore the analysis begins with the researcher's key observations and experiences from fieldnotes, followed by interviews with dance instructors and information gathered from the research of texts discussing tawa'if and rudali, and finally the textual analysis and thematization of films.

Fieldnotes: Key Observations and Points of Interest

My experiences with attending Indian dance-related events turned out to be a very useful exercise as a part of my data collection because it provided a personal perspective from which I could evaluate the information I was obtaining from the dance instructors I spoke to, the articles and books I read about tawa'if and rudali, and the films being examined. Additionally, the dance lessons in particular provided me with an opportunity to integrate embodied performance and praxis not only as a subject of my research but as a feature of my data collection method. This feature allows me to take a unique, non-textual perspective in at least one part of my analysis. The events I attended were the India Festival commemorating India's Independence Day, the Jai Ho! Video Dance Party with DJ Prashant, and three classical Bharatanatyam dance classes at Natya Leela Dance Academy. Below are some of the key points and observations taken from these fieldnotes.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Bharatanatyam lessons – Focusing on the internal state.

One point about the dance lessons that recurred in the fieldnotes for all three of the Bharatanatyam classes I took was the overarching experience of feeling an intense focus on the internal state and experience of the body. The words “centered” and “balance” came up repeatedly in my notes when describing how movements should be carried out properly and the overall attitude to be taken when practicing the steps. The fieldnotes also paid a lot of attention on the fact that there were no mirrors in the dance studio (and I can say from talking with dance instructors and going to other classical dance studios that this is a normal feature of Indian classical dance studios). My fieldnotes over the three classes describe how this absence of mirrors forced me as I was dancing to become very aware of my own mental and physical state, and pay close attention to all body movements.

I found the lessons to be quite physically taxing as the dance style demanded a lot of hard concentration due to the amount of attention that had to be paid to coordinating all body movements to achieve what probably looked like fairly simple steps from the outside. I discuss in my notes how dancing with a mirror results in paying attention to oneself almost as an outside observer; with no mirrors I had to pay close attention to exactly what was happening in my body to achieve the movements successfully, as if I was memorizing each movement to commit it to muscle memory.

For the Bharatanatyam classes this feature of focusing on the body was emphasized by the use of what I perceived as onomatopoeic sounds to count out steps

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

rather than numbers as has been used in all other dance classes I had taken. Words such as “takita” (pronounced tah-kee-tah) counted out a three-count step, and “tum” denoted the final step in a set. As I was performing the steps these sounds helped me envision the movements I should be doing, as they were so evocative of the body positions and movements carried out during the steps. This sense of intense internal focus is contrasted to the Bollywood lesson I participated in at the Video Dance Party. The focus at that event was very external, something that became particularly obvious during the video DJing section of the night, when I was so focused on the music videos that accompanied each song being projected on the screen overhead rather than what my body was doing.

Bharatanatyam lessons – Dance vs. life.

A number of elements about my experience with Bharatanatyam lessons led me to surmise that there is a strong principle of dance as a form of meditation, as well as that there is an explicit requisite of separating the dance experience from the rest of life. The instructor explained to me that at the beginning and end of each lesson a short ritual is performed called “namaskar” (which interestingly is also the Hindi word for an initial greeting) which involves certain upper and lower body movements intended to show thanks to the creator, the teacher, the self and mother earth. She also described it as a form of centering oneself to leave all else behind during the lesson, and after the lesson to leave the class activities behind as you go on with the rest of life. Again I saw a distinction here between the classical dance attitude and the Bollywood dance attitude, which seemed to take an attitude of Bollywood-as-lifestyle. For example, during the

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Bollywood Video Dance Party I got the chance to speak with one of the event assistants, who said that the event was just one element of the host DJ's (DJ Prashant) "master plan" of popularizing Bollywood culture throughout Portland.

Dance as culture.

My experience at the India Day Festival in Portland was an intriguing one. I decided to go initially because I thought it would be a good opportunity to meet some dance instructors who I expected would have stalls at the event to promote their studios or have information on their dance styles, since I knew that dance performance was a strong feature of the performances that were promoted to take place from morning until the late evening. However, that turned out not to be the case. Only one of the stalls was promoting any sort of performance organization, which turned out to be one that taught violin and voice lessons. The majority of the other stalls at the event were promoting or selling food, textiles, souvenir-like items, music, religious organizations, language schools and educational outreach organizations. While dance was obviously a primary showcase feature for the event, I was surprised that there wasn't more information on the background of the dance forms, or how to get involved in lessons. This could have been because of a perception of dance as "big C" Culture and therefore something to be showcased and observed, and separated from the practice of culture as is represented in religion, language and tangible products. Or it could have simply been that there was so much dance on show that to have the stalls occupied by dance studios also would have seemed unfair.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Interviews with Dance Instructors: Perceptions of Performance

The data gathered from interviews was another unexpectedly intriguing facet of the research, especially because of how it put the information gathered from texts into perspective. First of all, I should indicate that I obtained four interviews with dance instructors, which was lower than I would have hoped for. I was not able to obtain more interviews primarily because of a low to mediocre response rate within the timeframe of the research. Of the four interviews I was successful in obtaining, two were referrals and two were responses to the direct contact calls I made and therefore were self-selecting participants. It seemed that the snowball sampling method was partly problematic because of the time of year – many instructors may have been away on holiday for summer, or had limited schedules because their children were at home from school – which meant that they were less accessible. However, this lower than desired response rate does not appear to have affected the quality of the interview data because by the fourth interview there was a lot of repetition in the data which indicated saturation level was being achieved.

In terms of the respective backgrounds of the interview participants, each is a female dance instructor of Indian classical dance living in Portland, Oregon. All of the instructors are of Indian descent and moved to the U.S. from other countries. Three of the instructors (participants 1-3) specialize in Bharatanatyam dance, which is a style that originated in Southern India. One of the instructors teaches a variety of styles including Bollywood dance and various other regional folk dances from around India. Participant 4

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

was the only instructor who specialized in Kathak dance from the North of India, which is the style of dance practiced by tawa'if. Three of the instructors (participants 2-4) had seen most of the films, and Participant 1 had only seen one of the films (*Devdas*), but had seen other films which depicted courtesan characters similar to tawa'if called devadasis. An interesting note is that all of the instructors referred to the type of dance that tawa'if perform as “semi-classical”, and the type of performance given by rudali as either “semi-classical” or folk. The following is a breakdown of the primary repetitive patterns that emerged from the interviews, as well as some notes on key topics where the instructors' opinions diverged.

Who are tawa'if?

All of the participants described tawa'if as professional female practitioners of the arts in historical India. Three of the four participants used the term “geisha” to describe the role that courtesans in India such as tawa'if and devadasis have played in Indian history and society. This association implies a stronger association with the cultural and artistic heritage that the tawa'if provided rather than the sex-for-profit aspect of their trade. However, all of the participants did acknowledge the blurry line tawa'if straddled between entertainer and prostitute:

Participant 1: the women sort of, kind of, not really, some of them are...you know, in this whole almost perhaps prostitute stage, but not really. But they're beautiful dancers, almost geisha-like in a certain way.

[Later in the conversation]. In a way they're like geishas...you know

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

they're smart, they're bred to be just immaculate, right? Gorgeous, beautiful, sing, dance, everything, and they're there as the substitute to the boring wives.

Participant 2: They have been trained in classical dancing for many years, they've been trained to sing as well as dance, and they don't just do singing and dancing, they're really knowledgeable about different things. They can hold conversations with men, you know. So they were basically – they entertained men. It's like the geishas if you think about it, you know, very similar, you know. [*Later in the conversation*]. So it's not like they would sleep around; they had just one husband. You know, they would perform for everybody, but when it came to, you know, being with one person, they would choose somebody very rich who could support them, and that's how the, you know, the system was.

Participant 3: I think tawa'if were up in the ladder for sure. I know my father has told me stories of his grandfather's, you know, and maybe even his father going to these places, you know, to see mujras I think they call it, right?

Interviewer: Yes. Yeah. Mujras, yeah.

Participant 3: Mujras. And, you know, how it was entertainment. And,

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

you know, if you wanted to pursue further with the women you could, but you could often just go there and hang out and drink, where you didn't have too many other women saying, "Don't do this" and "Don't do that." You know, and your social – it was part of their social fabric, I think that they enjoyed. And I think they appreciated the dance, you know, they appreciated the artist, they appreciated the music. It was not just for sex. It was a lot of it was companionship I think also. You know, in stories and movies, things that I've seen, you know, they talk of the tawa'if sort of more like the geisha or the – or nowadays what do they call it? The escorts, I guess.

Participant 4: Tawa'if is actually translated directly to prostitute, but again, you can look at prostitute – tawa'if – okay. I should take that back. Tawa'if was supposed to be an entertainer in the Mughal era and a prostitute in the Victorian era when the Britishers came. So the same person, who did the same kind of entertainment, the poetry and the singing, evolved into becoming a prostitute for the Victorian era even though there was nothing going on, but somehow, they – that's the shift of the word that happened. And that's how Bollywood started portraying it based on what the Britishers thought which is how the decline of Kathak started with the British rule. Before, even the people who were dancing in

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

the courts, were so well educated in the dance form that they would be sent to the rich people's houses to teach their daughters dancing because they knew the dance in and out. But when the Britishers came and they just completely downgraded the whole thing, that's when nobody wanted anything to do with Kathak....

Participant 1 in particular did focus more on the dubious sexual history that courtesans had, as well as what she perceived as the possibly unjust system that required them to pass on their profession to their children. She was the only interviewee who addressed the potential that the children of courtesans either did not have a choice in whether or not to engage in these practices due to being born into the profession, or suggested that mothers were possibly "selling" their children into it. She also addressed the fact that there was "injustice" in this system of social stratification in India that meant that women who were on their own had to engage in selling their bodies for the sake of being able to practice their art.

That said, the general tendency of the interview participants to associate tawa'if more with their artistic skill contrasted with the image of them that was presented in other informational text and articles about their lives. Each of the articles and book chapters that I came across that discussed tawa'if emphasized the sexual aspects of their lives at least as much as if not more than the art forms that they practiced (Brown, 2007; Maciszewski, 2006; Qureshi, 2006; Srinivasan, 2006; Viridi, 2003).

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Who are rudali?

In terms of characterizing the rudali there was a less clear-cut response on the part of the participants as to who exactly rudali are and how to characterize what they do. One respondent (participant 1) had not heard of rudali at all before this interview. The rest had only very basic knowledge of who rudali are and what they do:

Participant 2: so rudali is a woman who comes and mourns when somebody dies. So in the Northern part of India in some communities the family is not allowed to mourn. So the rudali will come and do that for you. So they have their particular kind of dances that they do, and they weep and they, you know, there's a lot of outward showing the mourning.

This participant said she would describe what rudali do as an art form, because they're "trained to do that". Another participant described an experience she had when she was a young child in India of traveling to Rajasthan for a funeral and actually having witnessed a woman who, though unpaid, acted in the role of a rudali for the wife of a late uncle of hers. Though she knew the woman was not hired, she only described her as a distant aunt of hers:

Participant 3: And I remember very clearly, I was maybe five years – it was 1980; I was six years old, and my father's brother passed away. And we went to Punjab, Amritsar, and his wife was there, you know, and he had five daughters. And I clearly remember my buaa ji, who is my father's sister, coming and saying – telling his wife, "All right, give me

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

your hands. Let me, you know, bang it on the wall and break all your bangles.” And it was such a dramatic thing because, you know, there was this widow who was, you know, in her 30s or maybe 40, who, you know, has just lost her husband, has five little girls to look after and is obviously overwhelmed with grief and confusion and, you know, uncertainty, and she’s sitting in a corner sort of, she’s not breaking down yet, but she’s obviously not thinking about lots of things. But then this woman comes in, a much older woman, takes her hands, starts banging it on the wall and breaks all her bangles and wipes her sindoor, you know, the red [...] bindi and the sindoor and things off her forehead. It was so dramatic, like we see in Indian movies, and that did make her cry.

The last interviewee had somewhat spotty knowledge on rudali, though she described what their basic purpose was:

Participant 4: It’s basically the person cries or shows sadness for other people who are not supposed to because of social barriers or whatever it is. So it’s a name which actually originates in the State of Rajasthan. [...] And, over there, there was a lot of social stigma when you were higher up in the caste system. You didn’t sit outside in the public and show your emotions. You had a death in the family or something, you didn’t sit outside and cry, but again, culturally speaking, people expect to show sadness, to be missed when they die.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Interviewer: Right.

Participant 4: So, in rudali, you know, that was the thing. Rich people were dying but then they didn't have any legacy or the sons didn't care about them to die. So they would hire these people who would just sit and just cry for them even though they didn't care. It was just a profession.

Interviewer: So do you see it as having any sort of – is there any performance or any dance aspects to it, or is it just the pure crying?

Participant 4: I think it was just the pure crying.

None of the interview respondents spoke of the lives that rudali led beyond their participations in mourning rituals. The perceptions of the participants in this case, then, reflect the scholarly literature on rudali, which as described in introduction is few and far between. Aside from the eponymous novella and film, I have only come across three scholarly articles which discuss rudali to any significant extent (Chakravarty, 1999; Kapoor, 2005; Subramanyam, 1996), and in those cases it is the film being discussed, not descriptions of the performances themselves in the same way one might find a historical/informational description of Kathak. This lack of information in itself corroborates kind of general perceptions that the dance instructors expressed about who rudali are.

Perceptions of the cultural value of tawa'if and rudali.

All of the instructors agreed that the lived experiences of tawa'if and rudali have some value in representing Indian culture, though to varying degrees:

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Participant 1: I think the cultural significance of, rudali and tawa'if is that they're there. They're still there, they've survived, you know, it's a...it's something real that happens in India.

Interviewer: do you see that they have any value in the history of Indian dance forms or sort of communicating Indian culture throughout history-

Participant 2: Yeah. Yeah, of course.

Interviewer: -or, you know, to other cultures?

Participant 2: because they are portraying our culture itself, right? The rudali are portraying that we are not allowed to mourn, so they have to mourn for us. So they are showing a part of, you know, the Rajasthani culture. *[Later in the conversation]*. It's only through the devadasis and the tawa'if that dance got into Indian cinemas, because otherwise there was nobody to promote it in the society, you know? There was no one to carry it on.

Interviewer: okay. So they were the ones that helped perpetuate?

Participant 2: yes, they were the ones that helped. Yeah. And continue these dance forms.

Participant 3: ...I think personally for me I'm just amazed at the lives they led, you know, at how rich they were in their talent and their beauty.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

I have a lot of respect for them. I think it's very unfortunate the circumstances they were in, and most of the time they were put into it. I don't think they walked into a brothel or a kotha⁶. So I have tremendous respect for the fact that they trained themselves, you know, for years to become beautiful dancers, who we now look at those performances and go, "Wow." I think it's unfortunate that it wasn't documented very well, you know, how they lived and what they did and how they learned, what their relationships with their teachers were. You know, I don't know; I'm always curious how much training they had or what kind of training, how was it imparted to them or whatever, how much of the scriptures they read, how much of dance theory they read. But, you know, sadly I don't think that's the view that's the common view; I think more and more people look at them as, "Oh you know, all right, you're a dancer, but you're also a tawa'if," or "You're a tawa'if and happen to be a dancer." So I have a lot of admiration for them and I wish I knew more about it, or ways that I could learn about it, other than watching five or six Hindi movies....

Participant 4: ...I actually feel that they are the ones who helped retain that form of dance even if it has evolved over the years because I don't –

⁶ See Glossary of Terms.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

with all the innovations that India has gone through, so many people come through India, it would have vanished because temples were demolished. A lot of temples were demolished during the Mughal times and during the British times. So I give them full credit for keeping up with that dance form, and I think, in a different – if you see I think, philosophically, they have taught women how to do business because they were businesswomen managing their business in a time which was not even helping them. They did a good job of doing that. So, eventually, people did understand that part of it and I think they did learn even though it may not be direct learning. And they did contribute – they used to go and teach the rich people's – at the rich people's homes as a private tutor for dancing, and that's how the dance form stayed because nobody else saw the dance beside the men who did not care about it. But because they were hired by women to teach their kids that form of dance....

In addition, three of the four participants brought up the fact that the meaning of the word tawa'if had changed over time from artist and courtesan in the height of their popularity to prostitute in modern day India, and since the invasion of the British. For example:

Participant 3: Well it means a dancer who's entertaining and most of the time gets some kind of remuneration. Unfortunately it's sort of decayed into a...it means a prostitute these days. I don't think anybody associates tawa'if with any kind of art or culture. It's sad, but in a setting like

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Bombay and I'm gonna bring Bombay up 'cause that's what I know most about and I grew up in. If somebody says, "You're a tawa'if." They're gonna say it's a prostitute. They're not gonna think oh, it's some artistic value that this person had brought to the courts in India a long time ago.

Interviewer: So would you say that's a difference over time, that the meaning has changed?

Participant 3: I think so. I think people are just not that aware anymore. They're not that interested maybe in classical forms. They're more interested in like the quick sell, Bollywood and things and a lot of movies don't do justice to the ideas of the classical tawa'if.

Participants also describe how perceptions of dance have gone through another change in significance since the early 20th Century and through the struggle for independence in the mid-20th Century. They describe learning dance now as a sign of "prestige" (Participant 2) and "pride" in Indian culture (Participant 3), and a sign of a "good Indian woman" (Participant 1) or a qualification for the "Mrs. Degree" (Participant 1) as one participant put it. Three participants (2-4) also noted that while this is especially true of Indians living abroad, for Indians still living on the subcontinent dance is occasionally still looked down upon as "cheap" (Participant 3). Participant 1 articulated this very clearly:

Participant 1: you know, and um...so, so these classical forms even though they come from regional and folk...and almost all of them do

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

come from a kind of a caste you know the original caste of these ladies was all prescribed in a certain way. [...] So...so they all started with that kind of, I mean, not all but my, my form certainly did, Odissi certainly had that you know thing going on. So...but then at some point somebody comes along and says hey this is beautiful but we need to clean it up. If we don't clean it up it will have all this bad reputation and if it has all this bad reputation then everybody can't do it. You know, so Brahmin ladies would never do this form. Um, there was even a time when Brahmin women wouldn't sing in South India because that's also considered a low class...not low, but questionable.

Interviewer: right.

Participant 1: there was no...every job had a caste almost-

Interviewer: okay.

Participant 1: [...] so the musicians were their own castes, so the father would teach the son, who would teach the...

Interviewer: okay.

Participant 1: so Brahmin women or Brahmin men would not sing because that's not what their castes did, you know they're supposed to be priests and...elevating the status. And music is for people who don't know how to access spirituality through the scholarly way.

Interviewer: okay.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Participant 1: so, um, but you know by making all of these forms classical dance forms they elevated the status of these forms to...to kind of be accessible to all castes. So the Brahmins would come and study. You know, the Prince's children could go and study, the King's daughters could go and study and not have to deal with all this reputation issue.

Interestingly, Participant 4 who has been either a student or instructor of Kathak for over 20 years discusses how that dance form would not have survived to be revived in the 20th Century if it were not for the tawa'if. However, in looking at a historical description of Kathak and how it came to be what it is now, one author seems to side-step the role tawa'if had in perpetuating the tradition. In fact, he does not even use the word tawa'if or courtesan but instead uses the more innocuous term "court dancers" (Massey, 1999, p. 21). He also describes the evolution of Kathak during the British Raj as a "debased form of Kathak" that had "denigrated into voluptuous and sensual styles" (p. 23) though again not mentioning the words 'tawa'if' or 'courtesan', therefore banishing their role in it's history.

Final thoughts on marginalized dance and context.

In discussing how the performance contexts of tawa'if and rudali differ from those of modern classical dancers, each of the instructors conveyed that there was more of a tone of informality involved in these marginalized performances, using words such as "casual" (Participant 1), "seductive" (Participant 4), audiences being "drunk" or having "different states of awareness" (Participant 3) and "folk" (Participant 2) to

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

describe the performances and performance contexts. Two of the instructors brought up their own hesitance as modern-day dancers to perform in certain venues because it invokes similarities to tawa'if:

Participant 3: I've been asked many times to come perform, you know, "Can you dance at this wedding that I'm having for my friend?" And I've just been reluctant. I don't know what it is; it's the associations I have with, you know, what a tawa'if does maybe that I want to perform where I'm respected at some level for the art.

Participant 4: I still have my reservations about dancing while people are eating. That is disrespectful to me. I was approached before and here, also – like in restaurants. People say, "Can you show dance?" To me, that is disrespectful. So, for me, the main idea of dancing is when you have a captive audience. If the audience is doing something else, it doesn't mean anything.

Interviewer: Okay.

Participant 4: So that is my only criteria.

Interviewer: Okay.

Participant 4: As long as it's for somebody to understand the form and it's not just for pleasure, you know, that somebody dancing there or – and again, the venue, yes, depends as to what their reason for dance is.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Participant 4: Again, if it's celebratory, that is good. If it's on stage for cultural purposes, it's good only because of how this [Kathak], how the history of this dance is. I'm a little-

Interviewer: Right.

Participant 4: Touchy about that subject. You know, I won't come here, and I won't perform there but – and yes, like India Day, would be great because it does help people understand – a lot of people don't even know what Kathak is, which is sad.

Interestingly, each of the interviewees also mentioned, unprompted by the interviewer, the inherent feature of rudali and/or tawa'if performances being projections of their internal experiences. Here is an excerpt from one particularly well-articulated description of this:

Participant 1: And in terms of the performance itself, there's a casualness about these dances purely because of the um, kind of audience they have. Which is um...mostly men it feels like....

Interviewer: okay.

Participant 1: ...the stories that they tell are very, very...connected to the heart almost. You know there's a real emotion that they have to deliver. [...] Which I think...while you have to deliver it in the classical dance forms, because there's a whole pure dance side, people can hide for a

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

while without being emotive, you know-

Interviewer: okay.

Participant 1: you can just do pure dance movements, you can be very clean, you know, can have very clean lines and you can um, um...you know like ballet, you can have your plies and you have your clean lines and you have your turns and all of that and you can be really precise, and that could be enough.

Interviewer: mhmm.

Participant 1: you know, you really need to, it's almost like you have to pull that heart out and throw it out on to the floor. Even when you're doing what I would consider pure dance movement, you know. I feel like and I don't know if it's true but, I've always been told that a lot of Kathak influenced their, their dancing, right? And so the turns and the whirls and all of that...and the, even their clothing and their jewelry right, all of it is...and so, the hand gestures don't, are not too elaborate, but, you know they're...the whole body has to speak, you know? 'Cause it's that kind of audience. The audience isn't coming there to be critical about movement, they're there to...I don't know, for lack of a better word, being seduced, you know they, they want to get into that."

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Representations of Tawa'if and Rudali in Film

There were six films in total under examination for this study (*Devdas*, 1955; *Devdas*, 2002; *Pakeezah*, 1972; *Rudaali*, 1993; *Umrao Jaan*, 1981; and *Umrao Jaan*, 2006), each of which were watched from beginning to end at least three times. In addition, clips of certain scenes were watched repeatedly in order to provide clarification to the plot or concentrate on scenes that were particularly relevant to the analysis. Each of the films were scripted in Hindi but had English subtitles. Extensive notes were taken on the storyline and key observations from each film, which can be found in Appendices D-I. Additionally, notes were taken on the social, technical, representational and ideological stylistic features of each film, per John Fiske's Codes of Television model discussed in the methodology, to assist in analysis.

The following section will provide details of the themes which emerged from or applied to the data collected from the films. However, first some relevant contextual points about the films and their characterization of tawa'if and rudali will be made in order to situate the themes properly.

Overview of filmic data.

It should be noted that for two of the films, *Umrao Jaan* and *Devdas*, two different versions of each were viewed and analyzed. The reason for this was twofold: a) it was apparent that the modern versions of each of these films had certain stylistic elements that were distracting to the plot whereas older versions had clearer plotlines, and b) having the same story told in two different time periods provided an interesting

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

opportunity to see how the representation of tawa'if had changed over time.

Firstly, after the initial viewing of the films the ways in which the earlier versions of *Devdas* and *Umrao Jaan* differed stylistically from the modern versions is obvious and overwhelming. The modern 2002 version of *Devdas* certainly fits in with the over-the-top aesthetic of modern Bollywood in general. Clothing is elaborately jeweled, the red sindoors/bindis of married women are overly large compared to older films, there is excessive use of rich, luxurious, draping fabrics for set decoration, and the colors are both almost unnaturally deep and bright, and glittery and iridescent. The overall impression is one of opulence, excess and indulgence. On the other hand, the 1955 version of *Devdas* has a decidedly stronger focus on the plot and character development, with seemingly less attention paid to costume and set design.

Though this could be chalked up to the fact that the older *Devdas* is filmed in black and white, *Pakeezah* and the 1981 *Umrao Jaan* are certainly closer in style to the older *Devdas* than the two newest films (*Rudaali*, as an early-90s art film does not tend towards either trend). In *Pakeezah*, the static camera, common use of wide-shots vs. close-ups, exaggerated gestures and use of melodramatic expressions, and flowery (almost to the point of being Shakespearean) dialogue make the film appear more as a play than a movie. In the 1981 *Umrao Jaan* the focus is much more on the technical poetry and dance skills of the tawa'if character Umrao as a quality that attracts the princely love interest rather than an idiopathic emotional connection, or surface-level physical attraction between the two as is the focus on the 2006 version. Again, like the

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

2002 *Devdas*, the 2006 *Umrao Jaan* allows the viewer to indulge in the visual and emotional feast of the rich set and costume design and very intense character relationships, though it still does not quite reach *Devdas*' heights in terms of visual style.

While opulence across the board is primarily a feature of the two newer films, it is also used as a distinguishing trait of the tawa'if characters in the films. The costumes worn by the courtesans are distinctly more elaborate, bejeweled, and made of finer or more glamorous fabrics such as silks and gold threads. This is quite clear in the 1981 *Umrao Jaan* and 1955 *Devdas*, where non-tawa'if characters wear plainer cotton or linen saris or salwar kameez⁷ which may still be clean and fine but are not as grand as the elaborate saris or lehenga cholis⁸. In fact, the only times we see the non-tawa'if female characters looking as grand as the courtesans are when they are getting married, such as the character of Paro in either *Devdas* film, the girls getting married in both *Umrao Jaan* films, or towards the end of *Pakeezah*. This imagery of tawa'if as waiting bride is typified in the editing of one of the final scenes of the 1981 *Umrao Jaan*, when the adult Umrao reunites with her mother after being abducted and sold to a brothel as a child. The mother caresses her face, and an image from the beginning of the film of a young anonymous girl getting married with her own mother making the same gesture is spliced in for just a few seconds. The implications of this comparison of tawa'if and bride suggest a romanticization of the lives tawa'if lead.

In speaking of the lives of the tawa'if and rudali in these films, there are many

⁷ Salwar Kameez refers to the long tunics (kameez) worn with loose pants (salwar), and outfit which is more casual than a sari or lehenga choli.

⁸ See Glossary of Terms.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

indications throughout each of the films that indicate a connection between their lives and the performances that they give. For example in *Umrao Jaan*, particularly the 2006 version, Umrao's mujras and dance performances basically articulate in a bodily form what is happening in her life. Her debut performance as a tawa'if is a mujra/song titled "Salaam" which is a salutation associated with Muslims in the North of India who speak Urdu. Later her songs and dances reflect her internal state in reaction to the path of her life in the film, whether it be love for Nawab Sultan, stubborn resistance at dancing for men whom she didn't love, or sorrow for the life she lost and resignation to her courtesan identity.

The same is true of other films such as *Pakeezah*, as can be seen in the scene when she appears frozen and unable to dance because of the traumatic/intense experience she had being nearly drowned and then rescued by the handsome forest ranger Salim. This is also true especially in the 1955 *Devdas*, where the tawa'if character Chandramukhi's whole existence including her appearance and her desire to dance begins to change as a result of her relationship with her patron Devdas, who frequently voices his contempt of her type. Even the traditional tawa'if dancing attire⁹ which includes both Muslim and Hindu elements presents the tawa'if as an embodiment of the complicated history that has produced her. For the film *Rudaali*, the same is true also. In *Rudaali* this feature is most clearly epitomized by the

⁹ The dance costume which tawa'if are consistently presented in to perform is similar to lehenga choli, except ruched and fitted ankle-length leggings called churidars are worn under the skirt, and the top typically extends over the arms, upper chest and midriff so the body is completely covered. A dupatta or scarf/veil is worn over the hair with one edge secured at the crown of the head.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

main character Sanichari's transformation into a rudali at the end of the film, which appeared to happen because her body was simply no longer able to contain the grief from all the tragedy she had experienced in her life. It is almost palpable as it flows out of her as she beats her chest, tosses her head and wails to the heavens, a stark contrast to the almost physically inert Sanichari we saw throughout the rest of the film whose "sorrow has hardened in [her] heart like wax" (*Rudaali*, 1993). While *Rudaali*'s stylistic filming techniques (no dancing numbers, few songs, long takes of the main character staring into space) distinguish it from the other films by creating a philosophical, social-commentary type of film, the withholding of the performance scene until the end of the film makes the impact of the degree to which Sanichari's performance embodies her life all the more poignant.

Before moving on to the themes, a quick word about the casting in these films is relevant to helping understand them better. Each of the films used quite well known actresses for their time, even *Rudaali* as a smaller-budget film showcased two popular and acclaimed actresses (Ganti, 2004; Viridi, 2003). Starting with *Pakeezah*, Meena Kumari (who played the title role of Sahib Jaan/Pakeezah) attracted much attention from the public and was known as the *tragedy queen*. Viridi describes her role in *Pakeezah* (which took nearly twenty years to make due to her alcoholism and estrangement from her husband, the film's director) as part of the reason for its eventual success, since she passed away just after it was released (2003, p. 138).

Other actresses were renowned for their excellent dancing skills that often

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

preceded their acting: Vyjayanthimala (*Devdas*, 1955), Rekha (*Umrao Jaan*, 1981), Madhuri Dixit (*Devdas*, 2002), and Aishwarya Rai (*Umrao Jaan*, 2006) all are or were at least as well known for their dancing as their acting, if not more. Dimple Kapadia who played the main role of Sanichari in *Rudaali* has also enjoyed a prolific career with a popular following, known for taking serious roles that tackle women's issues (Virdi, 2003, pp.140-143). Even the male leads have been some of the top actors of their time, for example: Shahrukh Khan (known as the 'King of Bollywood') from *Devdas* 2002 and Abhishek Bachchan (son of the iconic Amitabh Bachchan) from *Umrao Jaan* 2006. The point in identifying this trend is that all of these films have been well known and often enjoyed popular success due to the caliber of actors that star in them. This also speaks to the degree to which roles such as these appeal to the popular imagination of Indian audiences.

Thematization of Films

Based on a thematic analysis of the notes taken the films and the breakdown of the social, technical, representational and ideological elements of each of the movies, certain consistent patterns emerged in the ways that tawa'if and rudali are represented. The following is an identification of these patterns with the supporting data gathered from the films that constitute each theme. The themes are as follows: Ambivalence, Mysticism, Fatalism, Classism, and Power, Authority and Gender.

Ambivalence.

The term 'ambivalence' refers to the act of simultaneously holding conflicting

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

ideas or feelings about a person or thing. These attitudes may be viewed as binary oppositions because they seemingly do not share any commonalities. Ambivalence is an attitude that is encountered numerous times and to a very strong degree when examining how especially the love interests view tawa'if or rudali, as well as the role that is etched out for them in the plot by the creators of the films. Examples of this attitude can be seen in the following:

- *Devdas* (1955): Devdas and Chandramukhi's love/hate relationship. It is obvious when Devdas and Chandramukhi first meet each other when she is dancing for him that she is attracted to him and he is disdainful of her. When discussing why she is attracted to him, Chandramukhi responds that it is because "no one had hated me like you". Eventually Devdas grows to love Chandramukhi, but his love for her is full of guilt and self-loathing, unlike his love for his childhood sweetheart, Paro, which is pure. The contradictions between the personas of Chandramukhi and Paro are compounded as Paro becomes more and more saint-like as the film progresses. After being punished (physically by being hit, and emotionally by not being allowed to marry Devdas) at the beginning of the film for having "too much" pride in her beauty and self-sufficiency (features which Chandramukhi possesses), Paro becomes more subservient, even referring to herself as a "servant" in the house of her husband. This characterization is emphasized by the use of soft lens filters in certain shots of Paro that make her look angelic. Paro's

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

asceticism and Devdas' constant pursuit of her as his ideal woman sets up an unreachable goal for Chandramukhi, despite her attempts to mirror Paro's behavior. In the end, it is Paro that Devdas chooses to go to in his final hours, not Chandramukhi.

- *Devdas* (2002): the same dichotomy of Paro as saint and Chandramukhi as dangerous temptress is set up in this film, though in the more melodramatic style of modern Bollywood films the differences are even more extreme. Paro is used almost as the embodiment of a sort of inverted mirror image of Chandramukhi, with constant comparisons being made between the two. Paro and Chandramukhi are two sides of the same coin, one which Devdas loves, the other which he hates. The clearest illustration of this is the scene where Paro and Chandramukhi first meet face-to-face: the director lingers on close-up and medium shots of the two women subtly mirroring each other's behavior and appearance in curiously symmetrical attitudes. Again, Paro's asceticism grows in this film too as her clothing changes from the simple but colorful blue, red and gold sari in her first scene, to the austere white sari with red edging in her final scene. Chandramukhi remains the same in her elaborate and beguiling outfits throughout the film.
- *Rudaali*: love and hate come up also in the relationship between rudali-to-be Sanichari and her noble love interest Lakshman Singh, son of the landowner. Lakshman pursues Sanichari throughout the film, constantly telling her of his

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

love for her and beseeching her to leave her husband and son to be with him.

While at first we see that the attraction is mutual and Sanichari is flattered by his advances, she knows they could never be together because of their caste differences (it is even bad luck for Sanichari's shadow to fall on him) and his advances begin to seem cruel and taunting.

Mysticism.

This theme refers to the representation of tawa'if and rudali as having some kind of sacred and innate connection with god because of their position in life. The suspected reasoning behind this connection being perceived is that there is no other way to understand how these women are able to work outside of the caste system and other social norms (such as women not being allowed to work outside of the home) and bypass normal protocol in the way that they do. Here are some examples:

- *Devdas* (1955): Chandramukhi appears to wield some special, unseen power over Devdas, as is seen when Devdas takes his first drink. In this scene Devdas seems to become overwhelmed by his surroundings as Chandramukhi dances for him. As he staggers around the room fretfully, wringing his hands and rubbing his eyes, close-up shots of Chandramukhi's feet alternate with images of Devdas and they seem mesmerizing in their skill and speed. Eventually Devdas seems compelled to pick up a carafe of some dark liquor which seems to help him deal with it.
- *Devdas* (2002): The character of Sumitra (Paro's mother) in this film is

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

written as coming from a line of “dancing girls” (a euphemism for tawa’if, devadasis or the like). Sumitra ends up cursing the Mukherjees (Devdas’ family) because of their ill treatment of her own family. In one of the scenes where she curses them her hair blows in the wind as she trumpets her conch shell, appearing as a mystical, wild woman. Additionally, a short sub-plot towards the end shows Paro secretly inviting Chandramukhi to her home to perform Durga puja. After they dance together, Paro’s stepson Kali Babu (who is a patron of Chandramukhi’s brothel) reveals Chandramukhi’s new identity to the entire audience, intending to shame both her and Paro.

However Chandramukhi retaliates and shames Kali Babu instead by insisting he could have a daughter in the brothel and manages to stop a slap he was about to deliver to her face and strikes his own instead. This is the only example in any of the films that shows a woman dominating a man both physically and morally and so has a supernatural air about it.

- *Pakeezah*: curses are made by tawa’if in this film too. In this case it is Nawabjaan (the main character Sahib Jaan’s aunt) who is a tawa’if herself that sends the curses. In this case an ultimatum allowing Nawabjaan to hold Shahab’s family accountable for their actions constitutes a curse. At the end of the film she makes a statement binding Shahab to recognize Sahib as his legitimate daughter, or else ruination will come to his family. The other characters take full heed of her curse and acquiesce to her request.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Additionally, there is a thread in the storyline of Sahib's love interest Salim being mesmerized by Sahib's feet which are adorned by anklets with small bells attached to them and *alta*¹⁰, much in the same way that men become mesmerized by the feet of *tawa'if* in both *Devdas* films.

- All films: in all of these films is the ways in which these special female characters are used/employed to celebrate or commemorate auspicious or sacred occasions. For instance, in the films the *tawa'if* are employed to help celebrate marriage, pregnancy and childbirth, and *rudali* are employed to help commemorate the life of someone who has died at their funeral. This implies again that there is some mystical potential that is perceived as inherent in these women's existences which is sacred enough to allow them as strangers into the homes of the general public during these special occasions to lend a touch of the divine to the occasion.

Fatalism.

This theme refers to the patterns of the storylines written about *tawa'if* and *rudali*, as well as the attitudes of other characters in the films towards these women, as living lives that are somehow predetermined. Not only are their lives predetermined, but predetermined in such a way as to prevent them from gaining happiness or satisfaction from their lives. This sense of inevitability about the path of unfortunate circumstances that the lives of these women will follow is a feature of each and every one of the films

¹⁰ See Glossary of Terms.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

that I examined for this project. Here are examples of this from each of the films:

- *Pakeezah*: this film is perhaps the best example of employing a fatalistic plotline for the representation of tawa'if through film. For the main character Sahib, it is as if nothing can go right in her life – her mother dies when she is a child and her father is prevented by his family from being able to take responsibility for her so she grows up in a brothel learning the trade of courtesans. She falls in love with two men, one who appears to die in a boat accident, and another who turns out to be her cousin from her father's family and therefore is also prevented by the family from being able to marry her, much like was the case with her parents. Though she is eventually released from her role as a courtesan at the end of the film there is no joy in this, because it has come at the cost of her father's life. On top of this, violence, conflict and tragedy seem to surround her in the film with very little action on her own part to warrant it. In fact, aside from her dancing, Sahib physically moves very little in the film almost as if she is an embodiment of the imprisonment she feels in her role as tawa'if. Gunshots, brawls, boating accidents, and death all seem to happen around her and because of her, despite her inaction in the film. At one almost self-reflexive point in the film Sahib gives a speech equating to all tawa'if as “corpses” whose brothels are “tombs”, summing up this fatalistic attitude.
- *Devdas* (1955 and 2002): Devdas and Chandramukhi can never be together,

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

no matter how much Chandramukhi tries to be like Paro. This is obvious from the beginning of the film because of Devdas' father's negative reaction to his son's interest in marrying Paro. If Paro is too low caste for Devdas, then Chandramukhi is certainly out of the question. Therefore, all of Chandramukhi's attempts at making Devdas fall in love with her (such as taking his abuse without retort, and taking care of him when he is drunk) are in vain and somewhat tinged with a sense of misfortune. This trait was played out the same way in both films.

- *Rudaali*: in the film we are constantly reminded (by Sanichari and other villagers) that her name refers to the day of the week she was born on (Saturday) and means 'accursed' or 'unlucky'. Her name says it all, and Sanichari is presented as the embodiment of this misfortune, with her birth into a low caste, her mother leaving her as a child, her husband being a drunk and then dying of the plague, her son marrying a prostitute and then running off never to be seen again, her love for a nobleman she can never be with, and finally her discovery that the rudali she befriended is actually her mother and has died. Like Sahib in *Pakeezah*, Sanichari appears frozen for much of the film, seemingly as a result of the imprisonment she feels in her unlucky life, until the end of the film when her mourning performance sets her free.
- *Umrao Jaan* (2006): in this film we see that the fate of the courtesan is forced upon young Ameeran (who grows up to become Umrao) because she is

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

abducted as a young girl and sold to a brothel. We are constantly reminded that this life was forced on her because of the recurring allusions to her not being like other courtesans, a trait reflected physically in her unusual eye color (blue), as well as her dogged desire to remain faithful to Nawab Sultan. We see that Umrao's tragic life (being abducted, losing her only love, being rejected by her family when she reunites with them) has taken a toll on her, and the older version of herself that tells us the story is portrayed as tired and broken-hearted at the end of the film. One interesting point which addresses the attitude of fatalism for a tawa'if life taken by other characters in the film is the brothel leader, Khanum Sahib's, response when young Ameeran tells her that the two men trying to sell her have in fact abducted her. After being seemingly compassionate for Ameeran's misfortune Khanum and her maid say: "we are not to be blamed. If she wouldn't be sold here...she would have been sold somewhere else" (*Umrao Jaan*, 2006, 17min 5sec). Already there is a sense of resignation to Ameeran/Umrao's fate, and her tone and words indicate either an unwillingness to do anything to change it or a fear of society's retribution for turning her over.

- *Umrao Jaan* (1981): like the other women discussed above, Umrao's life makes her unlucky in love and she does not – cannot – get the man she loves, Nawab Sultan. However, while her loss is portrayed as sad and as a result of her fate as a tawa'if (the woman who ends up marrying Sultan is revealed to

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

have been abducted as a girl like Umrao, though she was sold to be a servant in a wealthy house), it is not so tragic as compared to the 2006 version. At the end of this 1981 version we see Umrao recovered as a successful courtesan who holds her head high and has carried on with her life. Though her life was ill fated, her story was not completely tragic. This is the only film that ends on somewhat of a positive note.

Classism.

Classism is the term I have chosen for the pattern that describes a strong focus on relative wealth/social status of the characters in the film and the designation of power (or lack thereof) that is associated with that status. Tawa'if and rudali are both portrayed as having ambiguous or fluid caste yet at the same time being rejected from most of society. Here are some examples:

- Eye contact: differing allowances for holding eye contact are demonstrated for tawa'if and rudali in the films. In *Rudaali*, Sanichari makes a point to keep her eyes lowered in the presence of Lakshman Singh, her love interest and a nobleman. However, he insists that she break this taboo and look him in the eye when they are alone together. This is perhaps one of the reasons why she is attracted to him. Tawa'if on the other hand are permitted and even encouraged to keep extensive eye contact with the noblemen for whom they dance, as well as most others they encounter. This is especially true when they are performing mujras or dancing.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

- *Devdas* (2002): social status with relation to British colonialism is a strong feature of this film. Based in the early 20th Century, Devdas is sent off to school in the U.K. to become a lawyer like his father, who is described as some sort of magistrate in India and is soon to be knighted by the Crown. Additionally, Devdas is shown as returning dressed in very British clothing (suit and vest with ascot tie, walking cane, wristwatch). This implies an acknowledgement by the filmmakers of a general deference to the British during that time, though the gesture (perhaps purposely) is slightly marred by portraying Devdas' father as haughty and somewhat disingenuous. Additionally, Chandramukhi's lack of affiliation to anyone defines her as a tawa'if. Devdas says to her "Dancing to an audience of drunken men is shamelessness. You're a woman Chandramukhi. Realise who you are. Woman, mother, sister, wife, friend. When she is none she is a whore"¹¹ (Devdas, 2002, 1hr 17min 13sec).
- *Pakeezah*: respect in this film is gained by personal affiliation, or what could be termed "connexions", in the Jane Austen sense of the word. The implication is that without any social or familial affiliations a person is not respectable. We see this when Sahib's father attempts to marry her mother and is rejected from the family, and again when Sahib is introduced to the family by Salim. The family patriarch, Salim's grandfather, says "a girl who

¹¹ Something of note is that the word in this clip which is translated to "whore" is "tawa'if".

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

doesn't have a name or an address...will bring me disrepute" (Pakeezah, 1972, 1hr 52min 22ssec).

- *Umrao Jaan* (1981): skin color is a distinguishing feature of class in this film also. Of the two girls who are abducted at the beginning, one is sold to serve in a wealthy household and the other (Amiran) is sold to a brothel. The choice to not take Amiran for the house servant is made because she is deemed "too wheatish" (a term referring to the medium-brown color of her skin) and that "the mistress had said that the complexion should be fair" (*Umrao Jaan*, 1981, 10min 17sec). Also, an interesting feature that appears to somewhat heighten the representation of Umrao's social status in this film is that proficiency in the arts (dance, poetry and music) seems to be used as a sort of social currency as opposed to simply relying on personal connections. This is illustrated in scenes such as the one where men sit around in a room trading short poetry verses with one another (38min 40sec into the film), as if playing poker but instead of bidding money they each toss in verses to see who can come out on top. Additionally, the relationship between the tawa'if Umrao Jaan and her love interest Nawab Sultan is based much more on his attraction to her artistry as a composer of poetry, musician, and dancer. This is something that distinguishes this film from the other films and especially the 2006 version of *Umrao Jaan*, where the relationship between Umrao and Sultan is based more on surface-level beauty and some sort of unexplained, idiopathic emotional

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

connection.

- *Rudaali*: issues of caste and social status are brought up so frequently (both implicitly and explicitly) in this film that this entire movie can be viewed as a commentary on classism and the caste system in India. Sanichari is used as a mechanism to voice revulsion at the hypocrisy of the hierarchical system she exists in. For example, when Sanichari overhears a conversation between her rudali friend Bhikni and a man who has come to tell her about another opportunity to mourn and he describes that Bhikni will have a good chance of getting her asking price because this family wants to outdo another family. Sanichari responds “such hypocrites! I’ve contempt for them. They try to humiliate one another even during death!”. Additionally, Sanichari herself experiences much abuse from the other villagers for being a poor, widowed woman whose son has left her.

Power, authority and gender.

The final theme for the analysis of these films is one which addresses the ways in which male and female characters express their power and/or authority and how that affects the ways in which tawa’if and rudali are represented. The distinction I make between authority and power is that authority enables a character to gain the respect of other characters but not necessarily be able to exert any control over the situation, and power describes the capability of a character to change circumstances based on their own interests. Here are some examples:

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

- *Devdas* (2002): male power and authority in this film is represented not by Devdas or any of the other secondary male characters, but instead by Devdas' father who has strikingly few active scenes and lines in the film. However, the low booming voice he speaks with seems to ring through the ears of Devdas, Paro and Chandramukhi and hang over their heads as the plot progresses. Devdas' father sets the bar of not allowing Devdas and Paro to marry because she is of a lower caste than him, and also establishing that women acting autonomously is disreputable (i.e. - when he calls Paro a whore for sneaking into Devdas' room at night). It is this action that sets the ball in motion for the rest of the plot. Female authority is represented by Devdas' grandmother who not only is given quite a bit of screen time for such a secondary character, but also is represented as a wise and likeable woman. Her age also seems to influence the high level of respect given to her. However, she has no power to change the circumstances of Devdas' situation in the same way that Devdas' father does. The same could be said of Chandramukhi who eventually gains Devdas' respect but has no ability to control his actions.
- *Devdas* (1955): as a child, Paro is depicted as audacious and lively, exercising her own autonomy to serve her needs. However, she is still a child, so she has power but no authority. This changes later in the film when Paro grows up and is struck on the forehead by Devdas for having "too much" pride. After

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

this Paro becomes subdued and servile, making her transformation into sainthood. This is when Devdas begins to respect her, and even idolize her, making her out to be perfect. At the end she has authority but no power. While Chandramukhi herself is portrayed as having little to no power or respect, the portrayal of Paro's transformation speaks to what could be the probable consequences of Chandramukhi's autonomy.

- *Pakeezah*: as discussed above the lead character of Sahib/Pakeezah has no power or authority whatsoever during this film. The character with the most power is certainly Salim's grandfather, who has dictated which females should be allowed to join the family. However, he is portrayed as an unlikable man and therefore has little authority, especially when Salim retaliates against his decision to throw out Sahib (though eventually Salim succumbs to his grandfather). The female with the most authority and power in the film is Nawabjaan, Sahib's aunt, who makes the decision to run away with Sahib when she senses her father coming to take her away, and who also issues the curse or ultimatum at the end which leads to Sahib being released from her role as a courtesan. The source of Nawabjaan's power, then, seems somewhat mystical.
- *Rudaali*: respect is gained in Sanichari's community through face-saving techniques of showing that you are capable of holding a decent funeral for a family member that has passed away – this applies to both the wealthy land

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

owners and the low caste villagers like Sanichari (she is reprimanded consistently by the town priest for not holding proper funerals for her mother-in-law and husband when they die). However, as identified previously mourning is considered beneath the upper classes, and so low caste women are hired to do this job. Curiously, this is one way in which low caste women like Sanichari and Bhikni can gain some authority, by becoming known as the best rudali. The supernatural air to the service that rudali provide also lends them some authority. During one of the funerals that Bhikni mourns at, a disturbance is caused by the mistress (prostitute) of the man who died bursting in and running to cradle his body (she was not allowed in initially). She tells Bhikni that they allow her (Bhikni) there to mourn for the man because she is pure, unlike herself. So the purity of this profession represents some degree of authority.

- *Umrao Jaan* (1955 and 2002): the character with the most curious representation of how power and authority are enacted through gender is Khanum Sahib, the owner of the brothel that Amiran/Umrao is brought to as a child. In both films Khanum Sahib is portrayed as quite masculine, constantly chewing her paan¹² and smoking her hookah, which we only see other men doing during the film. Especially in the 2006 film Khanum is also portrayed as a very shrewd businesswoman who is able to remove her emotions from

¹² See Glossary of Terms.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

her business decisions (for example, choosing Umrao to perform a mujra for the high-profile Nawab's court event instead of her own daughter Bismillah). This portrayal lends Khanum much authority and respect throughout the film, though her status as a tawa'if is still somewhat of a detraction from this, as Nawab Sultan reminds her during a scene in the 2006 version. During this scene when Sultan admits his father has disowned him and so he has no money to pay her, Khanum admonishes him, to which he responds that "by weighing my love on the scales of wealth you have not only insulted me but the whole humanity". Khanum responds that he "most not be accustomed to reality", to which he replies "actually the [reality] is this Khanum Sahib...that I am the Nawab and you a brothel keeper" (*Umrao Jaan*, 2006, 1hr 51min 35sec).

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Chapter 5 Conclusion

The data collected for this research attempts to answer the research questions in a critical, qualitative manner that addresses the mechanisms of social power at work in the representation of tawa'if and rudali, and also fleshes out the circumstances that contribute to this context. The following section is an interpretation of the data from that perspective, using the conceptual framework that was set up in the literature review (postcolonial theory, Pierre Bourdieu's theories on culture and identity, and theories of performativity). Additionally the limitations of this study will be addressed and suggestions made for future research on this topic.

Interpretation of Findings

This research addresses issues of the significance of social marginalization in the process of establishing cultural identity, the portrayal of marginalized groups in film, and the mediation of cultural products. A summary and interpretation of the data for each research question is presented below, categorized by research question.

Research question 1.

The first research question asks, "What is happening, in terms of cultural identity, at the border of acceptable and non-acceptable dance performance in India?" Interviews with classical dance instructors along with the researcher's own experiences with and observations of Indian dance practices reveal that while Indian classical dance requires an intense focus on body, it also requires a separation of the body from the circumstances of

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

one's life. This is illustrated by the centering ritual carried out at the beginning of a classical dance lesson, as noted in the analysis of Bharatanatyam lesson fieldnotes that described the necessity of leaving one's life outside of the dance studio. Additionally, interviews with dance instructors revealed that one of the primary distinctions they made between classical dance and the type of dance that rudali and tawa'if do is the tendency for the latter to integrate their lived experiences into the content and context of their dance performances unlike with classical dance. It is perhaps this separation between body and lived experience that allowed for the revival of dance in India the early- to mid-Twentieth Century as a non-caste related art form that could be practiced by elites and middle-class women. This separation allowed middle- and upper-class women to practice dance while still retaining their respectability, as was described in the interviews and historical texts (e.g.: when the dance forms were "cleaned up", as the interview participants described).

The types of performances rendered by tawa'if and rudali, however, appears to require a deep sense of emotivity and connection to their life experiences as illustrated by how these performances are portrayed in film and understood by dance instructors. This is also perhaps why all of the instructors use the term "semi-classical" to define the type of performance, because the movements may be classical but the manner in which they are presented with such emotion and in more informal performance contexts (i.e.: at homes and during weddings) gives an entirely less sanitized tone to the performance than their modern classical cousins. As one instructor said, it is as if tawa'if and rudali have to

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

“pull that heart out and throw it on the floor...the whole body has to speak” (Participant 1 interview) for them to have a successful performance.

In the instructors' discussion of dance context also sheds some light on why the types of dance that tawa'if and rudali do are marginalized. They discussed the audience and venue used by tawa'if and rudali in terms such as “casual”, “seductive”, “folk” and audiences being “drunk” or having “different states of awareness”. They associated venues such as weddings or restaurants as locations where they themselves as instructors and performers would not consider holding professional performances because of the associations she has with “what a tawa'if does” (Participant 3 interview) as one instructor put it. They brought up the fact that before classical dance was widely accepted by the upper levels of Indian society, women of these castes were expected to stay at home (“a girl from a good family was never, first of all, allowed to go outside the house” said Participant 2). That meant that women displaying themselves in a public venue, and in front of men at that, has held a strong association with the women of lower castes, or what can be described more accurately for the purposes of this thesis as *caste-amorphous* women such as tawa'if and rudali, even for these instructors who still have respect for tawa'if and rudali as bearers of culture and highly skilled artists and dancers. At once the practices of tawa'if and rudali are respected as well as pushed to the margins because of the negative associations they inspire.

While the sexuality of tawa'if is certainly a feature of the scholarly and historical texts that discuss them, from interpreting the perceptions of filmmakers and dance

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

instructors the sexuality, or sexual aspects of their performance is almost an incidental issue. Sexuality in their performance and their relationships with their patrons is perceived as either a necessary functional aspect of the lives of tawa'if, or as something that was imposed upon them by the British. This is corroborated in the films examined to some extent, as none of the tawa'if characters are portrayed as promiscuous women; rather they are portrayed as monogamous women who are either victims of unfortunate circumstances, or are technically proficient artists dealing with their situation in the best way they can. This could be perceived as a manifestation of cultural taboos in India on depicting sexual situations in films, except for the fact that in many (all four *Umrao Jaan* and *Devdas* films) of the films there seems to be a very intentional plot feature of having involved in intense, committed relationships with male protagonists who represent a standard set of morals. We don't see any of the tawa'if taking multiple lovers/patrons at the same time if at all, or appearing as if they have no internal sense of morality.

On the contrary the tawa'if are portrayed as having exceptional morals compared to other characters in the films, which is perhaps connected to the aura of mysticism that the filmmakers imbue in them. This is typified in scenes from the 2002 version of *Devdas*, when Paro's mother Sumitra who comes from a lineage of "dancing girls" rebukes Devdas' mother Kaushalya for her family's elitism, and later in the film when the tawa'if Chandramukhi retaliates against Kali Babu (both physically by slapping him and verbally by revealing him as a hypocrite) in his attempts to shame her into submission. The same could be said of Bhikni's character in *Rudaali*, where she is

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

called “pure” by the grieving illegitimate mistress of a dead nobleman because of her talent, and Sanichari who frequently admonishes the hypocrisy of the middle-class men in her village who claim to have a higher caste/moral status than she, yet frequent prostitutes and swindle poor villagers out of money they don’t have. The only exemption to this mystical moral superiority is that they practice this art or performance which breaks the codes of ‘proper’ public behavior. Therefore, I would conclude that marginalization happens in this context when an individual or group of individual attempts to work outside of the system of social stratification to which everyone else in the society adheres, and instead create an existence or fate of their own making.

Research question 2.

The second research question asks, “What is the characterization of the rudali and tawa’if dancers being portrayed in South Asian films? How do the films being examined portray the lived experiences of these performers?” From the data collected from fieldnotes, interviews and films, we see that tawa’if and rudali are portrayed as preservers of artistic and cultural traditions who create their performances based on their life experiences. In film their existence is romanticized to be tragic (for rudali and tawa’if), yet opulent and exciting (for tawa’if only). For rudali, their performance practices are known of and understood by dance instructors at a basic level, but much about the lives of the women who undertake this profession remains mysterious. The film *Rudaali* and the novella it is based on remain the best examples of portrayals of the lived experiences of rudali. In the film *Bhikni* and especially Sanichari are shown as oppressed women

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

who have led tragic lives yet are able to perceive morality in a way that makes them almost supernatural. Sanichari has been beaten down along every step of the way, but it seems it is as a result of this oppression that she obtains her performance skills that allow her to become a “famous rudaali”, as the postscript of the film denotes. This depiction could be seen as a romanticization of the oppression of low caste women, indicating that such a life leads one to be rewarded spiritually with above average morality and connection to the divine. A meta-context such as this which valorizes the integrity of the oppressed and reveals the hypocrisy of the elites fits well in the context of filmmaker Kalpana Lajmi’s reputation for producing more philosophical, feminist films.

Who tawa’if are and the roles that they play in society has changed over time, starting out as females who live without husbands and perform for nobility in the art forms of Kathak dance, poetry and music in which she is proficient during the Mughal era. After the invasion of the British in the mid-19th Century they became seen as out-and-out prostitutes, a sentiment which is still around today. However, in the context of postcolonial theory, the obsessive fascination of the modern Indian public with courtesan figures and courtesan genre films despite the taboo these women’s lives represent suggests a more surreptitious mechanism at work. In attempting to understand the change in attitudes towards tawa’if after the British gained colonial power, the concept of cultural imperialism comes to mind. This process is something that other scholars such as Srinivasan (2006) and Hubel (2005) have brought up with respect to the devadasis of South India. The adoption by Indian elites of the uninformed misconceptions that British

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

military and upper class held of these women seems like a manifestation of a sort of self-loathing through the adoption of the dominant perceptions brought in by the British colonialists. The modern obsessive reimagination of the roles that tawa'if played in Indian history and culture through film almost seems like a way of reintroducing and reinspecting pre-British colonial cultural identity.

Rudali and tawa'if are at once seen as objects of ambivalence, mystics, victims of fate, people of low social status because of their caste-amorphousness, and potentially worthy of respect. These traits run the gamut of positive and negative, which results in a sense of ambiguity of an overall consensus on who these women are and how they should be regarded – individuals to be feared, loathed, pitied and admired. This sense of ambivalence could be connected with their endurance as embodiments of the hybrid cultural and social histories that produced them (hybrid referring to the intersection of marginal and mainstream, and foreign and local influences, per Shome and Hegde, 2002). Their mix of Hindu and Muslim, Indian and foreign customs appears bewildering and makes them not at all easily classifiable, especially now in these modern times of nationalism, sectarianism and ethnocentrism. This defining characteristic of hybridity is a factor that Brown (2007) discusses as something that has been relevant throughout the history of tawa'if, even as they exist today. The habitus of mixed heritage is revealed in their performance, and the way their representation is grappled with in such conflicting terms in these films is indicative of the modern habitus of the Indian populous which seeks to come to terms with its increasing hybridization across national and cultural lines,

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

and its history of discounting uniquely Indian cultural customs through the process of cultural imperialism.

It is difficult to say how much these filmic representations relate to the true lived experiences of tawa'if and rudali, because there is not much to compare it to. Tawa'if no longer exist in the form that they are represented as in these films, and the practices of rudali are so obscure that the only option for understanding their realities is to ensure that ethnographic research is used to document their lives. While Devi's novella provides this to some extent, it is still fiction and can only be viewed as another representation. For tawa'if, the only ethnographic research that has come up in this research is that of modern day tawa'if, whose situations differ significantly from their predecessors that are showcased in the films. However, examining the perceptions of these marginalized characters reveals in the habitus of Indian Bollywood audiences a circular practice of introspection and resolution in coming to terms with a representative cultural identity.

Research question 3.

The final research question asks, "How do the managers of Indian cultural products (performance and film) mediate the presentation of Indian culture and what are the results of this for cross-cultural communication?" There is no question that the Bollywood film industry is the largest mediator of Indian culture (both intraculturally and interculturally) that exists today, producing hundreds of films each year and circulating extensively in the international market (Ganti, 2004, p. 3). All of the dance instructors interviewed mentioned Bollywood's impact on the perception of dance in general in

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

India, one in particular noting how the representation of tawa'if in film has led to a struggle for Kathak to catch on as a popular form of classical dance (Participant 4 interview). Dance instructors themselves seem to have little impact on the representation of semi-classical performers like tawa'if and rudali, though each of them was quite knowledgeable about the roles these performers play in communicating culture. One instructor indicated that she has discussed the influence of the Southerly cousins of the tawa'if (known as devadasis) on the style of dance she teaches – Bharatanatyam classical dance – though she is cautious in her descriptions for fear of misrepresenting them to her young students (Participant 3 interview).

The exclusion or even depreciation of the roles tawa'if and rudali played in dance history in historical and informational texts on dance in India (Massey, 1999; Sinha, 2006) is disturbing. Perhaps this is a remnant of the desire to separate the sanitized classical dance from its corporeal associations with tawa'if and rudali in order to make it appealing to all levels of society. However, it is important to note that if this process of “sanitization” of dance at the beginning of the Twentieth-Century had not happened in order to produce the styles that are now known as Indian classical dances, it is very likely that these styles would have died out as the practices of their performers have. And while every dance instructor interviewed commented on how training in dance is now seen as an essential sign of an Indian woman having had a good upbringing, two instructors (Participant 3 and Participant 4) mentioned that it is still not universally and absolutely accepted as a “decent” hobby for girls. This illustrates how the historical associations of

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

public presentation with the shamefulness of low caste have endured.

The result of this is simply that the complex and multi-layered history of Indian dance and how it relates to cultural identity is not fully acknowledged and therefore likely misunderstood, especially in intercultural contexts. From an outsider's perspective viewing a live or filmic representation of classical Indian dance performance without understanding the history of the tradition is like attempting to decode an item of abstract art – difficult and frustrating at times, and often rife with misinterpretation. While the process of interpretation in this decontextualized scenario may be entertaining and/or meaningful for the viewer, it does little to aid in true exchange of cultural information. By incorporating the history and evolution of dance contexts, including the marginalized attributes, into their performance, a frame of reference is established to help understand the field of cultural production that assembled to produce this artifact.

Significance.

These findings illustrate how performance in general, and marginalized performance in particular, can be examined to identify and analyze deeper social issues. For the particular context being examined, the data collected reveals that the way tawa'if and rudali are perceived and portrayed by cultural mediators such as dance instructors and Bollywood films is complex and multi-layered. It illustrates that the historical and cultural significance of these performers is generally undervalued or misrepresented as is evidenced by the associations made between tawa'if and rudali, and prostitutes, and the general lack of value that is attributed to them. Analysis of the data shows that this

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

misrepresentation can be chalked up to the tenuous relationship society has with these women – their services are seen as necessary, but there is no adequate social category or caste that suits them.

The data also indicates that care should be taken when seeking to understand these women's performance practices and lived experiences. The statement made by Participant 1 acknowledging the injustices in these women's social statuses and the potentially unethical practices that their hereditary system may have warranted, reminds us that marginalized performance should not be "glorified" (in the words of Participant 1) or idealized due to a tendency to romanticize the past, but rather should be contextualized properly so that the cultural significance of their contributions can be understood more completely.

Gaining a more complete understanding of the lives marginalized female performers lead could also potentially lead to their eventual acceptance by the rest of society, in that increased understanding could lead to increased empathy. Exploring the parts of our respective cultures that are shunned or looked down upon can help society hold a mirror to itself by offering an opportunity for social reflection and demonstrate how the margins are still a part of the whole. This self-reflection could perhaps reveal elements of contradiction in the way we understand and filter our own cultural histories, by illustrating the multiple interpretations inherent in these histories. For example, recognition that the national "obsession" with courtesan genre films in India, paired with the controversial and not easily categorizable status these women hold in popular

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

imagination, indicates a type of national self-analysis of the significance of how these contradictory actions became manifest and how it constitutes the modern collective consciousness in India. The Bollywood film industry does facilitate this in this to some degree, but mediating perceptions of marginalized performers is also one aspect that dance instructors could also have a positive impact on, by having honest discussions about the roles of marginalized dancers in the history of classical dance, which could help to better contextualize performances for their students.

Additionally, this research helps to reinforce the insistence of theorists such as McRobbie (1997), Warren (2003), Bourdieu (1984, 1993) and Fairclough (1999) that academic exploration of art forms such as dance and performance is relevant and valuable to fields such as interpersonal and intercultural communication. This study has provided a way of understanding marginalization that differs from ethnography, historical recounting and pure textual analysis because it employs performative methods of data collection while also addressing dance performance as a topic valuable to academic discourse (especially to cultural studies). As stated in the analysis of the Bharatanatyam dance class fieldnotes, the researcher's own personal engagement in the topic revealed insights that would have remained unnoticed had a performative method not been employed. This paired with the additional data collection sources of textual analysis of films and interviews with dance instructors demonstrates the value of a multifaceted methodological approach to support investigations of performativity. This finding supports existing literature that touts performance as a unique and valuable pedagogical

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

concept.

Limitations

This study produced internally valid results, through employing validity measures such as triangulation of data sources and methodologies, and self-reflexivity through testing negative and discrepant cases. However the conclusions drawn could be improved by gaining additional contextual data. One such way of doing this would be to have a longer timeframe in which to conduct interviews so that accessing more dance instructors would be possible. To this end, modifying the sampling technique to a more direct approach may be helpful since snowball sampling within this timeframe did not produce optimal sample recruitment results.

Another technique that may have helped to add additional contextual data would have been to adopt more of a traditional immersive, longitudinal ethnographic approach that would have aimed at having a deeper, longer investigation of both the lives and backgrounds of the dance instructors who participated, and the presence of Indian culture in Portland. As an outsider examining another culture it can feel as though one can never gather enough contextual information and so dedicating more time to gathering data on Indian culture in Portland, Oregon would contribute to that. In the realm of filmic data, viewing other prominent Bollywood films would have helped to provide a more thorough context for situating the films used for data collection, which were all basically from the same genre. While the researcher did have some experience in watching Hindi films many of them have been independent movies, or British-Indian films, so seeing other

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

popular Bollywood films of different genres would have been helpful to put some perspective on the courtesan genre films.

Suggestions for Future Research

This thesis can be extended by employing research in the future which gathers data on audience analysis of these films; that is, data which seeks more direct feedback on audience experiences with and interpretations of the films under examination. Future researchers could hold film screenings and conduct in-depth interviews with viewers to gain a better understanding of how individual viewers read these films and the meanings that the tawa'if and rudali characters in the films create for them. To examine how intracultural meaning is created, Indian audiences could be recruited, and to examine how intercultural meaning is created, American or other non-Indian audiences could be recruited.

Another way to get more direct feedback from audiences would be to be able to witness live performances from marginalized performers. While this may not be possible for the historical figures of tawa'if themselves, it may be possible still to collect oral histories of people who witnessed these women dance in the past, or even to view performances by modern tawa'if and see how they compare to filmic representations of the historical figures. Rudali do still exist, so being able to witness live mourning rituals could provide an ethnographic context with which to compare\ the filmic representations of rudali.

It is also possible that viewing performances of different styles of marginalized

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

dance that exist currently could provide useful contexts. One example of this would be Bollywood/filmi dance. While filmi dance is not strictly a marginalized form of dance (it enjoys an extensive popular following both in India and around the world according to the dance instructors interviewed in this research), it does possess certain attributes of marginalization, such as “low culture” appeal (in the Frankfurt School sense), and the tendency to be dismissed as frivolous or inauthentic as a representation of Indian culture (according to the interview data collected here). While some of the data gathered in this study did touch on this subject, not enough was gathered to draw any relevant conclusions. Future studies in the area of dance and cultural communication could provide interesting results by examining an ongoing phenomenon such as filmi dance and how it compares to other more truly marginal dance forms.

In the field of communication and dance, having a better understanding of how performativity works, how it becomes manifest, would be useful. While scholars such as Bourdieu, Warren and Butler have identified that praxis and experience does impact identity, the ways in which individual experience becomes manifest in performance and art is less clear. Research at a more cognitive level that explores the relational and psychological mechanisms that are at work in this process may help to provide the validation that topics like the relevance of dance to social research need to gain more wide-spread attention.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

References

- Adorno, T. W., & Horkheimer, M. (2002). *Dialectic of enlightenment: Philosophical fragments*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Ali, M. (Producer & Director). (1981). *Umrao Jaan* [film]. Sacramento, CA: Bollywood Entertainment.
- Amrohi, K. (Producer & Director). (1972). *Pakeezah* [film]. Mumbai, India: Shemaroo Video.
- Benjamin, W. (1998/2005). *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*. Retrieved from <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. New York: Routledge
- Bharat, S. (Producer) & Bhansali, S. L. (Director). (2002). *Devdas* [film]. Secaucus, NJ: Eros International.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *Photography: A middle-brow art*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. Originally published as *La Distinction*, 1979.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1993). *The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature*. New York: Columbia University Press.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

BroadLink LLC. (n.d.). *Indian Dance School n Portland Dance School in Portland*.

Retrieved from <http://www.portlandindian.com/desi/businesslist.asp?catid=19>.

Brown, L. (2007). Performance, status and hybridity in a Pakistani red-light district: The cultural production of the courtesan. *Sexualities, 10*(4), 409-423.

Butler, J. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre Journal, 40*(4), 519-531.

Chakravarty, S. (1993). *National identity in Indian popular cinema 1947-1987*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Chakravarty, S. S. (1999). "Can the subaltern weep?" Mourning as metaphor in *Rudaali* (The Crier). In D. Robin & I. Jaffe (Eds.), *Redirecting the gaze: Gender, theory and cinema in the third world*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Chavez, M. (2002). We say "culture" and students ask "what?": University students' definitions of foreign language culture. *Die Unterrichtspraxis/Teaching German, 35*(2), 129-140.

Clifford, J. (1990). Notes on (field)notes. In R. Sanjek (Ed.), *Fieldnotes: The makings of anthropology*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Collins, M. (1998). Channels of discovery: Perceptions of culture and sovereignty in the Caribbean. In R. W. Palmer (Ed.), *U.S.-Caribbean relations: Their impact on peoples and culture* (pp. 117-128). Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

David, A. R. (2007). Beyond the Silver Screen: Bollywood and Filmi Dance in the UK. *South Asia Research, 27*(1), 5-24.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

- De La Garza, S. A. (1994). *Maria speaks: Journeys into the mysteries of the mother in my life as a chicana*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc.
- Dereshiwsy, M. (1999). The five dimensions of participant observations. Retrieved from *Northern Arizona University, EDR725 Qualitative Research Web site*, <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~mid/edr725/class/strategies/strategies/reading2-1-1.html>.
- Desmond, J. C. (1997). Embodying difference: Issues in dance and cultural studies. In J. C. Desmond (Ed.), *New cultural studies of dance*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Devi, M., & Ganguli, U. (1999). *Rudali: From fiction to performance*. Calcutta: Seagull Books.
- Dutta, J. P. (Producer & Director). (2006). *Umrao Jaan* [film]. Mumbai, India: Adlabs.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1903). *The souls of black folk*. Chicago: A.C. McClurg.
- Dudrah, R. K. (2009). *Bollywood: Sociology goes to the movies*. New Delhi, India: Sage Publications.
- Durkheim, E. (1984). *The division of labour in society*. London: Macmillan.
- Dwyer, R., & Patel, D. (2002). *Cinema India: The visual culture of Hindi film*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1999). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. New York: Longman.
- Fanon, F. (1967). *Black skins, white masks*. New York: Grove.
- Fiske, J. (2008). The codes of television. In Marris, P. & Thornham, S. (Eds.), *Media*

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

studies: A reader. New York: New York University Press.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York: Vintage Books.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Herder & Herder.

Ganti, T. (2004). *Bollywood: A guidebook to popular Hindi cinema*. New York: Routledge.

Gokulsing, K. M., & Dissanayake, W. (2004). *Indian popular cinema: A narrative of cultural change*. Stoke On Trent, U.K.: Trentham Books Ltd.

González, M. C. (2003). An ethics for post-colonial ethnography. In R. P. Clair (Ed.), *Expressions of ethnography: A novel approach to qualitative methods*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Gordon, B., & Feldman, M. (2006). Introduction. In B. Gordon and M. Feldman (Eds.) *The courtesan's arts: Cross-cultural perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gupta, R.; Malik, R. (Producers) & Lajmi, K. (Director). (1993). *Rudali* [film]. Edison, NJ: Video Sound.

Hall, E. T., & Hall, M. R. (2002). Key concepts: Underlying structures of culture. In J. N. Martin, T. K. Nakayama & L. A. Flores, *Readings in intercultural communication: Experiences and contexts* (2nd Ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Hall, S. (Ed.) (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

- Herron, C. (1999). The effectiveness of a video-based curriculum in teaching culture. *The Modern Language Journal*, 83(4), 518-533.
- hooks, b. (1984/2000). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.
- Hubel, T. (2005). The high cost of dancing: When the Indian women's movement went after the Devadasis. In L. Lengel (Ed.) *Intercultural communication and creative practice: Music, dance and women's cultural identity*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Kapoor, P. (2005). Rudaali (The Crier): Performing the music of mourning. In L. Lengel (Ed.) *Intercultural communication and creative practice: Music, dance and women's cultural identity*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers
- Kramsch, C. J. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.
- Lengel, L. (2005). Shifting matriarchal traditions to the mainstream: Articulating gender, ethnicity, nation and identity through creative practice. In L. Lengel (Ed.) *Intercultural communication and creative practice: Music, dance and women's cultural identity*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Maciszewski, A. (2006). Tawa'if, tourism, and tales: The problematics of Twenty-First Century musical patronage for North India's courtesans. In M. Feldman and B. Gordon (Eds.), *The courtesan's arts: Cross-cultural perspectives*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

- Marin, N. (2005). Romanian dirge: Women's ritualistic narratives of life and death as cultural constructions of identity in Southeastern Europe. In L. Lengel (Ed.) *Intercultural communication and creative practice: Music, dance and women's cultural identity*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Massey, R. (1999). *India's Kathak dance: Past, present, future*. New Delhi, India: Abhinav Publications.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (2nd ed.). Applied Social Research Methods Series, volume 41. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- McRobbie, A. (1997). Dance narratives and fantasies of achievement. In J. C. Desmond *Meaning in motion: New cultural studies of dance*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Mohanty, C. T. (1984). Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. *boundary 2*, 12/13, vol. 12 no. 3/vol. 13 no.1, 333-358.
- Nair, M. (Producer & Director). (1985). *India Cabaret* [film]. New York: Filmmakers Library.
- Niblett, M. (2007). Post- colonial theory. In D. Dabydeen, J. Gilmore and C. Jones (Eds.), *The Oxford companion to black British history*. Retrieved from <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t240.e330-s2>.
- Noel, S. (2010). De Jamette in we: Redefining performance in contemporary Trinidad

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

carnival. *Small Axe*, Number 31, 14(1), 60-78.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Qureshi, R. B. (2006). Female agency and patrilineal constraints: Situating courtesans in Twentieth-Century India. In M. Feldman and B. Gordon (Eds.), *The courtesan's arts: Cross-cultural perspectives*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.

Roy, B. (Producer & Director). (1955). *Devdas* [film]. New York: Baba Traders.

Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Scott, D. (2010). The fragility of memory: An interview with Merle Collins. *Small Axe* Number 31, 14(1), 79-163.

Shohat, E., & Stam, R. (2002). Narrativizing visual culture: Towards a polycentric aesthetic. In N. Mirzoeff (Ed.), *The visual cultural reader* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Shome, R. & Hegde, R. (2002). Postcolonial approaches to communication: Charting the terrain, engaging the intersections. *Communication Theory*, 12(3), 249-270.

Sinha, A. (2006). *Let's know dances of india*. New Delhi: Star Publications Pvt. Ltd.

Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*. London: Macmillan.

Srinivasan, D. (2006). Royalty's courtesans and God's mortal wives: Keepers of culture in precolonial India. In M. Feldman and B. Gordon (Eds.), *The courtesan's arts: cross cultural perspectives*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

- Subramanyam, R. (1996). Class, caste and performance in “subaltern” feminist film theory and praxis: An analysis of “Rudaali”. *Society for cinema & media studies*, 35(3), 34-51.
- Tajfel, H. (1974). Social identity and intergroup behavior. *Social science information / Information sur les sciences sociales*, 13(2), 65-93.
- Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. London, Ontario, Canada: State University of New York Press.
- Vatsyayan, K. (1996). *Bharata: The Natyasastra*. New Delhi, India: Sahitya Akademi.
- Virdi, J. (2003). *The cinematic imagination: Indian popular films as social history*. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Wacquant, L. (2006). Pierre Bourdieu. In R. Stones (Ed.), *Key contemporary thinkers*. Retrieved from http://sociology.berkeley.edu/faculty/wacquant/wacquant_pdf/PIERREBOURDIEU-KEYTHINK-REV2006.pdf.
- Warren, J. T. (2003). *Performing purity: Whiteness, pedagogy and the reconstitution of power*. New York: P. Lang.
- Williams, R. (1983/1958). *Culture and society: 1780-1950*. New York: Columbia University Press.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Appendices

Appendix A: The Codes of Television

John Fiske's Codes of Television (2008, p. 222), describes his schematic in four sections: social codes, technical codes, conventional representational codes, and ideological codes. Each of these sections is broken down into the attributes where attention should be paid in the filmic representation in order to constitute the section. Below the sections are arranged in order from most material to most abstract.

1) Social Codes: appearance, dress, make-up, environment, behavior, speech, gesture, expression, sound, etc.

2) Technical Codes: camera, lighting, editing, music, sound

3) Conventional Representational Codes: narrative, conflict, character, action, dialogue, setting, casting, etc.

4) Ideological Codes: individualism, patriarchy, race, class, materialism, capitalism, etc.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Performing Marginal Identities

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Lise Hurlstone, a Masters degree candidate with the Department of Communication at Portland State University. I hope to examine how rudali and tawa'if performers are portrayed in South Asian films, and why these performances are marginalized as cultural artifacts. This project is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Priya Kapoor of the Department of Communication, and you have been contacted to participate because of your expertise in the area of Indian dance performance.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to take part in a 20-40 minute individual interview at a location of your choosing. The interview will be audio recorded for transcription purposes, though you are not required to provide any identifying information (such as your name, the name of your dance studio, your age/date of birth, the name of the town you are from or any description of your appearance) and the recording will only be shared with those who are directly associated with this research.

Your participation is voluntary and you can stop the interview at any point during the conversation. You may not receive any direct benefit from taking part in this study. However, this research may add to the existing body of scholarship on communication and performance studies, and may help to facilitate new perspectives on this topic in the future. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be linked to you or identify you will be kept confidential. Your words may be used for academic scholarship such as the researcher's Master's thesis, or submission for publication or to a conference as a paper.

If you have concerns or problems about your participation in this study or your rights as a research subject, please contact the Human Subjects Research Review Committee, Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, 600 Unitus Bldg., Portland State University, [\(503\) 725-4288](tel:5037254288) / [1-877-480-4400](tel:18774804400). If you have questions about the study itself, you can contact me at LDH@pdx.edu.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the above information and agree to take part in this study. Please understand that you may withdraw your consent at any time without penalty, and that, by signing, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. You may keep a copy of this form for your own records.

Best regards,
Lise Hurlstone

Participant Name (Printed)

Participant Signature

Date

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. Please describe the type of classical Indian dance you teach, and how it fits into the classical dance system in India.
 - How familiar are you with classical dance institutions in India?
2. What does the word tawa'if mean to you?
3. What does the word rudali mean to you?
4. Are you familiar with the films Rudaali (1993), or Umrao Jaan/Devdas/Pakeezah?
 - What is your general response to these films?
 - How would you describe the practices of the female performers in these films?
5. What distinguishes the performances given by the female performer characters in these films from classical Indian dance that you teach ... [be sure to clarify whether the respondent is talking about the stylistic performance of the filmi dance, or the portrayal of the character]
 - In terms of body movement?
 - In terms of performance context?
 - In terms of the social position of the performer?
6. From a professional standpoint, what value (if any) do you see that rudali and tawa'if performances contribute to Indian culture? Does it compare to how classical Indian dance styles are seen as cultural artifacts?

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Appendix D: *Devdas* (1955) Plot Summary and Key Observations

In a rural school house a teacher is chanting times tables to a room full of children. A young boy and girl chat together distractedly. We are introduced to Devdas (the boy chatting), who is told by the teacher that his father requested that he stay behind after school is over to do extra sums. The girl he spoke to sits with him even though she doesn't have to. Devdas looks longingly outside at the other children playing and decides to trick the teacher and runs off leaving Paro behind, pelting stones at the other kids in the school yard. The schoolmaster becomes infuriated at this and marches off to tell Devdas' father what has happened. The father is very upset and sends for a servant to look for Devdas.

Paro giggles her head off as she returns home. She takes a snack and goes to find Devdas where he is hiding in a tree. Devdas gets upset at Paro after she tells him the teacher informed his father of everything and he slaps her. She runs off. Paro goes to tell Devdas' father where he is and he is furious. The servant goes to catch Devdas for the father who beats Devdas (with a belt?) and orders to have him have no food for the evening. Paro despairs in her room.

Devdas goes to see Paro the next day and they make up and go off to play. Musical interlude: they sing a song about a lost baby bird. Back at the house Devdas' parents think his pranks are becoming too much and discuss sending him to Calcutta. Devdas cries when his parents tell him of this and says he won't go. His mother confronts him. She has a soft heart for him. In the carriage as they set off he passes Paro and yells to her that he will see her in the holidays. Paro runs into a couple of street musicians and they sing a song to her. The song is about Radha pining for Krishna.

Jump to the future: Paro has grown up to her late teens/early twenties. Someone comes to tell her that Devdas has returned. Paro begs her grandmother to plait her hair for her so that she will look nice. Devdas goes to Paro's house and she runs upstairs to hide. They have an awkward exchange and Devdas leaves. Paro's mother and grandmother discuss that the two get married, and says caste is as unimportant as beauty so Paro should have a fair shot despite her caste.

At Devdas' house the mother tells father what Paro's mother proposes. Devdas' father becomes indignant and says they're not of the same level so it can't happen. Next day Devdas goes to see Paro, but Paro is shy and runs away. On her way upstairs she overhears her father scolding her mother for approaching Devdas' parents about marriage. He says he will find a wealthier family for her to marry. Paro confesses she wishes to marry Devdas, and not the man her parents want her to. At night, Paro sneaks over to Devdas' house and wakes him up. Devdas says she shouldn't have come because it is shameful, she will spoil her reputation. She asks him to marry her but he is unsure. Next day Devdas speaks to his family about marrying Paro and they all disagree. Devdas leaves the house to go to Calcutta. Paro sees him leaving and is sad but thinks he must have a plan.

Devdas arrives at the home of his friend Chunni Babu in Calcutta, who turns up

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

drunk. Devdas asks him to take him to the brothel so he can forget his sorrows. Devdas writes a letter to Paro explaining to her what happened with his parents and says he thinks they should not get married. He tries to get the letter back after realizing he has made a mistake but it is already posted. Devdas returns home, but Paro has already read the letter. She finds him by the river and tells him she will not speak to him again. He strikes her with a stick on her head saying the moon has scars too. Then he washes the cut on her head. The street singers come by again and sing to her about belonging to her beloved. She cries. Her mother dresses her for her wedding.

Devdas returns to Calcutta and Chunni Babu takes him to the brothel but reluctantly. It is a raucous house. They enter while the courtesan Chandramukhi is dancing. She flirts with Devdas and he calls the place repulsive. The atmosphere at this performance seems quite informal. The men sitting around are obviously drunk. They are enthusiastic for the performance. They hand her money directly. After her performance she tries to strike a conversation with Devdas. He throws money at her and leaves, calling her shameless. She tells his friend to bring him back. When Devdas returns to his friend's house his parent's servant, Dharamdas, is waiting for him with a note from his mother and money. She wants him to come home.

Paro has been married and walks to her new home. She is introduced to her stepson. Her stepdaughter is reluctant at first (and has apparently been saying rude things about her before she arrived) but warms to her. Her new husband senses the sadness in her.

The servant tells Chunni Babu that Devdas is sad because Paro left. Chunni Babu says he will try a trick to get him to return home. He tries to get Devdas to come to the brothel with him again. Devdas agrees. This time Chandramukhi dances for just the two of them. Her song is about being happy to have guests visiting her. There are a lot of close ups on her feet with their ankle bells. Devdas appears disoriented. He goes to fill a glass with liquor. Chandramukhi looks concerned.

Back at home, Devdas' father is very ill. Devdas is completely wasted at the brothel. Chandramukhi is disturbed. He tells her that he hates "her lot", but will continue to visit her anyway. He tells her that she is only an actress, not real. Nothing compared to Paro. He falls down and she runs to him to help him. The servant comes to find him in the brothel. Devdas refuses to go with him. But Dharamdas the servant tells him that his father has passed away. He returns home for the funeral.

Paro returns home too and goes to visit Devdas' house not knowing Devdas is there. They meet each other on the stairs and have an awkward exchange. Paro runs into the servant who tries to get her to save Devdas. Devdas and brother discuss their inheritance. Paro goes back to Devdas' room and Devdas is there. They have a sad conversation about how their lives have changed and pine for the love they lost. Paro asks him about his drinking. She makes him promise not to drink, but he refuses because he will never forget her (Paro). Paro returns home to a bustling household.

Devdas goes to see Chandramukhi. He doesn't recognize her. She says since he left she has closed down the brothel. She admits that she loves him, and hated to see him

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

getting drunk. She says she knows how much Paro loves Devdas though, and it is tragic. As he leaves Devdas tells her to stay in touch and ask for help if she needs it. Devdas returns home and reminisces, singing a sorrowful song. Paro tells her stepchildren she is going to her mother's house, but instead goes over to Devdas' house. When she arrives she finds Devdas has already left.

Chandramukhi travels to Devdas' house to see him, she passes Paro in a palanquin on the way but they do not know each other. When Chandramukhi arrives she speaks to Devdas' sister-in-law, who tells her that Devdas has squandered his money and soon will have none. She is happy about this. Chandramukhi leaves after she has the info she needs.

Paro arrives back at home. Her husband asks her why she never wears jewelry, she replies that it is because she wants to live simply. Chandramukhi dresses herself in finery, saying she is going to meet her groom. She goes round to other brothels looking for Devdas. She finds him lying in an alleyway. He is drunk and lying on the street. She gets him to come home with her even though he does not recognize her. She dances for him to keep him distracted from wanting liquor. She begins singing a song about how to get the status that will attract/charm him. She mourns being born the way she was. She cries. Devdas has fallen asleep on the bed. Chandramukhi is happy. In the morning when he wakes up he is happy to see her and tells her that he loves her. As he tries to get up from bed he grabs his stomach in pain and collapses. Chandramukhi fetches a doctor. The doctor tells him he is recovering but must not drink any more liquor and should get out of town for a few days. As Chandramukhi is packing she cries. She asks him to take her with him. He says no because people will insult her and he can't stand it. She is worried that he has no one to take care of him. He says he will take his servant, Dharamdas. She makes him promise to call her if he becomes ill. He says he will never forget her.

On the train Devdas tells Dharamdas that he doesn't want to go home but would rather go far away and they travel around the country together. Devdas develops a fever but still refuses to go home. A man boards the train into his carriage at a stop – it is Chunni Babu. Chunni Babu tries to get him to drink liquor by saying it will ease his heartache. Devdas drinks a glass and they get drunk together. Chunni Babu leaves. Devdas keels over in his cabin. At the next stop Dharamdas finds him and wakes him up. He is very ill. He continues to drink and Dharamdas cannot stop him. Dharamdas convinces him to return to his village. Devdas begins to cough blood. At the same time Paro falls down suddenly clutching the scar on her head.

Devdas gets off the train at Pandua, where Paro lives, without Dharamdas knowing. He gets a rickshaw to take him to Paro's house. He is disoriented and has hallucinations of Paro. By the time they arrive Devdas is taking his last breaths. He whispers Paro's name and she seems to hear it from where she is sleeping in her bed in her husband's house. She wakes up from bed but seems confused and goes back. In the morning a crowd surrounds a dying Devdas. Paro sees him lying there but doesn't know whom it is. She seems troubled during her prayers. As she walks away she overhears

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

servants talking about the man and asks whom he is. Her stepson tells her it is Devdas and she runs outside. The husband closes the gates on her so she doesn't manage to get outside. She never gets to see him before he dies.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Appendix E: *Devdas* (2002) Plot Summary and Key Observations

The film opens with a tribute to the original author (Chattopadhyay, 1917) and directors of previous versions of the film, P. C. Barua (1935) and Roy (1955). The beginning shot opens with a grand mansion. The bustling household expresses joy at Devdas' arrival. He is obviously a favorite son. The family assembles to receive him in their finery. Sumitra, a neighbor, wife of fellow landlord and "actress" arrives with sweets. Devdas' eldest brother's wife (who lives with the family) appears resentful at Devdas' arrival, but the mothers are happy as if they share the son between them. Sumitra goes to tell Paro (short for Parvati), Devdas' childhood friend and Sumitra's daughter, and the director resists from showing us her face, which is revealed eventually in the first dance number with her blue eyes startling.

Paro comes across as sincere and devout in her love (she has kept a lamp burning for Devdas since he left 13 years ago). Note that we see her first without many jewels or a head covering, her hair loose and somewhat unkempt. Paro's hair blows in the wind making her appear wild and free but still demurely flirty. The lyrics of the song are about the goddess Durga/Kali and define Paro as passionate, mad, naïve. Devdas arrives with a grand entourage, Kaushalya (his mother) is hurt to find out that he has chosen to visit Paro first before seeing her. She wanted to be the "first to set eyes on Devdas". The sister-in-law (Kumud) comes across as devil on Kaushalya's shoulder, whispering in her ear.

Paro hides from Devdas when he arrives, he finds her dancing in a room with a scarf. She hides her face from him. They discuss metaphors about the moon. He does not see her face before he leaves. His mother is upset with him for not coming to see her first and so refuses to talk to him. He tricks her into looking at him and the tension is relieved. He asks about his father and there is a flashback to childhood where his father lashes him for spending time running around the village with Paro. The father is some sort of high-up judicial figure (magistrate or lawyer), and is being knighted by the Queen of England. The grandmother is portrayed as a kindly women, even-tempered, balanced and reasonable. Paro is spying on Devdas from her house across the street, she reveals she wants him to see her face only in the moonlight. Now she is all put together, displayed like a doll lounging on a couch, hair and face made up, bejeweled in a fancy sari. She appears to be feigning sleep, they share a moment of sexual tension as she talks to himself/her in whispers; he leaves.

Next day, Paro arrives with gifts for Devdas. She is soft-spoken, the sister-in-law, Kumud, is judgmental and intrusive and fake. Paro and Devdas converse: he is temperamental and refined, she is playful and "unsophisticated". Paro proclaims her love for him unabashedly, but Devdas withholds, though finally gives her what she wants – acknowledgement of his love for her. Devdas' parents converse about Paro and Devdas. Paro's status as the daughter of an actress is disgraceful to the Mukherjees and the father sees Devdas as above her. He would not allow the marriage. Paro's parents joke about it and the mother thinks a marriage will be simple.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Kumud squabbles with Devdas over grandmother's jewelry. She feels unappreciated in the family and resentful that Devdas is offered the bangles to give to his wife-to-be and she does not get any. Devdas reveals to grandmother he wants to marry Paro and she has no issue with this. Sister begins plotting against them. Devdas goes to present Paro with grandmother's bracelet as a type of informal proposal. Next there is a weird scene/song where Devdas literally pushes Paro around – a little slapping and teasing that I think is meant to be playful but to me feels dangerous. Paro is obviously pining for Devdas and he seems to have the upper hand, yet the power does go back and forth between them, which is perhaps one point of this song/dance number. Devdas is trying to give Paro the bracelet during this song. Devdas' mother spies on them from across the way at sister-in-law's urging.

Paro's mother gets word that Devdas' mother wants to see Paro, and Sumitra thinks it is time to discuss their marriage – she is overjoyed. Kaushalya and Kumud invite Sumitra to perform at their house that evening in honor of Kumud's pregnancy. Sumitra thinks it is for Paro and Devdas, but Kaushalya plans to tell Sumitra that she would like to set Paro up with another man. Sumitra's dance appears overly dramatized. Kaushalya and sister-in-law roll their eyes at her melodramatic performance, but the grandmother seems genuinely pleased. Meanwhile, Paro and Devdas tease each other flirtily as Paro fetches water from a nearby stream. When Sumitra moves to make the mark of betrothal to Kaushalya, Kaushalya accuses her of manipulation and knocks the offerings out of her hand. Kaushalya calls Sumitra "water drawn from a poisoned well" – that of the "dancing girls". Sumitra is insulted by Kaushalya's accusations and curses Devdas' family with his own ruination, daughters born to them and Paro's marriage to a wealthier family.

Paro sneaks over to Devdas' house at 1am to see what can be done to resolve the situation. A lot of metaphor speak happens, it is unclear exactly what goes on between them. As Devdas is walking Paro home Devdas' father sees them together alone in his room and accuses Paro of being a whore. Though it is unclear if they slept together, the fact that Paro has sneaked over to Devdas' room to be along with him is enough to condemn her. Paro returns home and Sumitra realizes what has happened and is angry with her. Devdas vows to no longer speak to his father and leaves the house.

Devdas goes to stay with a friend (Chunni Babu) who is a drunkard. Chunni Babu takes Devdas to a brothel to cheer him up, where he meets Chandramukhi. Chandramukhi dances for them – her eyes and gestures and song indicate a tone of seduction as opposed to joy or playfulness as in previous dance numbers. She also wears rows and rows of ankle bells. There is a lot of twirling in her performance. Devdas wishes he hadn't shunned Paro after the dance. ***"When a woman is not a mother, sister, friend, wife, woman, she is a whore".

Devdas goes to see Paro and she is getting ready for her wedding procession. They have an argument and Devdas hits her with a heavy necklace, saying that he has scarred her like the moon with his love. Weirdly, then he nurses her afterwards. Devdas then walks her by the hand to leave the house and she sadly participates in her wedding.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

She goes to Devdas' house and they cry together over the loss of their love – he gives her granny's bracelet. Devdas helps carry her off in a palanquin. Scene change: Devdas is locked in his room burning papers. Sumitra sees them and reminds Kaushalya of her curse.

Paro's new house is a grand estate. She is being teased by servants for not sleeping with her husband on their first marriage night. The grandmother of the house comes to see her and reveals that she has stepchildren to take care of. Paro meets with her new husband on their first night together. He indicates that he does not want a romantic relationship with her because he misses/loves his first wife still who has died. He wants Paro to only take care of the children.

Devdas is awakened by Chuni Babu, who has brought Chandramukhi with him, who rescued him off the street 2 nights previous. Devdas insults her. Chandramukhi will not dance until Devdas comes to watch her, despite the urging of a creepy patron – Kali Babu. Devdas comes and she dances for him, her dance shows more direct eye contact, and coy smiles and gestures, as if the story is for Devdas alone. Devdas seems overcome with conflict between sadness of losing Paro and enjoying Chandramukhi's dance. He grabs a glass of whiskey and drinks it down, in tears, then passes out. Next we see him drunk and lying in bed, giddy. Chandramukhi visits him and asks why he has done this to himself, and he says so he can "tolerate" her and forget Paro. He sees his life now as punishment for his sins.

Paro meets the rest of her new family, her new daughter's mother-in-law seems suspicious of her. Now enters the daughter's husband, who we see is Kali Babu who has been taunting Chandramukhi in the brothel. Paro goes to visit her mother and finds that Devdas' father is dying – she goes to visit him. He is crying for his son who has not come to see him. A servant finds Devdas to tell him his father has died. Devdas returns home and walks in on the funeral rites drunk. The servant informs Sumitra and Paro of Devdas' drinking and living in a brothel. He insists Paro is the only one who can save him. Paro goes to see Devdas at the house and he returns to her all the things of hers that he has. They reminisce. She tries to convince him to give up drinking by he refuses. Kumud and husband (Devdas' brother) hatch a plan to steal money from Kaushalya now that father is dead. Devdas overhears them and tells them to return the vault keys (which Kumud has taken) to Kaushalya. She won't so he attempts to burn the money. Kaushalya walks in and Kumud cries wolf, twisting the story to make Devdas the thief. Kaushalya tells him to leave this house not to return. Devdas leaves.

Scene change: Paro's new family granny is discussing Durga Puja with her, which requires getting soil from the doorstep of a tawa'if. Paro offers to do this and granny asks if she won't be ashamed to be seen there. Paro responds that even a prostitute is a human being, and deserves to be treated as one. Paro goes to see Chandramukhi and there is a tense interchange. Paro thinks Chandramukhi is keeping Devdas from her but she realizes that is not the case and her heart softens. Paro departs on friendly terms and invites Chandramukhi to the house for Durga Puja. Chandramukhi arrives and Paro asks her to stay a few days. She tells granny she is a friend, but Kali Babu is there and knows

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

who Chandramukhi is.

Cut to Devdas who is drunk on a boat. He asks a priest to give him his last rites. Cut back to Paro who is dancing at Durga Puja. The dance is lively and energetic and joyful. Chandramukhi dances with her. The dance is not directed at anyone in particular; they seem to be dancing in celebration. At the end of the dance Kali Babu announces Chandramukhi's true origins. Paro is embarrassed. Chandramukhi becomes empowered and defends Paro's kindness. She outs Kali Babu as a patron of brothels.

***Chandramukhi insists that Kali Babu could have a daughter in those brothels and he goes to slap her but she catches his hand. Interestingly, this is the only slap which is stopped in the entire film. She slaps him instead. She thanks Paro and leaves. Kali meets Paro on the stairs and tells her he has told her husband and granny about her friendship with Devdas. Paro's husband confronts her about this, and she admits it. He punishes her by not allowing her to leave the house.

Scene change: Chuni Babu is getting drunk with Devdas. They begin to dance. Soon Chandramukhi finds them and joins in. Her dance is different than before, less embellished, hair loose and free flowing. She dances for herself. Devdas begins coughing at the end of the dance, and clutches his chest. Blood comes from his mouth. A doctor informs Chandramukhi that he cannot have even one drop of alcohol. Chandramukhi is taking care of him and he tells her he loves her and asks her to let him leave and die alone.

Devdas leaves on a train with his servant. He encounters Chuni Babu on the train, who brings alcohol with him. Devdas drinks it. They get drunk together, Devdas begins to struggle for breath. At the same time, Paro falls down the stairs and hits her head where the scar is – it begins to bleed. Devdas leaves the train to go see Paro. The carriage he takes leaves him on the side of the road by Paro's house. She senses him. A servant tells her it is Devdas. Paro runs to go outside and everyone tries to stop her. The guards close the gates on her at the urging of the husband, before she can see Devdas. He dies, and Paro weeps against the gates, separated from him.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Appendix F: *Pakeezah* (1972) Plot Summary and Key Points

The scene opens with a woman in white and gold singing and dancing by herself in a large mostly empty room. The narrator reveals she is Nargis. She is a much sought after tawa'if, but the men's love is unrequited except for Shahab's. Shahab promises to take Nargis away from her court. He comes to get her and she happily but stealthily leaves with him. She is blonde, with blue eyes. Shahab cradles her in the carriage. She thinks she is dreaming.

Ominous music begins as we see Shahab's father arise when he spots Shahab and Nargis arriving at his house. Nargis has her eyes downcast and is huddled close to Shahab who holds her protectively. Father knows she is a prostitute somehow (she has no connections?), and scorns his son for marrying her. It has "maligned the family". Nargis runs away and asks some rickshaw drivers to take her to a graveyard. Shahab looks for Nargis but doesn't find her. Nargis writes Shahab a letter and then lays down to die. She is crying.

Next we see a merchant trying to sell gold jewelry to a well-adorned woman named Nawabjaan. She recognizes a bracelet and looks astonished. She asks who it belongs to – they tell her a lady living in the cemetery for the past 10 months. She realizes the woman is her sister – Nargis. Nawabjaan arrives at the cemetery and finds Nargis dead, but with a child, recently born, at her side. She supervises the burial, packs her things and takes the child away. She tells the woman at the cemetery to sell the suitcase of Nargis' things.

Cut to: man selling books on the street. Inside one of the books he and a customer find a letter which has not arrived at its destination. The customer says he will deliver it. Cut to Shahab reading the letter – he realizes Nargis is dead. He goes to the graveyard to pay his respects. He finds out she had a daughter from the woman at the cemetery. Cut to: town center with brothels surrounding it. It is bustling. Shahab arrives there to see Nawabjaan. Nawabjaan accuses him of being a false savior. Shahab reveals it has been 17 years since Nargis' death, which is also the age of the daughter. He wants to see his daughter. He wants to take her away. Nawabjaan tells him to come back in the morning for her.

Cut to: Nargis' daughter, Sahib, performing "Dupatta Mera" (dupatta is the scarf/veil that is a common women's clothing accessory in South Asia, so the title translates to 'my scarf'). The dance is direct but cheerful/playful, danced coyly for someone (anyone) in particular. Flirtatious. The lyrics talk about someone stealing her veil; perhaps veil is a euphemism for virginity? Shahab arrives next morning to find the brothel abandoned.

Next scene: a man arrives on a train in the rain. He happens upon the train car carrying Sahib. She is sleeping. Her belled and red painted feet are shaken out from under their blanket as the train moves and he stares at them. He picks up her journal and reads that she is disguising herself as a beggar to escape something. Her toes tap his knee with the sway of the car and he seems mesmerized. She wakes in the morning and finds

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

a note he has left her telling her how beautiful her feet are.

They arrive at Gauhar Jaan's (who they refer to as Aunty) house. Gauhar Jaan reveals that there is a pink palace for sale that might be cheap enough for Nawabjaan to buy. This way Daughter will be hidden. Cut to Shahab having difficulty walking, clutching his chest. Cut back to Gauhar Jaan's brothel where Aunty tells Nawabjaan that she is leasing a space in the pink mansion for Sahib. She will be known there as Gauhar Jan's niece (Sahib Jan).

Cut to the brothel in the evening. A man arrives – Nawab Zahar from Panipat. Sahib Jan arrives in a fine green costume to dance. She looks around and catches Nawab's eye but looks away. I think her song again is a veiled sex reference. The dance is slow and deliberate. Men pass her bags of money when she comes near them during her dance. A man leaves so she stops, but continues in a moment. She shows off her feet and bells. Men appear to be trying to outdo one another with their gifts of money to get her attention. Nawab pulls out a gun and shoots a bag from one man's hand. Everyone leaves, the performance is over.

Sahib lays with her hair in a pool of water but gets up when she hears the train whistle. It might remind her of the man who left her the note. She goes back to read the stranger's letter. Cut to morning: grandmother in the brothel begins a dance for the other women. Her movement is off-beat and the girls laugh at her. Interrupting their fun, servants bring in a large expensive carpet for the girls to dance on, and a caged bird for Sahib. They are gifts from Nawab. They hang the bird in a tree and we see a snake come towards it.

The Nawab arrives to an empty brothel, so he will get a private performance. Sahib arrives and everyone else leaves except additional dancers and musicians. She sings and dances for him. Cut to morning – a train leaves and Sahib watches carefully. The bird is distressed because the snake is near it. Sahib goes to visit Nawabjaan (her aunt) in town and speaks to the girl she is close to that lives there. They talk about the note that Sahib received from the stranger on the train, and the girl says that the note was not meant for Sahib.

Sahib joins the Nawab on a houseboat over night. She begins to sing for him but cannot continue. Later the boat rowers yell that they see elephants blocking the river and Nawab comes out with his gun to shoot at them. The gun appears to anger them and it seems that they charge the boat – the rowers jump off to escape but the boat breaks apart in rough water, and Sahib washes ashore. She appears disoriented. She lies down in a tent she finds near where she washed ashore. A man happens upon her tent just as she lies down. It is her fellow traveler – he recognizes her. She awakens and they speak to each other through the tent wall. She doesn't remember who she is. He tries to refresh her memory of when they met on the train. She remembers but is disheartened because she knows they cannot be together because she is a tawa'if. He has to leave and says he will return before dusk, but will send a messenger to stay with her.

Gauhar Jaan happens upon her in a canoe, so she leaves with them before the traveler or his messenger gets there. Back at the brothel, she is in her regular routine but

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

she seems sad and distracted. They are urging her to begin but she seems confused. Gauhar Jaan feigns that she had a fever to excuse her – everyone leaves. Gauhar Jaan has found the bird and clips its wing and returns it to the cage. A man (he looks unfamiliar, but is possibly a previous brothel patron) finds Sahib Jan alone in her room sleeping. She is startled, he chases her and knocks over the birdcage where the snake has been hiding. The snake chases him off. He becomes disoriented, falls into a pond and Sahib runs off into the train tracks nearby. Her sari gets stuck as a train is coming but stops just before hitting her. She has fainted.

The traveler, whose name is Salim, was on the train and sees her lying there, and takes her back into his train car. She is disoriented, he cradles her. She thinks she is dreaming (mirroring the scene with her mother and Shahab at the beginning). He takes her to his home, full of his female family. They accept her because no one knows who she is. Salim's uncle arrives and we see it is Shahab, who was Nargis' lover. Grandfather arrives and asks who the strange girl is. There is an uncomfortable conversation. The grandfather wants him to kick her out but he refuses. Grandfather says he will lose his reputation, and he gets angry. The traveler is indignant and refuses to give in so he leaves with her.

Next Salim and Sahib appear near a picturesque waterfall. She remembers who she is – a tawa'if. The word echoes dramatically. He comforts her and they sing a song full of sexual innuendo – "I want to take you beyond the moon...". They sail away on a boat. They ride off together in a rickshaw the next day. He goes to buy a garland from a street vendor. A man passing by on horseback recognizes her as the tawa'if Sahib. She hides her face from him. Salim returns and the two men have a tense interchange. Salim refuses to give his name to the man and they are followed in their rickshaw. Salim gets out to confront him and a crowd forms. The man runs Salim down with the horse and whips him. Salim pulls him down and punches him out. They are all arrested and go to the police station. The officer lets them go when he hears what Salim's status is – a forest officer.

Next we see them walking to a temple. Sahib's voice states that notoriety will follow them wherever they go because of her. Despite this, Salim takes her to be married. He gives her the name Pakeezah, which means 'pure one'. When the priest asks her if she consents she refuses to reply at first, and then screams "no" and flees. She returns to the pink mansion to find it nearly abandoned. Another woman from the brothel finds her there and she weeps in her arms for her misfortune. "Every whore is a dead body" Sahib states. She likens a brothel to a tomb where women's bodies are buried. She explains what happened between her and Salim. She says she cannot live in the world outside the brothel. Cut to: Salim's tent on fire.

Cut to: train whistling. Pakeezah is given a letter from Salim. He asks her to perform a dance at his wedding in a few weeks. Cut to: the wedding where Pakeezah dances. It is torture for both of them, she keeps her face completely covered by her veil except to look at him. She seems to be dancing for him. We see Shahab walk in. Nawabjaan is there and recognizes the ironic situation. When Pakeezah sees Salim has

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

left in the middle of her performance, she knocks over a lamp and dances madly in the glass shards on the ground, leaving bloody footprints all over the floor.

Nawabjaan stops her and calls for Shahab. She reveals that Pakeezah is his daughter. Grandfather protests and raises a gun to shoot. Instead he shoots Shahab, who has run in front of the two women. Shahab is dying in Salim's arms. There is a slight implication that Nawabjaan curses Salim's family (including grandfather), requiring them to recognize Sahib as a legitimate child of Shahab's so that she can be released from the life of a courtesan. Shahab's funeral procession, Salim's wedding procession and Sahib's betrothal procession combine into one event. Sahib/Pakeezah is given permission to leave the brothel.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Appendix G: *Rudaali* (1993) Plot Summary and Key Points

Opening titles: opening scene is a black and white chessboard floor with five women silhouetted and dancing in circles. The women are tossing their hair which is loose and unkempt, and throwing their arms in time with the music. This is the only obviously choreographed dance scene of the film. Gestures are somewhat coordinated but far less precise and much more frantic and emotionally expressive (without being melodramatic) than other typical Bollywood films. Reminiscent of “whirling dervishes” with their arms raised and their skirts flaring out as they spin trance-like.

The first scene opens with chants from a priest who is blessing a cow that has been gifted by a fat man – a wealthy landowner. The man is laying resplendent on a chaise outside under a stone cabana-like covering being fanned. He talks of his impending death. He coughs pathetically and complains loudly to his servants. He calls over his closest manservant and asks him if he will cry for him when he dies. He fears that no one will cry for him on his deathbed and so asks the manservant (Kalia) to hire a Rudali – “a special one who leads the morning in rich houses”.

Next scene: a woman pats down fresh mud on the floor of her mud hut courtyard. Another woman asks her to stay with her, insisting that she will not be a burden. Woman 2 asks woman 1 why her name is Sanichari – it means unlucky and accursed. Sanichari discloses that her mother ran away when she was young. A drunkard married Sanichari and now her life is bittersweet. Sanichari sadly reminisces about her son when he was younger.

MEMORY FLASHBACK: Sanichari and her son have a playful relationship. They arrive home and the mother in law, who is lying ill on a bed in the house, complains that Sanichari neglects her. Dadi (mother-in-law) claims that her son pays more attention to her but Sanichari disagrees. Eventually Sanichari goes to her and holds her hand tenderly to comfort her. Sanichari goes to search for her husband, Ganju, because his mother is asking for him. A neighbor says he must have run away because he was accused of thievery.

That night Sanichari is woken by thunder and a rainstorm. She dances and sings in their courtyard in the rain. She is joyous and calls Dadi to come see the rain, but finds that Dadi has passed away while sleeping next to Sanichari’s son, Badhua. Sanichari runs outside calling for Ganju again and a passerby tells her he is in jail. Sanichari decides to cremate her that night to avoid having to pay the funeral fees to the Pandit (priest). BACK IN CURRENT TIME: Sanichari mentions to woman 2 that she could not cry at this funeral. Woman 2, named Bhikni, goes to the Zamindar’s house where she meets his son who expresses concern to Bhikni for Sanichari. Bhikni realizes something must have happened between them. Bhikni returns with food and cash from the Zamindar’s son for Sanichari.

MEMORY FLASHBACK: Sanichari reminisces about when she first met him. She was walking through the desert with a pot of water on her head; he rode a camel in the opposite direction and they met. He asks for some water to drink. She asks him how

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

to do that because she will have to raise her head in order to give him water. He tells her not to worry and look up at him, so she does. He tells her that she is beautiful. She giggles like a young girl and begins to walk away. He asks her name and she tells him. He asks for water again and she tells him “it will pollute your caste”. He insists it will do him no harm. He tells her he will take her on the camel the rest of the way to her village. His name is Lakshman Singh he says, and she suddenly becomes scared and runs away.

Next scene a man is tied up and is arguing at having been brought to the palace. Lakshman sits on a swing outside. The man is Ganju. He wonders why he has been brought there. He is drunk. Lakshman says Sanichari is needed to serve his wife (Malkin – an honorific meaning lady of the house) as a maid. Next day Sanichari arrives at the palace and is introduced to a senior maid – Moti. Sanichari admits she is nervous about working there and Moti says not to worry, that the Malkin is kind. When they arrive at the Malkin’s rooms it is clear that she did not request a maid and knows nothing of Sanichari, but allows her to work anyway. Sanichari is amazed at the palace, especially by all of the water that they use which is obviously so precious to her. Sanichari and Moti talk about how Moti came to serve at the palace for so long. They have a friendly relationship.

Scene change: Sanichari is helping Malkin bathe. They talk about games they played as children and Sanichari says she often wasn’t allowed to play – she had to work most of the time. Lakshman is calling for the Malkin so Sanichari goes to tell him she is bathing. Again, Sanichari stares at the ground in his presence but he tells her to look up at him. There is obvious sexual tension between the two. Musical interlude: Sanichari is lovesick and sings of her love for Lakshman. She dances in an un-choreographed way through her small village smiling.

Scene change: Sanichari is washing and hanging cloth at the palace. Lakshman sneaks up on her and tries to engage her in conversation but she turns away from him, crossing her arms over her chest as though she is exposed because he has taken her headscarf away. Sanichari tells him their feelings are sinful because of their difference in castes. Lakshman tells her if she gives up Badhua and Ganju he will make sure she never goes hungry again. This disturbs Sanichari. Scene change: Sanichari is brushing the Malkin’s hair and Lakshman comes in. He asks Sanichari to sing at their son’s birthday. At first she refuses for fear of her presence being unlucky but she reluctantly agrees. Musical interlude: Sanichari sings at the birthday but her song is about her love for Lakshman. They look at each other. It is a sad song because they can’t be together. At the end of the song, Lakshman gives Sanichari payment by giving her the two acres of land around her house.

BACK IN CURRENT TIME: After Sanichari finishes this story for Bhikni she expresses that she feels no one has understood her like Bhikni has. Kalia comes in calling for Bhikni because the Zamindar is dying. Bhikni changes into her black dress and shawl. The Zamindar lay moaning on his stomach looking like a beached whale under his gazebo. Bhikni complains to another servant that they have sent for her too early, that he is not going to die soon. Next Scene: Sanichari is smiling and laughing as

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

she sits by a fire with other people around and watches Bhikni sing and dance with other village women. Bhikni coaxes Sanichari up and she shyly dances for just a few seconds and then sits down again.

MEMORY FLASHBACK: Sanichari sits with a young Badhua watching a puppet show in the village. It is diwali and they light small clay lamps and receive blessings of water to drink from the temple. Everyone attending the celebration drinks this same water. Later that night where people are camped out for the festival, everyone begins to get sick and they realize the water was tainted. Villagers yell about the plague. Ganju, who was with Sanichari and Badhua at the festival apparently, dies of this sickness that same night and we see Sanichari tearing off her marriage bangles with the cremation fires in the background.

Now Sanichari and Badhua work in the quarry breaking up boulders. Sanichari scolds herself for not being able to cry as she pounds the stones furiously. The other workers stop and stare at her. The Pandit hears her and scolds her for her behavior. He tells her she cannot cry because she hasn't paid funerary rites for her husband and his mother. He tells her she will rot in hell if she doesn't perform the rites. He charges her 80 rupees to do this, which she does not have. Next day Sanichari goes to the Zamindar for a loan. He asks her for her house/land in return but she refuses. He offers her 15 years of bonded labor instead.

Badhua is a grown man now and traipses about the village playing tricks on his mother. Sanichari is looking for him and scolds him when she finds him hiding from him. They are still playful together. Sanichari sells quilts that she has made in the village. A couple of customers come by. One tells her that After the Zamindar dies his son (Lakshman) plans to move away and lay off all the workers including Sanichari. She is caught off guard by this news. The customer who told her this joke that she is not even fit to be a prostitute now. She curses them and they storm off. At night Sanichari asks Badhua why he leaves her so often. He tells her that at night someone calls him from across the dunes and he can't help it.

Next morning Badhua comes in playing his harmonica. He introduces Sanichari to a woman, who enters the courtyard and throws down her bags petulantly, sitting on them with an obvious look of displeasure on her face. She wears brightly colored lehenga and choli (traditional long skirt and fitted blouse worn by women of this region). Sanichari immediately becomes furious and tries to throw the girl out. Badhua tells her not to worry, that he has not married her yet. Sanichari calls her a whore. Badhua reveals that he cannot throw her out because she is pregnant with his son.

Next Scene: Sanichari works in the quarry and then at her quilt stall in the village. Mungri, Badhua's now wife, is with her. The Pandit and one of the customers who insulted Sanichari earlier in the movie look on and laugh at her state. They call them both whores but still obviously lust after Mungri. They reveal they have both been customers of hers. Mungri comes over to them and asks to buy some food provisions from their stall. They grab her and ask her why she isn't on "whore street" anymore. She tells them to hush so that "ma-in-law" doesn't hear and tells them that she has married

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Badhua. The men become angry at Sanichari now, asking if she is going to set up a brother in her home. Mungri continues to joke with the men and Sanichari comes over and tells her to leave them. The men insult Sanichari and she tries to slap them. The Pandit calls her a whore and says she is running a brothel. Sanichari says everyone knows that he visits whores at night with his wife at home. How can he blame her for allowing her son to give Mungri a home with some respect? The Pandit says he will have them all thrown out of the village.

Later that night at home Sanichari argues with Badhua and Mungri for what they have brought on the family and insults Mungri. Mungri says that the child in her womb might not even be Badhua's anyway. They are stunned. Mungri storms out of the house. In the morning Sanichari searches for Badhua. She ends up at Mungri's brothel. Mungri is lying in a bed looking ill. When Sanichari asks what has happened a woman tells her that Mungri aborted her baby. Sanichari is stunned. She says she would have raised the child not matter whose it was. Mungri screams at her that it was her grandson. Sanichari walks home as if in a trance.

BACK IN CURRENT TIME: Sanichari tells Bhikni that Badhua left to join a touring company after that and she never saw him again, like her mother. Bhikni asks what her mother's name was and she says Peewli. Sanichari is sad that she will have no one to take care of her when she is old. Bhikni begins to cry and Sanichari asks why. Bhikni has grown too attached to Sanichari. Sanichari says she doesn't want to become attached to Bhikni because she will leave one day too. Sanichari asks Bhikni to stay with her after her job as a rudali is done.

Later that night another servant comes looking for Badhua but the Zamindar has not died – he has another job for her. There was another death that Bhikni can perform at. He says they will pay whatever she asks because they've to show the village how they used a Rudali to mourn for them. Next Scene: Bhikni screams out in sorrow at the death of this man. She is crouched on the floor in an elaborate courtyard in front of a body wrapped in a white cloth. She is in black and her hair is loose and wild. She is in tears. There is a commotion and Bhikni stops and pulls up her headscarf. It is a woman who they say was his whore/mistress. She is the only other person who cries over his body and grabs him up in her arms. Everyone else sits quietly. The woman speaks to Bhikni and says the reason they pay her to mourn for him is because she is "pure". They will not let her in because she is a whore, even though she mourns just as passionately as Bhikni. They call for people to drag her out and she calls them all hypocrites.

Later that night Sanichari and Bhikni have a feast to make for dinner. Sanichari asks how Bhikni can cry at funerals so readily after all these year. Bhikni shows her a secret – a cream which she puts around her eyes to make her cry. She applies some to Sanichari who complains of stinging and covers her face. But when she takes her hands away there are no tears. Bhikni tells Sanichari she cannot cry because sorrow has hardened in her heart like wax and it needs to be melted. Bhikni suggests that Sanichari become a rudali with her so that the practice of mourning others with soften her heart. Sanichari is reluctant but Bhikni says she will get money and respect from it – both things

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

which she needs. They will perform together and be each other's support. Musical interlude: Bhikni sings to Sanichari and she is convinced. The two women fall asleep together.

Later that night as they are both sleeping, Kalia comes to wake Bhikni. He tells her that someone named Bishamdata is very ill and is asking to see her. She only needs to be away for two days. She is visibly upset. She runs to grab her things and stops to tell Sanichari that she has to leave for two days. Sanichari is concerned. Bhikni tells her not to worry, and she leaves. In the meantime, cut to the Zamindar who is very ill and asks to send for the rudali. The servant arrives at Sanichari's house to find Bhikni gone. Sanichari tells the servant she went away and he tells Sanichari that the man she went to see owned a touring company. The servant tells Sanichari that Bhikni was his "kept woman". She became a rudali only after the touring company ended. He asks if Sanichari will come to the palace to perform a mourning for the Zamindar.

Sanichari arrives at the palace and Lakshman finds her. They have a sweet, sentimental chat. He tells her that everyone wanted him to throw Mungri out of the village but he didn't have the heart to do so. Moti comes and announces that Sanichari has a visitor. It's Kalia, he tells her that Bhikni died from the plague that was spreading around the village she went to. Before she died she asked for someone to tell Sanichari that her real name was not Bhikni but Peewli – Sanichari's mother.

Sanichari is in disbelief and looks as if she might go crazy. Instead she begins crying. At the same time it is announced that the Zamindar is dead. Sanichari wails and falls to the ground calling for Bhikni. Next scene: Sanichari is rolling around on the ground in front of the Zamindar's body. She is in black and her hair is loose. She beats her chest and spins in circles with her hands raised up in the air. Her eyes look harsh with kohl (black eye-liner substance) around them. She stands alone and wails and cries at the palace. The ending text says "Thus Sanichari became a famous Rudaali".

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Appendix H: *Umrao Jaan* (1981) Plot Summary and Key Points

Opening scene is a mother dressing her daughter for her wedding, the accompanying song is a girl asking her father why he is sending her away to be married. Date and location: Faizabad circa 1840. A man releasing pigeons curses an inspector. They are racing pigeons and the two men have an altercation over whose pigeon has won. Back at his home, one of the men – the inspector – discusses it with his wife who says that the man was being ungracious because he resents the inspector testifying against him and sending him to prison. The other man's name is Dilwar.

The inspector's daughter and her brother play under a tree. Dilwar comes upon them and convinces the daughter to come with him. He abducts her and ties her up in a cart. The two abductors think about killing the girl but then decide to go to Lucknow and sell her instead. Back at the house the father returns and the mother tells him what has happened and beseeches him to go find the daughter. The father races around on his horse in search of the man but cannot find them. The parents despair back at the house. The girl's name is Amiran.

The men arrive in Lucknow and the girl is thrown in a room that looks like a barn. She is comforted by another young girl, Ramdai, who has been there for a while. A woman comes to bring them food. Sometime soon the girls are brought out to be viewed by a potential buyer looking for a servant girl for her mistress. They haggle over the price of the girls. Only the other girl is taken, because Amiran's complexion is deemed too dark. The streets of Lucknow are bustling as they walk through. In a lavish courtyard musicians play and sing for a woman smoking a pipe. Amiran is brought to be shown to the smoking woman, she is purchased for 250 rupees. Husseini offers to raise the girl, the mistress changes her name to Umrao.

Umrao sleeps in the bed with Husseini. She dreams of Dilwar coming to kill her. She wakes up and runs away to escape but all the doors are locked. The whole household wakes up and Husseini finds her before she escapes. The mistress begins to beat and curse the girl for trying to escape. Ms. Husseini tells Umrao that the streets are too dangerous for her to try and leave.

Next morning Mistress introduces Umrao to the teacher and her training begins with Bismillah, another girl at the brothel. The girls sing and dance. They become older in this sequence and it is clear that their singing and dancing has greatly improved. Later after this sequence, the teacher explains poems to the girls. The conversation is quite deep and philosophical, and the topic is love. We are introduced to Gauhar when he tricks Umrao into leaving a bowl of sweets she is preparing so that he can eat them. She scolds him when she realizes he has tricked her and says she wishes he would die of the plague.

Umrao and Bismillah play dress up in the courtyard with other girls. They all fawn over all of the jewelry and silks. Umrao sits with Gauhar and the poetry teacher to discuss how to compose a poem properly. Umrao sits in a court and sings and dances for a patron who has come. Lots of direct eye contact is made and her smile is mischievous.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

A new man arrives to look upon the performance. Everyone is enthralled. A man who had pulled up his carriage outside during the performance to listen pulls away. That evening a man sneaks into Umrao's room to have his way with her but is kicked out. Another man comes to ask for Umrao's price and is told 5 "todas".

Men sit together reading poetry in a gathering spot other than the brothel. Gauhar recites Umrao's poem that he heard earlier when the girls were practicing with their teacher. He presents it as his own but is called out on it. Gauhar praises Umrao to a man who he then brings to the brothel. Gauhar points Umrao out to him. Umrao sings in a white sari with gold jewelry and heavily painted hands and feet. She makes eye contact with the man consistently. He gives her his necklace. The girls play a board game together and Gauhar walks in.

Nawab Sultan gets a meeting with Umrao. They sit together quietly at first and Nawab Sultan tells Umrao Jaan of his love for her and admiration of her art. He requests that she give a poem to him. He also recites a poem for her. He tells her that his family is from Faizabad and she becomes unsettled. A man comes upon them but they do not see him. He appears to be looking jealously at them. This man goes to Khanum Jaan to ask what Nawab Sultan is doing with Umrao Jaan. He confesses that he is Nawab Sultan's father, and tells Khanum to never let Nawab Sultan know that he visits the brothel also.

Nawab Sultan and Umrao Jaan lie together on her bed and recite poetry to one another. Umrao Jaan gets up to play a song on her instrument for Nawab Sultan. As she begins performing a man barges in and refuses to leave her room. Ms. Husseini is called but she cannot get the man to leave either. He grabs Umrao Jaan and Nawab Sultan speaks up to defend her. The man threatens violence and Nawab Sultan pulls out a gun and shoots him. Umrao Jaan tells Nawab Sultan to leave so he doesn't get arrested. They throw the man out into the street.

Umrao Jaan is "lamenting" because Nawab Sultan has left. Gauhar teases her for this. Umrao Jaan gives Gauhar a love note to pass on to Nawab Sultan for her. Nawab Sultan writes a love poem back to her and asks her to meet him. Umrao Jaan and Nawab Sultan meet secretly. She falls asleep on his chest and is happy to see him still there when she wakes.

Umrao Jaan gets a visit from the wife of a friend of Nawab Sultan who asks if Umrao Jaan knows where her husband is. An old maid comes in and begins insulting Umrao Jaan for being a tawa'if. The elderly mother of the household comes in and tells the woman she shouldn't scold the maid on the behalf of the likes of a courtesan. Umrao Jaan is ashamed and leaves. On her way out Umrao Jaan sees Nawab Sultan and tells him she can't come back there.

At Nawab Sultan's mother's house his father returns to discuss their son's engagement to the father's niece. The mother accuses the father of badly influencing the son since he has always visited Khanum Jaan at the brothel. The father responds that "visiting the brothel is the matter of prestige of the blue-blooded". Mother says, so it is okay for father to visit brothels but not the son? And father says he can't argue anymore

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

that he will go set a date for Nawab Sultan's marriage to Fatimah, Nawab Sultan's cousin. He leaves. Mother laments at not having found a suitable wife for her son sooner, but seems confident that Nawab Sultan will do nothing without her blessing.

Umrao Jaan and Nawab Sultan meet on a riverbank. Umrao Jaan tells him that Bismillah has been kidnapped so it is difficult for her to leave the brothel now. Nawab Sultan confesses that he overheard his parent's argument and Umrao Jaan tells him to go ahead and marry if he wants to. A man comes to meet Umrao Jaan and tells her he heard her singing when he was outside in his carriage once. They seem to have a pleasant time but Umrao Jaan is distracted. Another night Umrao Jaan is visited by this same man, whose name is Faiz Ali and he writes her to come stay with him at his country home. Nawab Sultan comes to tell Umrao Jaan that he gets married tomorrow. Umrao Jaan is distraught and tears Nawab Sultan's shirt. The other man comes back and tries to console Umrao Jaan.

Next day Ms. Hussein tries to convince Umrao Jaan not to go with the man. She has a schedule conflict of a dance already paid for. Umrao Jaan tells the man she will go in with him. They ride together on a horse. The man goes to fetch water by the river and sees a band of men chasing him. He rides back to get Umrao Jaan but is intercepted by the band of men who injure him, but he escapes. When he returns he keels over dead.

Umrao Jaan is taken to be interrogated by the military and they find out she is a courtesan. Umrao did not know that Faiz Ali was a bandit. Bismillah enters and Umrao Jaan is off the hook because Bismillah recognizes her. Bismillah has been living with the king, she was not abducted. Umrao Jaan asks Bismillah to help her reach Nawab Sultan. She agrees. Umrao Jaan now lives in her own brothel in this area. Her patrons praise her for her poetic/vocal compositions. Umrao Jaan is invited to perform at a wealthy woman's son's birthday. When she arrives the women recognize each other but don't know how. Then they realize they know each other from when they were first abducted and put in that room. Ramdai and Amiran. Ramdai is a wealthy woman now. They greet each other warmly and catch up. Umrao Jaan sings for her. A man comes upon them – it is Nawab Sultan. It appears that Ramdai and Nawab Sultan are married, so Ramdai must be the cousin that Nawab Sultan's father spoke of. Nawab Sultan asks Umrao Jaan to stay and perform a verse for them. She reminisces as she sings.

When Umrao Jaan returns to her home she is greeted by Ms. Hussein and Gauhar. They tell her Khanum Jaan is fallen ill and Umrao Jaan returns to Lucknow with them. When she arrives she finds that Khanum Jaan is fine and Ms. Hussein tricked her. Umrao Jaan says she will not stay. Gauhar arrives in Umrao Jaan's room to comfort her. He tells her the only way out is to marry someone and he proposes himself. She does not take him seriously and turns him down. Another day, a court messenger comes to Umrao Jaan to tell her that her legal husband, Gauhar has filed a petition for her to live with another man without divorce and she is given a court date. Umrao Jaan is stunned. Gauhar comes to show her the marriage certificate. She slaps him and tears up the paper and falls to her bed crying. "We are all governed by fate. Not by fate but by circumstances". She gives him a box full of gold to move away.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Next the British invade Lucknow. The brothel residents escape through the back. They take a caravan to another town. They arrive in Faizabad and Umrao Jaan escapes from the rest of the group at night. Maulvi sees her leaving but says nothing.

In Faizabad Umrao Jaan sings poetry and performs mujras. She recalls her childhood as she performs. An old woman in the home Umrao Jaan grew up in hears the singing and becomes curious. They look at each other from across the street. Umrao Jaan walks over to her and enters the house. They talk and recall who the other is. They cry in each other's arms. The brother enters and scolds Umrao Jaan for bringing shame on the family. Umrao Jaan leaves. Some time later, she enters a barren courtyard. It was Khanum Jaan's brothel. She wanders around reminiscing and the film ends with her staring into a mirror.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

Appendix I: *Umrao Jaan* (2006) Plot Summary and Key Points

An era is given: 19th Century Lucknow. We hear a solo instrument with a woman's voice singing. We close in on a room in a stately courtyard. A woman is sitting veiled on a bed behind a beaded curtain. She is singing. She has little jewelry and looks sad. The shot changes to a man standing in a doorway who appears to be listening to the singing. When he asks who it is a man in the room behind him tells him it is Umrao Jaan Ada, the famous courtesan. He says he wishes to meet her as he has heard of her.

A servant greets him at Umrao Jaan's door and he is permitted to enter. Umrao Jaan asks him to sit on a chair on the other side of the curtain. They discuss her singing and he praises her. He asks her to tell him of her "self experience". She tells him she was born in Faizabad as Ameeran and that is what she prefers to be called today.

FLASHBACK: The scene changes to a young girl sitting under a large tree playing in the dirt. Her brother comes over and she tells him she has lost her ring and mother will be very upset with her. He helps her search. Two men come up behind the two children and ask who they are. Their father comes up also and they run to him. We discover that one of the men – a tall darker man with a beard – hates the father because he testified against him in court. The bearded man watches the family menacingly as they walk away.

The father shares sweets with the kids as they walk back to the house. We see that their family must be relatively wealthy, or at least have a high social status (though perhaps not nobility) because their house is quite large and well kept. The mother fusses over them and gets them clean to go to a wedding. As she is doing so she notices that Ameeran does not have her ring on. Ameeran is forced to say it is lost. The mother slaps Ameeran across the face and scolds the child as she cries, but comforts her after.

The next scene is a young girl dressed in bridal red and gold. The song that plays is a plea to god by the female singer asking him to not send her back as a daughter in her next life. Ameeran asks her father why, if a wedding is supposed to be joyous, do the family members cry? Her father replies, because it is sad to bid your daughter farewell. Ameeran says she will never get married. At night Ameeran's parents think she is sleeping and discuss their plans to arrange her marriage. Ameeran is awake in the next room and overhears the conversation. We return to Umrao Jaan in her beaded bed. Her face is obscured by darkness as she describes how she was abducted by the bearded man and taken out of the town in a cart.

We return to the flashback and see that as the thugs wheel Ameeran out, tied and gagged they pass Ameeran's father on the road, but he does not know she is in there. The two men plot to sell Ameeran to a brothel to make money. Next we see a haughty looking woman in a grand room. Her name is Khanum Sahib. Her maid calls in the two men with Ameeran and she asks to see the girl. Ameeran tells Khanum Sahib that the men abducted her and Khanum Sahib seems sympathetic but does not attempt to return the girl to her home nor tell the men to take her back. She and the maid rationalize,

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

saying that she would be treated worse at another brothel so they must take her. They haggle over the price and Ameeran is bought for 120 rupees. The maid asks if she can raise Ameeran as her own. Khanum Sahib agrees, and changes Ameeran's name to Umrao.

At night Umrao calls for her father in her sleep. The next morning Umrao rises early and attempts to escape the bed she is sleeping in with the maid. However, when she tries to leave she finds that her arm is tied with a cloth to the maid. The maid wakes up and asks where she is going. Umrao says she is going home but the maid draws her back and to her chest saying that the world outside is bad and she cannot go. To comfort her they play dress up with jewelry and silk saris.

RETURN TO PRESENT DAY: Umrao Jaan Ada says she stayed at the brothel because she was seduced by the finery and the friends she had (Bismillah, Kursheed and Gauhar).

FLASHBACK: Back at the brothel, Umrao's training began at the hands Ms. Husseini (the maid) and Maulvi (an older man who lives with Ms. Husseini and teaches the girls at the brothel), who appear to have essentially adopted Umrao. Umrao is taught how to read and write, manners, how to speak properly, poetry, music and dance. Now we see Umrao as a young woman – perhaps in her late teens. She has a sibling – like relationship with Gauhar who teases her about being beautiful. Umrao claims she is not beautiful like Bismillah or Kursheed whose clients bring them many gifts. It appears that Umrao has not been allowed to have clients yet. Gauhar asks to brush Umrao's hair and is chastised by her and Ms. Husseini who walks in on them. It is obvious from their reactions that it was an inappropriate gesture.

Umrao feels dejected because no one pays attention to her, but Ms. Husseini tells her not to worry, that her time will come. Later Umrao is found crying because she remembered the song from the wedding she attended with her parents – don't make me a daughter in my next life. She practices poetry with Maulvi and he agrees to get her some sweets like her father used to. He then gives her a ring of his own to be kept for herself.

Next day the girls are brought in to perform for Khanum Sahib. She calls Bismillah and Kursheed to dance for her and calls them the brilliance of her brothel. Umrao is ignored. A messenger arrives with an invite to dance the mujra (an intimate song and dance performance for celebratory events) for Nawab Khan's family. They request the most excellent dancer. The arrangements are made and the messenger leaves. Khanum Sahib selects Umrao to dance at this event, unexpectedly. Umrao rushes to Khanum Sahib and gives her a warm hug. Bismillah looks jealous and Umrao looks victorious. Bismillah approaches Khanum Sahib after Umrao leaves the room. She says Khanum Sahib has made the wrong selection, that she should have chosen Bismillah as she is her own daughter. Khanum Sahib explains that while she cares for Bismillah as a daughter, business decisions are made without emotion, and that if Umrao does well it will be the best for all involved.

RETURN TO PRESENT DAY: still on her bed, Umrao Jaan says she met her true love that night at the mujra performance.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

FLASHBACK: Umrao arrives at the palace for her performance and is fully veiled – almost as if in a burqa – in black. As she comes out of her palanquin a man comes behind her and picks up a ring she has dropped and was looking for. She lifts the veil and looks at him to thank him. He is obviously taken by her beauty. Umrao's performance begins and she is excessively bejeweled. She dances on a large carpet with a room full of men surrounding her. There are periodic exclamations from the crowd proclaiming her brilliance. Her dance is warm and intimate. She looks the patrons in the eye and has slight mischief in her expressions. She teases the men at the edge of the carpet by extending her hands for them to touch but withdraws before they can do so. Khanum Sahib is pleased.

The man from outside enters the room and takes a place at the front of the audience circle. Umrao becomes distracted, Khanum Sahib looks flustered but is pleased. Umrao and the man flirt through eye contact. Umrao appears confident but demure. Umrao and Ms. Husseini return home and fill Maulvi in on how it went. Everyone is overjoyed. Khanum Sahib comes in to see Umrao and begins talking about who will spend a night with Umrao and Umrao's face drops. Khanum Sahib says she will allow the man who makes the maximum payment only. Khanum Sahib will move Umrao to her own quarters and again Umrao is devastated. Umrao says she doesn't want to leave Maulvi and Ms. Husseini's quarters. Ms. Husseini comforts her by saying childhood is left far behind.

Umrao lies on her new bed with Bismillah and Kursheed. They praise her performance. Khanum Sahib arrives and says the Nawab will arrive that evening to be entertained in her bedroom by her. The four "siblings" including Gauhar sit on Umrao's bed and discuss what the Nawab may look like. Umrao seems scared. Umrao sits in her sitting room and Gauhar arrives to announce the Nawab. When he comes in Umrao does not look at him but keeps her head turned and eyes averted. When she finally looks at him her mouth drops – it is the man who picked up her ring. He flatters her and she invites him to sit next to her. He continues to flatter her and they kiss but are interrupted by Bismillah who comes to tell them that "the court is ready". NOTE: we do not actually see them kiss because their faces are obscured, but it is implied by the positions of their heads.

They arrive in a nearby room which is set up for performance. The space is intimate. Umrao begins to dance. She is less bejeweled than the previous evening but still very elegant. The song she sings this time is about falling in love. Her eye contact is quite persistent, and she pulls the Nawab to the middle of the floor and dances around him. At this point there is obvious sexual tension and they are both ushered off to a candle-lit bedroom. They sit on a bed together and exchange rings. Umrao's veil is removed and her hair obscures kissing. There is a lot implied but not much shown. The scene ends with a close shot of their fingers woven together.

Ms. Husseini arrives in Khanum Sahib's chambers with congratulations saying Umrao has become Umrao Jaan (the subtitles indicate that 'jaan' means beloved). Ms. Husseini continues around to all other household members, but when she gets to Gauhar

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

we see he is subdued. It is implied he loved Umrao and wished to have her as his own. The two other sisters arrive at Umrao Jaan's room as she is trying on new outfits. They warn her to be careful to make sure that he falls for her and not the other way round.

Nawab Sultan arrives on horseback for Umrao Jaan and she watches him from the window. She quickly arranges herself carefully on a chaise lounge in her room so she seems as if she is sleeping when he comes in. They croon at each other and Umrao Jaan tells Nawab Sultan of the story of her true mother slapping her for losing the ring. Umrao Jaan asks Nawab Sultan to promise that he will come see her every day, but then Nawab Sultan reveals he is to be married to Saba, his cousin. Umrao Jaan is devastated and becomes petulant, but Nawab Sultan does not leave. He tells her he is not in fact engaged, but he wanted to test her to see how much she loves him. They promise each other that they will be faithful only to each other, despite Umrao Jaan's profession and Nawab Sultan's high status. We begin to see how their stars are crossed.

Scene change: Umrao Jaan is in a fuchsia lehenga/choli (long skirt and fitted blouse) and veil and performs in a court for Nawab Sultan. This footage is interspersed with scenes of Umrao Jaan and Nawab Sultan cuddling together in her room. The song talks of asking her lover not to hurt her. On another evening Umrao Jaan and Nawab Sultan are cuddling alone in her room and a man bursts in. Nawab Sultan accuses him of being indecent, and the man points out both of them are sitting in a courtesan's room. The man offers to pay double the amount that Nawab Sultan has paid for Umrao Jaan's company, which the other two see as an extreme insult. The man grabs Umrao Jaan's arm and Nawab Sultan gets up and stabs him with a knife. The man is taken off to the doctor by the rest of the household who has come in to see what the commotion is. Nawab Sultan seems impassive. It is suggested he leave but he says he will stay and face the consequences. However, Umrao Jaan asks him to leave for her sake.

She does not see him for a long time, we return to see her despondent. Gauhar brings news of Nawab Sultan, saying that he has invited Umrao Jaan to visit him at a friend's house. They devise a plan to distract Khanum Sahib so she can go. As she is leaving she runs into Maulvi and tells him where she is going. He wishes her well. She arrives via palanquin at a large estate. Nawab Sultan arrives to greet her on horseback, and they go together to be alone. There is a sense of restraint but also longing between them. A song begins about how much they love each other. This song is a montage of all the times she goes to visit him at this friend's house. Back at the brothel, Bismillah and Kursheed are practicing dance for Khanum Sahib. Khanum Sahib asks for Umrao Jaan, and Gauhar tells her freely that she has gone to meet Nawab Sultan. Khanum Sahib is very displeased.

Umrao Jaan is arriving back at the brothel from her palanquin and is nearly run over by a man all in black on a horse. They make eye contact briefly. The man asks his companion who she is and he tells him it is Umrao Jaan. Inside the brothel Khanum Sahib scolds Umrao Jaan for leaving without permission. There is tension but nothing more happens. Later that evening one of her sisters asks why Khanum Sahib is mad with her and Umrao Jaan discloses where she went that day. The sister tells her that she must

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

be truly in love. In Umrao Jaan's voiceover commentary, she admits she and Nawab Sultan could see nothing beyond each other. Another day Umrao Jaan is at a house with Nawab Sultan. A man comes in and asks Umrao Jaan to leave. It is Nawab Sultan's father. Umrao Jaan leaves. The two men argue about Umrao Jaan and Nawab Sultan's relationship. Father see it as pure lust, Nawab Sultan sees it as pure love. They agree to disagree and father disinherits Nawab Sultan.

Umrao Jaan runs into Gauhar at home and asks him to go find out what happened between the two men. When he returns he tells her what happened. Umrao Jaan is distraught and sobs alone in her room. That evening a new man arrives at the brothel – Faiz Ali. This is the man that was dressed in all black earlier. He asks for Umrao Jaan's company. She tries to decline saying that she belongs to Nawab Sultan. Faiz Ali does not push her but declares his love for her, pays Khanum Sahib and leaves.

Nawab Sultan is getting drunk with his friend. The friend's wife calls him and becomes angry about Nawab Sultan's presence in their home. Nawab Sultan overhears and asks the friend to take him to Umrao Jaan. When they arrive he is drunk. Umrao Jaan takes him to her room and they talk about Nawab Sultan's unfortunate situation, but Umrao Jaan says she will never be unfaithful. Nawab Sultan threatens her by saying that if she ever is he will disown her.

Next day, Khanum Sahib is buying saris and calls for Nawab Sultan and Umrao Jaan. She warns him that she will not tolerate his presence if he cannot pay. Shortly after, Faiz Ali arrives. Umrao Jaan leaves the room. Nawab Sultan admits he has no money with him and so cannot buy a shawl for Khanum Sahib which she has requested. Faiz Ali interjects and gives money to Khanum Sahib for the shawl and one for Umrao Jaan also. At this time Nawab Sultan says he will take his leave because Khanum Sahib has insulted him by weighing his love on the scales of wealth. Khanum Sahib accuses him of being out of touch with reality. He retorts by reminding her that she must have forgotten reality also, because he is the Nawab, and she is the brothel keeper. He leaves. Umrao Jaan follows him.

Umrao Jaan says she will come with him but he refuses. He asks her to wait for him and she agrees tearfully. She mopes in her room and Khanum Sahib comes to fetch her for Faiz Ali but she refuses. Khanum Sahib reminds her that the role of a courtesan is for showing dreams not watching dreams. Khanum Sahib leaves Umrao Jaan crying and Ms. Husseini comforts her. Eventually she arrives at court dressed to entertain Faiz Ali, stony-faced. She says she is there out of duty not desire. The song is one of sadness and loss of love. Her dance is direct but not seductive. She thinks of Nawab Sultan as she dances for Faiz Ali. Faiz Ali is drunk but requests to see Umrao Jaan in her room. He arrives there and returns Umrao Jaan her shawl which she left while she was dancing. He blows out the candle and begins to disrobe Umrao Jaan. She seems numb and non-reactive and does not resist but does not seem to really participate either. He shakes her by the shoulders as if to wake her and yells in frustration when she doesn't respond. He pledges to bring her to life again as he leaves.

New scene: Umrao Jaan sees Nawab Sultan's friend and she gets news from him

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

that Nawab Sultan has gone to live with his uncle, whose daughter is Saba (who he had said previously that he was betrothed to), and be in the army. New scene: Faiz Ali arrives in Umrao Jaan's room. He tells her he will no longer try to force her to love him, but invites her to come stay with him at his estate. She agrees only because she thinks she will have a chance to see Nawab Sultan who she knows will be staying nearby the estate. Umrao Jaan goes to Khanum Sahib for her blessing to go off with Faiz Ali. Khanum Sahib tells her she has no qualms because she has received the appropriate payment from Faiz Ali. She reminds her that the world outside can be ruthless, and that at least a brothel provides honesty. They part affectionately. She runs into Maulvi and he tells her to try not to return and bids her farewell as a father would.

She travels in a cart with Faiz Ali on horseback. Some men join the brigade and we find that they are Faiz Ali's "soldiers". He leaves Umrao Jaan alone with her maid at the estate saying that he will return soon. He returns some days later and tells Umrao Jaan that they have to leave. As they are about to go, a band of men arrives. Faiz Ali manages to kill one but the rest surround him. They are all arrested and are taken to where Nawab Sultan is living with his military uncle. The uncle tells Nawab Sultan what has happened and Nawab Sultan goes to talk to Faiz Ali. Nawab Sultan stops Faiz Ali from being whipped. Faiz Ali tells him that Umrao Jaan is with him now. Faiz Ali provokes him by saying that he has slept with Umrao Jaan, and Nawab Sultan is convinced by his lies. Nawab Sultan summons for Umrao Jaan. When she arrives he is getting drunk. She runs to him and throws her arms around him but notices something is wrong. He blames his drinking on her and tells her he is leaving her. At first she is unconvinced, she does not know what she has done wrong. She tries to explain that she did not sleep with Faiz Ali and used him only to get to Nawab Sultan. He is unconvinced. She cries at his feet. He orders his servants to take her back to Lucknow.

A cart takes the two women back to Lucknow. The maid asks why the fields that they pass by are being burned. The cart driver tells them that the old must be burned down so that the new can grow. The song "don't bring me back as a daughter in my next birth" plays. Umrao Jaan arrives back at the brothel and greets all. They all already know the story, and tell her how much they missed her. She discovered Khanum Sahib is ill and rushes to see her. Khanum Sahib welcomes her back warmly. She goes to see Maulvi and Ms. Husseini and finds that Maulvi has passed away. She cries with Ms. Husseini. Later she sits with Gauhar in her room and he is getting drunk. He forces himself on her and they struggle on the floor. He leaves her lying on the floor of her room after apparently raping her.

Next Umrao Jaan begins the storyline of the British invading Lucknow and massacring the men of the town. The women of the brothel meet with the rest of the household surrounding them to try to devise a plan. Gauhar stumbles in with blood all over him. He fills them in on what is happening and tells them to escape through the back. Before he dies Umrao tells him that she forgives him. Outside, Khanum Sahib tells them she is staying while they leave. There is a tearful and rushed goodbye, everyone except Khanum Sahib leaves via horse and cart.

PERFORMING MARGINAL IDENTITIES

By chance the convoy passed through Faizabad and they end up staying there and renting a house as their court. A man comes in to ask Umrao Jaan to perform a mujra. She questions him about the place where her family lived and finds that her father is dead but her brother has taken his post. She walks over to her old house and has memories of when she was young. Her mother comes upon her and does not recognize

her at first. She tells her who she is and they cry in each other's arms. Her mother knows that she is a courtesan and tells her that she is no longer her daughter. The brother comes upon them and scolds Umrao Jaan for bringing shame on the family. They tell her to leave. She scolds them back for being heartless, but asks them to forgive her anyway. She leaves them with her head held high.

Next scene: Umrao Jaan is at the mujra and the townspeople jeer her. She performs anyway. Her dance again is intimate and direct but sad. She cries and the dance seems to symbolize her separation from her past life. Umrao Jaan leaves Faizabad and they stop for a man lying on the road. Umrao Jaan sees that it is her abductor from years previous, Dilwar. He has become a leper. She takes pity on him and gives him one of her bangles.

RETURN TO PRESENT DAY: Umrao Jaan Ada is finishing her story. She summarizes it by saying it is one of ill fate. Her face is full of sorrow.