

**SEEMING, BEING AND BECOMING: AN INTIMATE,
AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC RASA-LED
PERFORMANCE ART EXPLORATION**



Reshma Maharajh

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Supervisors: Professor Sharlene Khan, Professor Allan Munro and Professor David Andrew

*For the Oneness as we meander and dance through all its spaces,
we call life...*

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the interplay of "*Seeming*," "*Being*," and "*Becoming*" as it relates to past experiences, present moments and future potentialities. In this project, I delve into the concept of my South African 'Indianness' from a personal perspective. As a researcher, I engaged performance art and the aesthetic theory of *rasa* from the *Nāṭyashāstra* a treatise on dramatic theory or the science of drama in Sanskrit (a language of scholarship and philosophy across ancient 'India') to explore this concept further. The research encompasses three interconnected practices: *rasa*, autoethnography, and practice-led research and how central living strategies and concepts are used to define body-mindedness as a life force as emergence in performance strategy. *Rasa* serves as a guiding metaphor, representing the emotional essence of the artmaking strategies and creative process. These pursuits were not merely cathartic but were about reaching a Transcendental Emotional Moment (TEM) in which "being" and "becoming" converged. *Rasa* has been proven to be an effective tool in exploring my own identity, subject formation and artmaking, with therapeutic benefits. The second line of inquiry delves into my lived experiences as a widow, mother and practising Hindu, highlighting the complexity of South African Indianness and seeks to bridge the gap between "*seeming*" and "*being*" while anticipating what might "*become*" through the lens of *rasa*. The third line of inquiry revolves around the practice of performance art (combined with autoethnographic reflection), exploring the tensions between two philosophic models of Integrity and Intimacy as proposed by Kasulis (2002). As the artist (both creator and subject), my life and body became the canvas upon which the artwork unfolded. Performance art allowed for a moment of being when the artwork and I came into existence for each other. This process required cognitive and creative engagement with the project's content, drawing on past experiences, culture, relationships, politics and religion, guided by *rasa*. The goal created an environment in which the 'Oneness of *Being*' emerged, leading to a TEM in performance. This moment invited the potential for refreshed, emergent insights and meaning through autoethnography and practice-led research. The "*Seeming, Being and Becoming*" trajectory and the efficacy of the *rasa* roadmap is proposed as a cultural philosophy that promotes human flourishing, culminating in the moment of TEM.

Keywords: autoethnography, body-mindedness, practice-led research, performance art, *rasa*.

DECLARATION

I, Reshma Maharajh, declare that:

(i) The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.

(ii) This thesis has not been submitted for examination for any other degree at any other university.

(iii) This thesis does not contain other person's data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons as a complete reference.



Reshma Maharajh

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INTRODUCTION

I close my eyes and, using my finger, I draw an image in the space in front of me. It may be there or not, but it creates a vivid impression in my mind's eye. I open my eyes to find my hand in mid-air, poised, where I think I imagined it to be. My gaze falls on the tip of my finger – my instrument, connected in body, but seemingly distracted, in mind. The disembodied moment of the hand 'out there, drawing' is reconnected with the mind – a body-mindedness of the moment¹.

Believing through the body is also believing with the mind. Body-mindedness² as a *Kathak*³ dancer and artist requires one's skills and capabilities to be perfectly attuned to be in the

¹ Note to reader, the text in grey is the author's voice relating the narrative experience.

² Body-mindedness throughout the thesis is to bring in an awareness that the mind is not separate but resides in the body (as the integrity model identifies) but rather the body and mind are integral and indistinguishable parts of each other, thus embracing the Intimacy model as we embrace the lived experience in the world (Haarhoff, Munro and Coetzee, 2022). The mind/matter debate, a Western cultural Cartesian dualism approach, is what we are, often, conditioned to believe in. However, in Eastern religious and cultural beliefs there is an inter-connectedness between the body, mind and soul. This is intrinsically linked to our being in the world through the continuous process of becoming. These connections are culturally elaborated as all experiences take place within a vast background of cultural presuppositions (Piran, 2017). These shape our selfhood and identity as we participate in multi-modal connections between the body-mindedness and the world (Reeve, 2011). Socio-cultural paradigms play a significant role in determining how we engage and make meaning as the body-mind is the fundamental link between the world as it serves as both a conduit and agent in the continuous process of becoming through embodiment. In the process when artist/dancers are immersed in a profound bodily presence, they may feel joy, a sense of elation and euphoria in this embodied reflective process as (Buttingsrud, 2021), even if that remembering or even verbalising the experience later would be challenging. At times these are experiences beyond what the mind can perceive. Shusterman (2008) believed that introspection and body awareness have beneficial positive potential in terms of "knowledge, performance and creative self – fashioning". In this research I have engaged the body-mind through spiritual practice as a method of healing as I became more understanding of self-expression to become more of who I am and no less thereby understanding the oneness and my actual relationship with the world and experience *Ananda* (bliss, peace) as an aspect of my being.

³ *Kathak* is a North Indian classical dance form. It is a storytelling tradition that is bifurcated into technical and story-telling emotional components. The dance form is a composition of music, drama, recitation, spiralling pirouettes, rhythmic footwork and intricate gestural movements (Maharajh, 2022). There are three styles: the Jaipur Gharana (school) which concentrates on the *nrita* or pure dance syllables; the Lucknow Gharana, that focuses on the depiction of emotions or *bhavas*; and Raigarh Gharana that is a mixture of the Lucknow and Jaipur Gharana with a unique twist in the music and dance style (Walker, 2004). Kathak in its present form today had a strong influence from the Persian, courtly Mughal period as well as from Rajasthan courts. As Kathak draws from Hindu mythology and scripture it seemingly explores the philosophy, ideology and spirituality of *advaita* which means 'Oneness' (Gupta, 2015). I have interacted mostly with this concept of Oneness in this thesis. According to Walker (2009) there is no single and objective position to document scholarly processes especially when dealing with the complexities of Kathak in the post-colonial and post-modernist thinking and, more especially, in the cultural re-construction in India. Kathak in its current form known today bears the legacies of

moment. This practice results in body-mindedness, a concept central to this thesis. Myself, my mind, my finger as an instrument, and the act of drawing in the air/my space are one.

Can I do it again, having realised what has happened? I now imagine what will happen, what will become of the experiment, as I have moved into the present space and think of the future. Hesitantly, I close my eyes and repeat the process – is my planning mind getting in the way of my future experience? I open my eyes and watch my finger trace the figure I had visualised in my mind (was I visualising in my mind and then tracing, or was I tracing and then visualising? Did it matter? I was/am making, acting, doing, then making).

Making, in dance, requires intense concentration and is controlled and directed towards everything, from the subtle eye and eyebrow movements to finger and hand gestures. This practice is connected to what the *Vedic* scriptures, the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Puranas*⁴, and *Vedas*⁵ call the cosmic or third eye, that is not just looking but seeing something beyond the time, space and body continuum. It is about becoming *Oneness*. *Oneness*, according to *Vedic*⁶ scripture, is *Om* (*Yajur Veda*: 40.17), *Eka*, *Ekam* (*Rg Veda*: 10.121.3), and is the recognition of the presence of the supreme consciousness present in all, equally. The *Rg Veda* (10.90.3) further elaborates this: “*Ekoham Bahushyaam* – I was One and willed to become the Many, I separated Myself from Myself to experience Myself.” The use of *Oneness* will be used in two ways: *Oneness*⁷ as merging with God/Godliness and *Oneness* in the *One/Other* relationship.

an intermingling of diverse cultures across centuries and bears witness to a cosmopolitan egalitarianism of medieval societies on the Indian sub-continent.

⁴ *Puranas* are extensive works of Hindu literature delineating the construction and rules of the universe, written and narrated by multiple authors through time through meditative practices and is a formative portion of Hindu philosophy.

⁵ The *Vedas* are the foundation of Hindu theology and are a composition of Sanskrit texts – primarily comprising of four books of the *Rg Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, *Sama Veda* and *Atharva Veda*. The *Vedas* are texts comprised of sacred verses, hymns and rituals initially narrated by Lord Brahma, the Creator of the universe.

⁶ *Vedic* scriptures relate to the sacred *Vedas* (as explained in footnote 5) and an early period of Indian history and records of Indo-Europeans dating from c.1500-c.600 B.C.E.

⁷ The interpretation of ‘Oneness’ by Lazlo and Lazlo (2021) resonates with the enquiry that this thesis also engages with - that is, the deep-seated celebration of source or the wondrous working of the universe that

My understanding and conception of God/Godliness and One/Oneness is detailed around the concepts that represent different theological frameworks (Christian, Islamic, Hindu, Jain, Buddhist amongst others) they emphasize the distinct aspects of the Divine and for me particularly the relationship with the Divine. God, in my understanding, transcends all forms and manifestations and is an unchanging reality whilst, godliness refers to the attributes that reflect divine nature. Similarly, the concept of Oneness reflects different manifestations of the same God rather than separate persons within Godhead and the different modes of God's self-revelation (Mishra and Tripathi, 2020). The idea of God/ Godliness for me is the focus on the nature and attributes of the Divine, while One/Oneness allows me to explore the relational and experiential dimensions of faith, and the unity and attempt to understand the nature of and with God. God in Hinduism is called **Brahman** (source of all existence) (Mishra and Tripathi, 2020), and the concept of Oneness is articulated through the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta which teaches non-dualism, the idea that the **Atman** (individual soul) (Timane and Wandhe, 2024) and **Brahman** are ultimately the same. The perception of separateness is **Maya** (an illusion) (Srinivasan and Aithal, 2023) and the ultimate goal is for the individual soul to merge with the universal consciousness. As I theorise and write about this experience, I undermine the very intimate act by dissecting it, thus, seemingly undermining what Dilip Loundo (2021) calls the subjective dimension of emotionality and the uniting or re-uniting things ontologically in the Oneness of God.

communicates with us. We know how to engage with it with our heart and gut through experiential knowing and come to understand it as infinite consciousness. This is no different from the holotropic insights that emerge in contemporary scientific inquiry.

As I⁸ mentally follow the hand-eye coordination, I sense an awakening of my *kundalini*. *Kundalini* is a Sanskrit word for *kundu* (to coil or spiral) (Kourie and Pretorius, 2004; Mann and Singh, 2018; Lockley, 2019) and is the latent divine feminine energy located at the base of the spine and, when awakened, causes the practitioner to reach the potential of full awareness. According to psychologist (Taylor, 2015, p.219), the *kundalini* rises from the base of the spine towards the crown centre of the head, where all the energy discs are pierced and raised through body postures, hand gestures and breath.

A sense of potential and trust well up in me . . .

a sense of knowing, and a sense of the promise of becoming, of emerging.

The body-mind connection was the epistemological moment in the realisation that a greater exploration of myself is required to decode/understand how my mind is affecting my body and life path, and how dialectically my body, as a harbinger of unconscious, subconscious, and conscious memories, affects my decision-making process. Ruminations upon this thought stream led me to the point of questioning the relationship between the body and mind, and how, as a mature, cognisant adult, I have the potential and capacity to not only explore why I am the way I am, but also postulate who I want to be based on the findings of the ‘whys?’. The natural evolution of the questioning resultantly formed the nodal points of this thesis. Asking questions throughout the thesis is part of the autoethnographic reflexivity – a method I choose to apply. Adopting this autoethnographic approach is an acknowledged bias but necessary even as I have tried to step back at times from myself to analyse self and actions, but that stepping back is never away from myself. Thus, I am not aiming at any generalisability

⁸ Note to the reader: There is an intentional shift between the first and third person writing throughout this thesis based on autoethnography as a methodology that informs this study.

of what I am engaging with but rather explicating constantly how aesthetic practice has served me.

I title my thesis **Seeming, Being and Becoming: An Intimate, Autoethnographic *Rasa*-Led Performance Art Exploration** and the structure of my thesis is trifurcated as a South African Indian⁹ woman's identity. *Rasa* is translated in English as a sentiment¹⁰ or art-emotion¹¹ as provided by V.B. Apte (in Prasad, 1994, p.2), who lists several meanings of *rasa* such as: "to flow", to make wet all over, to soak or saturate in liquid, since etymologically 'ra' means to give and 'sa' means motion¹². Artist (Wilke, 2018) calls *rasa* a theory that captures a lived practice generally identified as a sap, juice or nectar¹³ to further, activate, dynamise or bring about aesthetically refined and cultured connotations of desire, love and beauty. These inferences evolve into a rational intricacy that reflects the very spirit of everything, including the essence of the divine cosmic energy¹⁴. Indian aesthetician (Surendra S. Barlingay 1981, p. 433) explains:

Rasa is not a thing in itself, formed previous to the act of consciousness by which it is perceived, but the consciousness itself and, therefore, the perception, which is freed

⁹ In this context Indian is a race group defined under apartheid. Indians migrating to South Africa were chronologically classified as indentured labourers, skilled-working class, businessmen, teachers, lawyers and doctors operating within the gig economy. I 'migrate' between these two cultures constantly so as not to forget one's Indian roots and a South African from a colonial, apartheid past, but rather look at my life's journey as an identity exploration through performance art practice.

¹⁰ 'Sentiment' is the translation chosen by Ghosh (1951): tr. Bharata's *Nāṭyashāstra*, Vol. 1, Chapter 1 to XXVII p. 102. The internal and external processing of a *rasa* and *bhavas* also gives rise to the 'sentiment'. As with all translations, current English usage is problematic in presenting the complexities.

¹¹ Art-emotion suggests a potentially expressive moment that arises from emotion, but also suggests an emotion that arises from the making of that expressive moment – the two processes are, in fact, inseparable, or, to use the terms of the intimate, and the aesthetic (Kasulis, 2002).

¹² In this sense, 'motion' leads to, or arises from, 'e'-motion.

¹³ Nectar (*ras*) according to (Annette Wilke, 2018, p.50) is considered to be the essence or taste of an emotional experience.

¹⁴ Cosmic energy is generally associated with the universe, and energy considered to create balance is a life force that flows through our bodies creating an interconnectedness amongst all living beings. Cosmic energy is also called the super consciousness, higher consciousness, or chi in Buddhism (Chatterjee and Datta, 2011; Junghare, 2018; Kudelska, 2000).

from external interference and all practical desire, becomes *rasa* or aesthetic consciousness.

The *rasa* experience, thus, is described metaphorically as an elixir, the highest taste or divine experience or a juice that flows into a metaphysical experience and can be interpreted as an elevated state of consciousness (Maharajh, 2015). The first aim is to analyse and understand the dynamic flow that arises from interrogating the '*Seeming*' (the apparentness, face-value) of my identity. '*Being*' refers to my lived experience – I am because of what I was, as well as the environmental stimuli that affected and shaped me. This background, in turn, defines and informs several of my actions and interpretations of my experiences. Part of my beingness in the dialectic is the desire to come to grips with the moment of being itself and the associated action and interpretation of it/myself. Finally, '*Becoming*' refers to my subject formation trajectory inspired by the writings of (Annika Thiem, 2004) and (Susan Kaiser, 2012) on subject formation that is an analysis of who I want to be based on a critical interrogation of the social constructs and their concomitant binaries that constitute my subject formation. This understanding is used to guide the exploratory creative process and to trace, document, interrogate and share the findings from the creative process. In doing so, this thesis contributes to new knowledge that surfaces through pursuing these lines of inquiry: namely identity and subject formation that have not been explored through the lens and experience of *rasa*, especially in the context of an Indian, Hindu South African woman, mother and citizen who has lived through apartheid into the post-apartheid experience.

The research engages with the social constructedness of my identity as a South African, Indian (I am classified as an Indian by the South African Law of Classification by the Population Registration Act of 1950), Hindu in terms of the religious practices I follow, and Gujarati-

speaking¹⁵, female, mother of two daughters, widow, academic, visual artist and classically trained *Kathak* dancer. My identity is steeped within my South African Indian culture and is impacted by the socio-economic and psychological imprints of colonialism, and I seek to understand my identity and its evolution through *rasa*. Apartheid was a system of racial classification and Indians in South Africa are considered a racial and ethnic group with a distinct culture (Vahed and Desai, 2010; Jaga, 2014). Indian people are the smallest population group in South Africa and Indian women, specifically, had to face triple discrimination, namely gender, class and race, and this prejudice was compounded because Indians were considered an inferior race (Andrews, 2001; Baden, Hassim and Meintjies, 1998). This marginalisation is also due to the particular histories of this country. This exploration and rationalisation of self via *rasa* is critical as an artist because as an artist/dancer, I am required to internalise the entire process of a narrative, become the narrative, and finally express the narrative in a way that connects to the audience and outside world. Hence, as mentioned, the notion of exploration and rationalisation of *Seeming, Being* and *Becoming* is imperative in allowing for this type of transferability. The documentation of the processes accesses the potential transferability of the research process outcomes. In the application of *rasa* to my *Seeming, Being* and *Becoming*, I utilise the framework of autoethnography¹⁶. My artist-audience relationship is a moment that's internal then externalised as well, like the internal transcendental moment in performance that then also meets the audience viewing the performance and this moment that is shared. This work is not about the external audience

¹⁵'Gujarati' according to *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2023) refers to a language spoken by the Gujarati community who come from the state of Gujarat, which is on the west side of India and is an Indo-Aryan member and a branch of Indo-European languages. I am a South African Indian woman who is part of the Gujarati speaking community.

¹⁶ Due to the issues related to autoethnography, a researcher has to obtain ethics clearance from the university for such, and my ethics clearance number is H22/09/09.

but rather the focus is on myself as both performer in the performance and audience. This kind of dialectic should not be viewed as merely an external audience that one performs for but rather as an internal one where I am already the audience in thinking, in being, in rehearsing, in performing, in talking, in writing. Even though I am no longer a stage performance artist I still, sometimes, think in terms of gestures and performativity. I am performing self for self. The focus is on the autoethnographic methodological approach to being both performer and audience in an intimacy relationship as I am my own audience 'trying' to view myself. The difficulty arises in that there might not always be the graphic/written reflexivity but, it is an important creative strategy when I am performing self for self and I internalise the moment, which is something that we all do because we are in the moment of performing self. I am aware of the *rasa* notion of the external audience-artist relationship but this is not my preoccupation here. This thesis is primarily engaging the *rasa* strategy to perform self for self as an internal intimate process to self-healing and self-discovery.

Thus, the second aim of this study is to use the *rasa* strategies and concepts in a performance art-making flow process to explore my *Seeming, Being and Becoming*. In addition to this definition of *rasa*, I describe it as something that is *alaukika* (beyond this worldly domain), a sentiment or a conceptualisation that I share with authors (Cassaniti and Menon, 2017). I refer to it as cosmic flow.

These terms are metaphorical, yet, as will become clear, the very Western binary nature of what a metaphor is, becomes problematic in explaining the experience of transcendental subject matters. It involves using *rasa* as a flow to life's currents, that are constantly moving

and building on the body-mind-soul integration, to flowing fearlessly and growing with every twist and turn. The *Atman* or soul according to Hinduism is explained as the self that is identical to *Brahman* the super soul or pure consciousness in *Bhagavad Gita* translated by (Prabhupāda, 1983). The soul is the true self distinct from the physical body, it is believed to be immortal and indestructible. The soul is also said to go through the process of reincarnation, until it attains *moksha* or spiritual liberation by overcoming the cycle of death and rebirth *Bhagavad Gita* translated by (Eknath Easwaran, 2007). This process is undertaken via a succinct autoethnographic understanding of myself as a contextualised human being and as an artist with the goal of externally experiencing myself and, thereafter, analysing what I can become based on my self-exploratory narrative.

The third objective of this study is to interweave the conceptuality of *Seeming, Being and Becoming*, understood through *rasa*, by engaging in the efficacies of creative processes that are life-specific and chronological, to synthesise emotional and mental nodal points in the tapestry of my entity. Through this interweaving, the thick descriptions and artefacts that arise from the process not only facilitate artwork to materialise, but also foster the notion of *Subject* reconstruction and transferability.

It should be noted that throughout the literature on the relationship between arts practice and 'formal' research, there are shifting positions as to whether the work is Practice-based Research (PAR) or Practice-led Research (PLR) (Linda Candy, 2006). In PLR, the research is about practice and the results will enhance either the practise of practice or the theory of practice, or the practitioner's position in the world (Barbara Bolt, 2006). In the latter case, it is assumed that doing the practice will enhance an understanding of the world (and not

necessarily the practice itself). My thesis attempts to do both, in the sense that I interrogate how *rasa* enhances practice, but, at the same time, I make art to better understand myself as a person in the world. With practice-led research one does not have to completely depend on the Integrity Model and separating your head from your heart in an experiential model. PLR is a step forward because I am already a *kathak* dancer and a visual artist and I am taking the insights from my experiences to analyse my subject formation for deconstruction and reconstruction. So, Practice-based Research (PBR) would have been more relevant if I was not already a dancer, and it would become the avenue for me to experience *rasa*. Many theoretical texts actually come out of practice, and thus PLR and PBR are not new but emerge from a heightened and specific research awareness by people as they practise artmaking or dance performance. Thus, this centrality of creative forms within societies through history, and my reading of these spiritual text, are not new but are fundamentally attached to creative forms and understanding about creativity that will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 1, entitled *Seeming*, I interrogate the etymology and description of *rasa* itself. I adopt the approach of the dancer performing on stage. The concept of *Seeming* is applied to my role as the dancer and is based on what is visible in comparison to who I am and the junctures in my journey that have led to this point. This practice leads into a chronological flow of the key junctures in my life from childhood to adulthood with myself as internally recounted but externally engaged: I am my own audience who I 'Seem to be' based on familial, societal, political, and self-analytical views. This chapter concludes with the body-mind connection. Chapter 1 is a rationalisation and experience of myself through the rich body of *rasa*. It is, thus, a literary view of self seemingly defined by others, but experienced through self, and made sense of via *rasa*. Chapter 1 dives deeply into the intricacies of *rasa*

as a body of work and how, through experiencing *rasa*, I was able to experience, process and overcome nodal points in my life's sojourn thus far.

Chapter 2 is a visual artistic manifestation of the contextual explorations of self through *rasa* as detailed in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, these nodal points are given a graphical representation through a presentation of images and videos that interweave the highlighted portions of my life. Chapter 2, thus, represents my *Being* – an interpretation of myself via performance art. In this chapter, I use personally curated visual art pieces which are presented chronologically to map the evolution of my life through myself. Each image is accompanied by descriptive anecdotes of key life-changing points. Both the artwork and anecdotes are analysed through *rasa* and the associated frameworks will be discussed.

Chapter 3, entitled *Becoming*, uses a scaling framework of my *Subject* formation and analyses it through the *Subject-Object* dichotomy, as well as *rasa* itself. Whilst the intention of Chapter 2 is a de-construction of self, Chapter 3 becomes a re-construction of self with the aim of creating transferability, that is, a framework and knowledge-based pathway or journey based on personal experiences that individuals can use to dissect, interrogate, and map a new life-based trajectory for themselves. Chapter 3 amalgamates and expounds my central living strategies and how, through identities, one becomes tenacious and resilient in light of personal and historical disjuncture, and how I can position myself to experience Oneness. This thesis, as a process in and of itself, therefore, has become a personal roadmap towards what I have called **Transcendental Emotional Moments (TEM)**.

The gap in research that I engage with is how to intertwine *rasa*, as a strategy of investigation and my method of enquiry, with the modern-day Practice-Led Research (PLR) method in the creative visual arts performance process. This thesis is novel in that no discourse has overlaid the concept and practice of *rasa* over a socially constructed South African Indian identity. In navigating my identity and journey, I have employed the use of autoethnography as argued by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (2003), Heewon Chang (2007, 2016), Peter McIlveen (2008), Steven Pace (2012), Sally Denshire (2014), and Julie Choi (2017). This thesis is an interdisciplinary study, and I draw on authors from various fields, ranging from dance, social sciences, performance art as well as art history. As a style of writing, with self-analysis, I draw on the works of bell hooks (1999), Kwame Appiah (2019), and for PLR, the works of Maarit Mäkelä (2007), Hazel Smith and Roger Dean (2009) and Josie Arnold (2012). I also draw on performance art frameworks as acknowledged by Richard Schechner (2001), Bradley Haseman (2006), Thomas Fuchs (2009), Edvin Sandström (2010), David Davies (2011), Shivani Gupta (2015) and for *rasa* and emotions on Sreenath Nair (2007, 2013, 2015), and Eleanor Chadwick (2016) and on *rasa* the work of Manmohan Ghosh (1951), Kapila Vatsyayan (1997, 2016), Saswati Chakraborty (2014). For my notions on the Intimacy and Integrity Model (IIM), I refer to the work and book of Thomas Kasulis (2002) *Intimacy or Integrity: Philosophy and Cultural Difference*. I am aware of the binary positionalities they open up, but also of the potential of a bifocal lensing: the one lens is used to connect with ‘traditional research and writing’ and the other opens up to the possibilities of immersion and emergence in artmaking. These two positionalities are in conversation in throughout this thesis. The thesis and artwork presented will simultaneously exist and enter the public domain through a digital platform in the form of a website for researchers (that can be accessed in different geographical settings), and this practice adds to the dimension of continuous learning accessed via the university

library website. This site is intended to have several functions, including a space to experience creative research related to my autoethnographic journey; creating an archive to document the *Seeming, Being, and Becoming* interweave; and an opportunity to explore creative practices through the *rasa* lens. The embodied experience at times is difficult to process, however, it is necessary for this creative research to understand the complexities that engage our human experience.

(Denzin and Lincoln, 2003) define autoethnography as writing that draws on both ethnography and autobiography concurrently. Autobiography, according to Juliet Smith (2020), sets out to provide a comprehensive account by the author of her life, focusing on storytelling and personal reflection concerning the individual's narrative and history. Autobiography as a methodology relies on the author's memory and perspective, often without a systematic research framework (Chang, 2008). Placed within literary and historical context, autobiography is often published for general readers, in which a personal life story is shared with a broader audience (Habermas, 2018). Feminist scholar (bell hooks, 1999, p.32) account of writing an autobiography questions the extent of writing the personal story and the unique account of events not so much as what happened but as we remember and invent or imaginatively (re)construct them. An autobiography is also what I call a form of self-preservation, a reflection that may not be part of one's life anymore but unquestionably informs and helps change some aspects of it. This autobiographical plotting is about a critical distancing that allows one to reflect on one's experience as a scholar and how autobiography can be used as scholarly material. Auto-ethnography refers to both the culture of artmaking and the embeddedness of the cultural self, and autobiography refers to my cultural journey – an interwoven journey of 'living and arting'.

Ethnography involves the study of culture, and this practice is especially important because the idea of artmaking as a culture is, in itself, unusual (Rutten, 2016). Artmaking *in* a culture and *for* a culture is one aspect seen, perhaps, also as the culture of artmaking. My research endeavours to draw on what I call the **process-to-artefact idea**, performing – as an emerging process – becomes crystallised in, and into, the performance, that then becomes an artefact etched into the ether of time and captured by the mind of the audience. Dancing becomes the dance, designing becomes the design, arting becomes the artwork, and so forth. The methods to be used in capturing the emergent or emerging data parallel the autoethnographic strategies (outlined below). Therefore, this research rests on the very idea of creative practice as the emergent dynamic with multiple interactions, and that process is continuously developing, reinventing and reproducing with the practice through performance that is action orientated. Understanding process-to-artefact, as an iterative process, is conceptually novel and can be applied across multiple fields of thought.

The summative essence and *Objective* of this self-explorative study is to self-rationalise via a concatenation of *Seeming, Being* and *Becoming* via *rasa* and autoethnography. As mentioned, the larger schematic of this thesis is broken into four key sections, including the Introduction. In what follows in the introduction are three key research questions followed by four methodologies and frameworks that significantly assist in framing the rationalisation of *Seeming, Being* and *Becoming* via *rasa*. In the following sections the key research questions and frameworks used to guide the analysis are presented.

A. Research Questions

The three principal research questions are presented sequentially. The first and main research question posed in this study is:

How are the central living strategies and concepts articulated to determine and describe *rasa* so that these can be used to guide and potentially explain the artmaking strategies and processes to be undertaken, and the discoveries that may arise from such strategies and processes?

The above question has been posed to guide and explain the artmaking strategies, the processes to be undertaken to reach the objective of the study, and to enunciate and rationalise the discoveries of *Seeming*, *Being* and *Becoming* that emanate from such strategies and processes.

The second research question is:

How can *rasa* strategies and concepts, in the making of a performance-led research body of artwork, guide me to discover myself, in terms of where I come from, how I experience myself to be, and what I might aspire to become?

The third question explores the links between *rasa* and emergence, where *rasa* can be used as an 'emergent tool for new subjective formations and naming of evolving subjectivities and positionalities.

How can the interwoven and intimate dynamics between *rasa* and *Becoming* propel inner resilience and healing for someone embedded in a socio-cultural environment, while navigating with decolonial thought and practice?

B. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The first framework is derived from the book *Integrity and Intimacy: Philosophy and Cultural Difference* by cultural theorist Thomas Kasulis (2002), wherein he allocates emerging knowledge into either an Intimacy or Integrity Model. Each model possesses a specificity-based application and is presented with my website and will simultaneously exist and enter the public domain through a digital platform in the form for researchers in different geographical settings. Thus, the Intimacy and Integrity Models (IIM) (Kasulis, 2002) were chosen because this thesis is divided into a written autoethnographical section that draws on the importance of the Integrity Model, while the performance and visual arts perspective employs the value of the Intimacy Model.

The second framework is A/r/tography. Due to the life of the author being the topic of study and investigation through a performance art medium, this framework allows for a structured and accepted modality of analysis. This outline feeds directly into framework three, which is autoethnography – a concept that has been described earlier. The last framework underscored and described is PLR. PLR will be discussed in greater detail below as a methodology, that includes a categorical understanding of how practice – dance, drama and living as a socially constructed entity which is fluid in nature but still defined by societal

conditioning – contributes to inquiry and how research is distinguished from practice, based on how knowledge is grounded in the emergent, creative, experiential process. All four theories further layer and enrich the understanding of *Seeming, Being* and *Becoming*, and their contribution to each will be discussed. What follows is a description, analysis and application of IIM (Kasulis, 2002).

C. The Integrity and Intimacy Model

There are two fundamental approaches to engaging with emergent knowledge in, and of, the world. One approach observes, analyses, interprets and explains the world for the self and others through inductive and deductive reasoning. The other embeds the researcher, the potentially emerging knowledge, and the world as a synergistic whole. Kasulis (2002) locates the former approach as an Integrity Model, and the latter as an Intimacy Model of explaining the world. Whilst neither the Intimacy nor Integrity approach is superior to the other, the nature of the knowing and knowledge would determine the preferred approach. The written portion of this thesis adopts the Integrity Model of Kasulis (2002), because it draws on the notion of discrete units and phenomena, that include discrete units of people, places, events, things and processes, to document the research process, and to generate meaning that is required to be shared. In this model, each aspect has its own integrity or its own discrete place in the world and, once interaction has occurred, such discreteness is/can be returned or returned to.

On the other hand, Kasulis (2002) speaks extensively in his book on the intimacy of understanding. Kasulis (2002) argues that through intimacy, or engaging in intimate

relationships with people, places, events, things and processes, a personal intimate knowledge emerges that leaves all touched and changed by the interaction itself. An intimate approach to research has an affective dimension. The Intimacy Model, therefore, speaks of the inter-weaving of everything, of Yin and Yang, for if Yin is removed there is no Yang. As Kasulis discusses, here separation brings loss, as intimacy brings change to all, a persistent moving forward¹⁷.

The Integrity Model is particularly independent of emotions, sentiments, or feelings as it pursues objectivity and rational separation. It is in the interpretation and understanding of emotions, and the role they play in the Intimacy mode, that this project engages with the labyrinth of consciousness as it attempts to represent a struggle between the epistemology and the phenomenology of *rasa*, intimacy and aesthetics. This approach notes the *Seeming, Being and Becoming* narrative and journey, as it fosters the inseparability of the artist and the artwork in the process of making and helps locate myself in the emerging and renewing hybrid self. This concept is expanded upon and forms a critical set of findings that emerge in the making process. Hence, the engagement in artistic practice will be using Integrity as a 'crutch'¹⁸ within an Intimacy-driven agenda.

D. A/r/tography

¹⁷ It is here that the act of baking, referred to earlier, becomes relevant. Once the separate ingredients are mixed and then baked, they cannot be separated again, as they have taken on a new and different form, meaning and application.

¹⁸ This sets up the separation that explaining brings (integrity) as opposed to the immersive, emergent messiness of creativity (intimacy). In description, one cannot escape the Integrity Model but in exploration, one can use the Intimacy Model (Kasulis, 2002).

A/r/tography as a method of research, according to artists and researchers Rita Irwin (2010), Ayse Guler (2017) and Nicole Lee (2021), comes into being where the in-between space of the artist/researcher/performer's identity is acknowledged as living inquiry, whilst using 'graphy' to associate and interconnect art and text as a narrative (Heaton, 2018). A/r/tography also means living as an artist and/or a researcher that values the identities and discipline of artist/researcher/performer in an equal, embodied, holistic and affective manner. The performance as the artwork is the research, and, thus, to speak of the performance and the research as separate, although each seems to maintain their integrity, makes them lose their complexities as a whole. In this way, the complexity of IIM is rehearsed.

E. Autoethnography

I have explained my rationalisation for the pursuance of an autoethnographical approach earlier in the introduction and will now add additional points to my rationale for its choice as a framework. Ellis and Bochner (2000, p.739) define autoethnography as an:

“Autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographer's gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations.”

The potency of autoethnography is that it attempts to document the being in the moment of the person's life experience and explorations. *Being* allows an accessing of the experiential domain, the lived experience and being in the world in the moment, in the action – the existential and phenomenological being – and it is, speculatively, inductive in nature. Thus, I

use autoethnography as a method and methodology that I can utilise to enhance and provoke questions in the a/r/tographic journey.

I turn the telescope of my research towards the triadic model of autoethnography that encompasses process, culture and self, as expounded by Ellis and Bochner (in Chang, 2008, p.48):

“[a]utoethnographers vary in their emphasis on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethno), and on self (auto) and that different exemplars of autoethnography fall at different places along the continuum of each of these three axes.”

The triadic model, furthermore, is enriched by Chang, 2007 (p.207) who adds that autoethnography is, “Ethnographical in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation and autobiographical in its content”, that leads to self-discoveries and understandings. The process of engaging with autoethnography is simultaneously looking at oneself and oneself as the *Other* (Neumann, 1999; Venn, 2010, 2020). Wolff-Micheal Roth (2008, p.5) below describes the *Other* in the autoethnographical space as:

This Other is the ground against which the Self becomes figure, but this becoming requires Other not only as ground but also as material and as tool. The Self and Other are co-constituted in their relation ... there cannot be a Self without an Other. The Other is a pre-condition of and model for the Self. This is also an implication of the sociocultural and cultural-historical approach, whereby any higher cognitive function attributable to an individual first and foremost was a form of relation between individuals who constitute the culture (Vygotsky, 1986). Without the Other, there is no consciousness, which, as its etymological origins show—i.e., Lat. con-, together (with), and scire, to know—knowledge with and for others. More importantly, without consciousness there cannot be self-consciousness. Consciousness-for oneself always and already is consciousness-for-the-Other. Therefore, writing the Self without acknowledging the Other is itself a violent (symbolic) act against the ethical condition that comes with being human ...

What Chang (2007) warns against is self-indulgent introspection in autoethnography which can become an ethical problem in the sense that it exposes the artist-researcher and could

lead to the loss of rigour in the engagement with the process and the assumption that a matter is as it is because “I” have experienced it as such. Therefore, it is inevitable that autoethnography is not written in a vacuum but relies on personal interaction with the world around one, because the world around one interacts with the self as traumatic memories are being accessed in this process whereby theory and creativity are not totally sufficient to help this process.

F. Practice-led Research

PLR, as a methodology, includes a categorical understanding of how practice contributes to inquiry and how research is distinguished from practice, based on how knowledge is grounded in the emergent, creative, experiential process (see Jaaniste and Haseman, 2006; Smith and Dean, 2009; and Nelson, 2013). PLR is, thus, concerned with the nature of practice and leads to new knowledge within a particular branch of study/inquisition. It emanates from inquiry and proceeds towards a goal of new thinking and doing/making that addresses the theory that is under consideration, in this case, *rasa* (Bacon, 2015; Gray, 1996; Rutten, 2016). The focus and objective of PLR is the generation of new knowledge about the practice. The research is driven by questions that arise from the practice itself and the primary contribution to knowledge is through the insights gained about and through the practice (Candy, 2006). Following this, the outcomes in PLR research are often theoretical or conceptual, aiming to provide a deeper understanding of the practice and the implications within the field, which, in this case, is *rasa*. As a methodology PLR involves a reflective process where the practice is both the subject and the method of inquiry. The researcher (in this case myself) engages in a cyclical process of creating, reflecting and theorising using a qualitative method to analyse my

practice (Gray and Marlins, 2004). Practice-based Research (PBR) focuses on the creation of new works as the main output. The knowledge contribution is embodied in the practice and the artifacts produced, serve as both the research process and the outcomes (Arnold, 2012). The emphasis is on the practical output rather than the theoretical insights about the practice. PBR focuses on the development and results of artefacts as outcomes of the artistic practice (Jelinek, 2014). In the words of Linda Candy and Edward Edmonds (2018, p.64), “if a creative artefact is the basis of the contribution to knowledge, the research is practice-based; if the research leads primarily to a new understanding about practice, it is practice-led.”

The outcomes of PBR are tangible works that exemplify the research findings, and the primary evidence of the research are accompanied by a reflective commentary or exegesis that contextualises the work within the broader framework (Candy, 2006). As a methodology, PBR is the investigation, and the reflective documentation serves to articulate the knowledge embedded in the practice (Niedderer and Roworth- Stokes, 2007).

This thesis shows how PLR, through *rasa*, can be used to enhance creative practice and how creative practice can enhance the autoethnographic practice of *Seeming, Being* and *Becoming*. Hazel Smith and Roger Dean (2009, p.47) describe PLR as:

This type of research thus aims, through creativity and practice, to illuminate or bring about new knowledge and understanding, and it results in outputs that may not be text-based, but rather a performance (music, dance, drama), design, film, or exhibition.

Given this position, PLR fosters the emergent practice, driven by reflection-in-action. Here I bring in the idea of artist-researcher Gray (1996, p.3) who states that PLR is:

Initiated in practice, where questions, problems and challenges are identified and formed by the needs of the practice and practitioners. The research strategy is carried out through practice, using, predominantly, methodologies and specific methods familiar to practitioners in the visual arts or creative fields.

Authors in the field of psychology and journalism, Dominique Hecq and Robert Banagan (in Bacon, 2015, p.3), further define PLR within the creative research domain as that which embodies elusive qualities and offers limitless possibilities since it is the goal of all research to acquire or gain new knowledge. In this sense, the elusive spiritual qualities that *rasa* brings to the inquiry and, therefore, to the creative practice, encourages the emergence of such new knowledge and insight. PLR as a methodology has also been chosen because it bridges the dichotomy of experiencing in the present (as a central aspect of *rasa*) and the importance of time in reflection to inspire further creative injunctions and artefacts. As I experienced, and as Allan Munro (2014) points out, the difficulty lies in the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of your lived experiences happening simultaneously. Philosopher Donald Schön’s (1983, p.49), notions of “reflection-in-action” argue for subtle, seemingly intuitively driven, micro decision-making in the moment of making as an intimate creative act as opposed to “reflection-on-action”. The latter notion suggests a post-creation consciousness and deliberate, and perhaps theory-laden, interrogation of the process of making and the concrete creative act that comes/came into existence. Traditional research, one might argue, concentrates on the separation of the concrete *Object*, the analytical frame, and the application in discrete ways (as argued by the Kasulis Integrity Model). The creative process that employs moment-to-moment-reflection-in-action needs to be captured as it emerges to provide the data for the “reflection-on-action” for analysis and conclusion purposes that occur ‘post’ the creative act. In the context of this thesis, the “reflection-on-action” exercise was undertaken in two ways.

Firstly, emerging creative work was visually captured through videos, photographs, sketches, ‘scamping’ and similar processes, through a practice known as ‘visual journaling’. Secondly, a written journal was kept capturing emerging thought processes during the creative process.

This bi-pronged approach was informed by Gray and Malins (2004), Michelle Ortlipp (2008), Allan Munro (2014), and Hazel Messenger (2016) respectively. The outcome of the dual-based process was an understanding of when and how creative and analytical seeds were planted and how they came to grow and fructify (see Chapter 2). Digital documentation (using a video/digital photographic camera and smartphone) of my creative activities and practices is largely an inductive, intuitive activity aiding the reflective practice. My smartphone took on the persona of a research assistant and visual journal – an idea shared by Tim Ingold (2011) and Marsha Berry (2017). While the images can be seen to be of a poor camera quality, these images were taken at the time I was responding to an ‘in-the-moment-of-experiencing’ the feeling I had and that is what visually transpired; I did not arrange the artworks as I would in a formal exhibition setting. Even with the poor lighting, I wanted to capture that moment of feeling with whatever digital means I had at my disposal, which often was my mobile phone camera. As such, the artwork is not the visual output, but any visuals provided are those of documentation for this PhD examination and as process, these are reminders of an experience.

It is important to note that this research study does not engage with cultural studies wholly or specifically. I engage with how my (own and owned) South African Indianness and associated *Subject* formation impacts my artmaking and that which emerges from the artwork, but I do not rely on the sociological, ideological and political critique of extant cultural practice that is specific to cultural studies as a research practice. I have found PLR more valuable and insightful as a research tool compared to cultural studies. Although cultural studies have an established circular way of thinking that helps people analyse their identity, in this research, I seek not just an analysis but a way of deconstruction and repositioning of

self, which PLR affords. PLR provides the ambit for navigation and helps me to expand the questioning of myself (values, principles, morals and judgement) while cultural studies limit my identity analysis to a certain degree.

The creative and analytical seed is initially planted by a thought, an experience, or a belief. Once the moment has been identified, I/one ask(s) whether the artist-researcher has taken cognisance of the shortfalls, elaborations and descriptions arising from the innovative nature of PLR, its position and its relation to other methodologies. At this juncture, one of the central methods of PLR namely journaling, offers insight (Bacon, 2015). PLR does not encourage a compare and contrast/reflection-on-action in the moment of creating but rather opens the lines of inquiry (Nelson, 2013). The concurrence of thought and action is in tandem with IIM. Kasulis (2002) reiterates how practice aligns itself with the Integrity Model of having to find verification, whilst the Intimacy Model prompts one to look within reflection through gazing within oneself for self-discovery and the potentially emergent creative process.

Consequently, in the course of reviewing my *Kathak* dance videos, I discovered that some of my performance pieces were initially not meant for public viewing but rather are self-reflective inquiries and intended for research, thus, the route to a research art exhibition was pursued. The research exhibition, according to Kristina Niedderer, Michael Biggs and Malcolm Ferris (2006, p.14), "Is not only there to present the outcomes of research but it can become a tool for investigation into its own phenomenon for a wide range of inquiries". I engage the research exhibition as I breathed my life experience into artworks and words, and I reflected on Margot Ely, Ruth Vinz, Maryann Downing and Margaret Anzul (1997, p.2) who show that doctoral students use the research exhibition (Intimacy Archive) space as a tool to self-create,

communicate growth, challenge notions of self and develop resilience. Similarly, I used this research space as a personal investigation process to express my experiences and acquire new knowledge in my journey, which can be viewed on my website: <https://sunelles.wixsite.com/reshma-maharajh>.

G. Performance art as Method

The beginning of my journey in synthesising the historicity of self, *rasa* and performance art, was as a young girl attending *Bharatnatyam* dance classes. *Bharatanatyam* is a South Indian classical dance form originating in *Tamil Nadu*. It is a temple dance that is harmoniously expressed using the body in narrative, through *bhava* (emotions), *raga* (melody), and *tala* (rhythm) (Katarzyna Skiba, 2016; Dheepa Sundaram, 2014; Magaret Walker, 2014). All modalities of dance are found within the famous Indian art treatise the *Nāṭyashāstra*. The *Nāṭyashāstra* is a Sanskrit text treatise on dramatic theory and not a Hindu text, and, as a dramatic treatise, it guides various traditions of theatre including the canon of what would later be known as Buddhist and Jain dramatic works as well (Adikari and Saha, 2022). Bharata Muni, a sage also known as Bharata, has been attributed with the origins and writing of the *Nāṭyashāstra* around 2nd BCE, when he introduced the *rasa* theory and applied *rasa* to all the aspects of performance art (Chavda, 2015), that includes dance, drama, music, literature and all the visual arts. *A Students Handbook on Indian Aesthetics* by Neerja Gupta (2017), further reiterates the idea of *rasa* as nectar or an elixir of not only emotional experience but an aesthetic experience that brings about the excitation of the body, mind and spirit. The processes and strategies used in self-discovery are captured through a/the conduit of performance art.

Performing arts have artists using their bodies and voices to embody a message through theatre, dance, a play, music or mime, whilst in performance in visual arts, visual artists use paint, mixed media and other various materials to create artworks across the artistic landscape, including photography, painting, sculpture, drawing, digital, mixed-media and installation. I engage with both performance and performing arts because the combination of these practices allows for exploration, conceptualisation and expression of my journey, my feelings, emotions, opinions and tastes/preferences through their respective mediums.

The second research question interrogates the strategies and theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of performance art so that these can be used to describe and justify the artwork emanating from the *rasa* explorations in the pursuit of self-discovery. Theatre director Schechner (2001), artist and scholars of performance studies Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008) and Shivani Gupta (2015) describe performance as a space determined and proposed by anything that happens from the time the performer and spectator enter and/or exit the defined space. This understanding cuts across both the life of a performer/artist and my personal life as well. In the curation and performance of an artist, one of the many perspectives is always how the audience will interpret or receive a gesture, an emotion, and an enactment. A lens or a focused spotlight is created by the artist to engage the audience so that a succinct synergy with the art and arising *rasas* is made – this permutation causes a sense of self-reflection for the audience itself. Ghosh (1951) states that Bharata lists only eight *rasas*: *sringara* (pleasure/love), *hasya* (joy/laughter), *raudra/krodha* (anger), *karuna/shoka* (compassion), *vibhatsa* (disgust), *bhayanaka* (fear), *veera/utsaha* (heroism) and *adbuta* (wonder). A ninth *rasa*, namely *shanta* (peace), was added later after

Abhinavagupta's defence of *shanta rasa* in his *Abhinavabharati* (translated by Anupa Pande, 1997), and this became one of the most significant additions to the family of *rasas*, hence there are not eight but nine *rasas* that we know today. Peace is one of the most formidable feelings and experiences towards the *Oneness* and for achieving an elevated state of consciousness. Similarly, in the context of life, I was, and continue to be, impacted by the notion that the way I present myself to the world will be judged, therefore, what I show and how I choose to show it is of vital importance. Even though I did not engage in any stage performances as a dancer during the of writing this thesis, I still think, sometimes, in terms of gestures and performativity. The understanding of the multitude of processes and strategies that inform performance art and how it is received, extends and lends itself to daily living¹⁹, in line with the notion of performing the self. This autoethnographic methodology approach to being both the performer and audience is the Intimacy relationship expressed in this thesis here. As the dual perspective fosters an intimate relationship between the researcher (myself) and the subject matter, it is, thus, a way of enriching the understanding of cultural phenomena and practices through personal insight. Autoethnography encouraged the experiences of the researcher to transform into narratives that not only convey personal significance but also resonate with wider societal themes.

As an aspiring dancer what enthralled me the most were the explanations and interpretations of emotions/*bhavas* provided by my mother and my dance teachers. This allure translated into an absolute fascination as to how an internal emotion finds outward expression/*rasa* through the swaying of a hand, the subtle movement of the eye, and the depiction of a story

¹⁹ The notion of the "performance of self" can be seen to be in line with Erving Goffmann's (1959) concept of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

or myth. This visual intoxication, connecting the metaphor to ‘sap’ and ‘nectar’, impelled me to dance and to investigate what came first: the emotion or the movement. My mother would say, “Nothing stands still so you need to keep moving”. She silently (or, perhaps, unconsciously) had a knowledge of what the concept of flow was. Innocently, I applied her dictum of movement and flow in every aspect of my life, even while doing household chores (even if it drove my father a little crazy). Today, I resonate with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s (2014) description of flow in the embodied emergent experience, a state when we feel and live our best. This was the beginning of my journey of continual body-mind-soul exploration at different intervals of forming and transforming, my **TEM**.

Thus, central to my argument is the claim that dance, drama, music, literature and the visual arts must be seen not as things – *a* dance, *a* drama, for example – but as actions that emerge – to dance, or, more accurately, dancing, dramatizing, musicking (Christopher Small, 1998), writing and to make visual (that is painting, sculpting, printing and so forth) – perhaps best captured in the neologism of ‘arting’. Meleanna Meyer, Miki Maeshiro and Anna Sumida (2018) refer to arting as unfolding practices and an activity that arouse sensation that stimulates awareness or thoughts about objects of perception. Amelia Kraehe (2020) places arting at a conceptual level that eliminates closed categories of what is and what is not art and remains open to that which is yet to come into being, whilst at a practical level arting includes creating, appreciating and responding to art.

These art forms are seen as emerging in the presence of the observer and are energised by *rasa*, and this flow of energy turns a listener or viewer into a being that is listening or viewing and, therefore, experiencing. To dance, therefore, is to move a body through space and time

with a pattern or intent – all is in flux and emergent. Thus, while identity can be seen as a process of looking back, *Subject* formation argues that we are ever emerging. Put another way, as a person I move forward, through a contextual/contextualised space and time, with the intention of encountering the next moment of life, i.e., I am performing or dancing my life or my living.

In the practice of answering my third research question - what are the processes of understanding the nature of *Subject* formation from a socio-cultural construct? - I begin with the following quotation:

My explorations of self-reveal [sic] that I ‘migrate’ between these two cultures constantly so as not to forget my Indian roots and a South African root from a colonial, apartheid past, but rather look at a diasporic identity exploration through performance art practice. I am a practising Hindu steeped in the science and philosophy of my belief as I try to understand my spirituality as I explore my life’s journey” (Maharajh, 2022, p. 15).

Briefly touching on the Hindu/Indian concept (Maharaj, 2013), Hindu is a far older religious concept, whilst the term ‘Indian’ is a national(ist) concept. Once India emerged as a sovereign state in 1947, the definition and the emphasis was on belonging to India and, therefore, being an Indian, in addition to (a) cultural identity. According to Indian sociologist and historian, Salma Aziza (2019), Indian philosophy is an umbrella term for all the different branches of philosophy and doctrines that have arisen in India. Hindu philosophy is one of these branches, but the term ‘Hindu’ was not in vogue when these schools of philosophy arose (Ganeri, 2020). There is no clarity on how the term ‘Hindu’ originated on the Indian subcontinent as there are many interpretations and versions by the Greeks, Persians (Zohrastrians), Mongolians, amongst others (Lorenzen, 1999; Truschke, 2023). Hinduism was sought to unify various religious practices under a single identity in response to colonial narratives and to distinguish

themselves from other groups (Sharma, 2020). The historical evolution of these terms, however, reflects a complex interplay of cultural identity, colonial categorisation and religious diversity. Hinduism, also known as *Sanatana Dharma* (Srinivasan and Aithal, 2023), relates to a way of life that encompasses a range of beliefs and philosophical practices that place emphasis on following the *Upanishads* and the *Vedas*. To claim that 'Indian' identity is inherently 'Hindu' is a misconception as Romila Thapar (2014) and Amartya Sen (2005) have argued that India's legacy is one of pluralism and an open debate and certainly not one of religious nationalism. Conflating Hinduism with Indianness ignores the many non-Hindu communities (Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhist and others) as part of the Indian tapestry. Whilst the terms 'Indian' and 'Hindu' are used ubiquitously and colloquially, in South Africa the term 'Indian' has a racial connotation, and the term 'Hindu' denotes a religious/spiritual practice. The terms are neither synonymous nor interchangeable. As mentioned previously, I identify as Gujarati, which is an ethnic group of India with language, food, songs, dance and clothing being geographic-specific. In South Africa, being an Indian is an apartheid/post-apartheid racial designation, being a Hindu is a religious affiliation, and being a Gujarati is an ethnic denomination. Hinduism²⁰ is primarily a religious identity characterised by a diverse range of beliefs, practices, rituals and philosophies. Hinduism encompasses a wide variety of sects

²⁰ The concept of Hinduism and its position in contemporary India is a very contentious topic and this thesis does not focus on the political institutionalising of the concept of Hinduism. The Hindu (Indian) Knowledge system according to Timane and Wandhe (2024) emphasises that the holistic understanding of self, nature and the universe is ever evolving and not limited to a specific religion, belief system or social class aimed to serve as guiding principles to a balanced way of living. During the British colonial administration (Brekke, 2019), Hindu practices and promotion of certain text and rituals while marginalising others effectively created a standardised version that was easily categorised and governed. However, in contemporary India assertion of Hindu identity in a diverse society marginalises religious minorities and undermines the secular fabric of the nation. The sedimentation of Hinduism into a recognisable identity has been shaped by historical processes and contemporary political dynamics and created an interplay between tradition and modernity - Kalim (2016) points to the different agendas of ruling political parties that can have a detrimental effect and lead to violence, which unfortunately has occurred over a period of time. Gilles Tarabout (2018) states that Indian courts of law have contributed to the shaping of religion and, more particularly) Hinduism.

including Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism and others and is not monolithic but varies greatly by region, community and individual belief (Doniger, 2009). In South Africa Hinduism was brought by Indian indentured labourers and traders (in the British Indenture system) during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It remains a significant religious identity among South African Indians (Bhana and Vahed, 2011). These practices have since evolved and adapted to the South African context (Hiralal, 2014). Festivals are celebrated according to the Hindu calendar (Ram Navami, Krishna Janmashtami, Navaratri, Diwali, Kavady, and many more), and temples serve a dual role for worship and creating a sense of community, and cultural organisations, such as the South African Maha Sabha, play a vital role in maintaining Hindu religious life (Pillay, 2017). However, Hinduism has been influenced by the broader social and political environment, including the legacy of apartheid and the ongoing issues of racial and cultural identity (Vahed and Desai, 2010). There are various complexities in India around the formations of identity in terms of 'Hindu', and the amalgamation of different linguistic groups in South Africa made up of Hindi, Gujarati, Tamil and Telegu and Indianness in terms of the history of India and the nationalist frameworks. However, this has not necessarily manifested in South Africa. Indian descent in South Africa encompasses a diverse range of religions including Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, and the term "Indian" in South Africa is a broad ethnic category used to describe people whose ancestors originated from the Indian subcontinent (Desai and Vahed, 2010). The Indian community in South Africa faced unique challenges in terms of systemic discrimination and socio-economic marginalisation, compounded by legislative acts aimed at restricting their rights and opportunities, apart from racial segregation. Despite these challenges Indian people strove to preserve their cultural and religious identities. Even though the term "Indian" in South Africa is shaped by political identity and activism, post-apartheid Indian communities continue to navigate issues of

identity, representation and integration within the broader South African society. According to Brij Maharaj (2013) South African Indians practicing Hinduism today face many challenges as third and fourth generations, due to globalisation and internationalisation, decline in family values that are associated with social vices (abuse, violence, crime divorce), and an upsurge in economic power. 'Language and religion particularly have lost their significance after the end of apartheid' (Schroder, 2017, p.221), as the trajectories of Hinduism became weaker as Western norms permeated society and global entanglement became more prominent. Karthigasen Gopalan (2010) and Suren Naicker (2020) write that the current generation of Indians in South Africa are bilingual speakers but not multidialectal because of religious and linguistic varieties (which are too complex to discuss here). However, due to post-apartheid many families moved away from the communal hubs, adopting English as a medium to converse in as recorded by Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie (2000). Ndlovu- Gatsheni (in Naicker, 2020) states that, "because the domains of culture, the psyche, mind, language, aesthetics and religion and many other have remained colonised", and, thus, many third and fourth generation Indians in South Africa do not speak any of the vernacular Indian languages (Hindi, Gujarati, Arabic, Tamil or Telegu) but do, however, engage in some religious practices.

I continually try to maintain my inner flow as I explore my existence within the performative and creative space as an individual in a cosmopolitan environment. Hybridity takes on many perspectives as I review my space and environments (in terms of work or profession and home as the personal area) of engagement in this journey. However, being raised in an orthodox Hindu family system had its own set of rules, that included complicated traditional values, and rituals (prayers, weddings, births or deaths) that created tense situations in the home, especially if the rules and rituals were challenged. These traditions, sometimes, went against

the flow, and the disruptions were not welcomed. My father had to leave school to help support his family of seven brothers and five sisters. My mother came from a very poor family, and she was not 'fully educated'²¹ because her family had to move to a farm in Richmond (a small town in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands) after the Cato Manor²² riots in Durban in 1959, left them homeless. My grandparents did not have sufficient money or resources to allow my mother to complete her education. She occupied herself with learning the different 'female' skills of embroidery, sewing, knitting, crocheting, baking and other domestic activities. She also secretly followed her passion for dance (or, as I have argued, the act of dancing).

As an artist, I often interpret the world through visual and mental representations. Gazing inward is like the loop of the cotton strung around my finger when I think about my mother's life and how her actions have impacted on me and who I became. My thoughts mimic the hook of a crochet needle as it loops in (an action) and loops out to form a tight-knotted loop (a material *Object*) and dances through the thread that sometimes forms a knot. Metaphorically this action started to hold life in place. My mother's life 'becomes' mine in the acts of making through the looping of the cotton around the crochet hook or the movement of the needle through cloth, stitching parts together to make something of worth. In the crocheting, embroidery or stitching process, the ordinary, everyday activity of arranging and applying beads, stitches of colour, and dabs of cloth, through the embroidery act, the

²¹ My mother was highly educated, but not in the formalised, Westernised sense of the word.

²² The Cato Manor riots devastated my family, and my grandfather lost his grocery store (which was the family's only source of income) and their home (a shack dwelling) that they spent months building with their savings. They had to leave their home with only a few essentials to escape the riots. My grandfather lost all his possessions but held onto the only thing most precious to him – his family – trying to keep them alive and safe. For a detailed description of these riots see the by article Ian Edwards (1994) 'Cato Manor: Cruel Past, Pivotal Future', as well as Gray and Maharaj's (2017) report on *Poverty, Inequality and Violence: A Case Study of Cato Manor*.

extraordinary emerges. Baking bread or rolling the rotis (Indian flatbread) itself starts as a mundane, household chore, and, yet, through the combination of attention, manipulation and application, something new (nourishment) emerges²³.

I develop the above metaphor once more. I continually thread the text and visuals as artefacts of a lifelong journey that changes as I weave along the path of life, masking my fears, embodying different dreams and embracing different experiences as they arise. A knot, as a physical tying of thread or fabric, has had many different meanings for me. As a child, the knot reminded me of how, firstly, we as children all helped to fix buttons on the shirts that my mother used to make in the home-based family tailoring business, and secondly, a reminder of something formed to hold things firmly in place. Hereupon, I extend the button metaphor. If buttons hold two different pieces of material together, when the two pieces are pulled apart while unbuttoning, there is a gap that emerges between the two pieces of cloth, revealing what is beneath. There are elements of the interstices, the cover-up and the gaping garment (see below).

When I engage with the elements of interstices, I move between the different mental and physical spaces and try to keep the entities together. While at work, I think about the day-to-day well-being of my young daughters, my ailing parents and the groceries I need to buy before going home. At home, I interact with family members and try to be the best mother, dog owner, homeowner and practising Hindu as I continue with my academic work and plan for the next day. The interplay between the physical and mental worlds is ongoing and

²³ The act of stitching allows one to take apart and return each part to what it was, in baking, the cake cannot be undone into its ingredients. The ingredients are transformed. This image ties into the notion of the intimacy of meaning (see Kasulis, 2002).

becomes increasingly conflated when emotional upheavals are added. Art and dance then become the button, both a release and connector, an understanding that through performance art, that which is unnecessary, or a non-priority, must fall away so I can truly connect to that which is significant with presence and mindfulness. I use the *rasa* emotions to guide the process of being mindful and aware. Through this process of becoming more mindful, however, I cannot take responsibility for how others might react to circumstances within environments that involve family or society, but I am able to reflect, engage and navigate my own thoughts, feelings and reactions to a situation encompassing *rasa* emotions. *Rasa* theory predominantly pertains to *rasika* (a cultured audience), however, this research project requires of me to be both performer and audience as a point of departure in relation to the *rasa-bhava* theory as I draw on the process of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983). *Rasa* provides us with strategies not only for acquiring or appreciating moments of being, but these strategies lead to action and acts of doing (and, therefore, in the context of this study, artmaking). Another integral component to understanding the interplay between *rasa-bhava* is the notion of how it is communicated through being the *rasika* as I reflect on experience of the autoethnographic journey.

Our human nature tends to cover-up multiple life-changing events, a fact that I have uncovered in my own experience. One such occurrence is that of senior family members hiding their feelings and trying to keep the peace even though they are aware of the consequences of their actions, especially when it comes to my role and duties as a widow. The concept 'gaping garment' is what Roland Barthes (1975) refers to as the erotic – where the gaze falls on that area of the body which is visible. I engage the metaphor of the gaping wound to the gaping garment, the feeling of being exposed, of feeling vulnerable and the

reliance needed on the converse side of cover-up. I ask the question 'What is my 'go-to-action', thought or practice that assists me in my moments of vulnerability? Gaping reveals to me that across the multi-dimensionality of my life and my life experiences, it is always in both moments of cover-up that I realise that my spirituality and spiritual practices are the bedrock that enables unblocking and flow and that I experience the highest *rasas* in arting.

I learned at an early age to become resilient to certain events and experiences even though they created uncomfortable feelings. I questioned how all these threads of culture, identity, and value become knotted together to form a place within the embodied space and all its different contexts. As a dancer, I knot my string of dancing bells around my ankles, and the bells, activated by the ankle movements, create rhythmic patterning and sounds that are synchronised and become lyrical, as I flow into motion and enter the world of bliss and *Oneness*. The course of self-effacement and self-discovery has, thus far, led me to a knowing that the state of *Oneness*, the experience of TEM, is the ultimate state of being resultant from the uninterrupted flow. *Oneness* is also related to the spiritual process and by relating it to the pure scientific analysis or explanation around the experiences of TEM is to undermine the very intimate act, even if it is only momentary. The connection of *Oneness* and merging with my authentic self is when I became aware of my emotions, thoughts, and creative impulses. As I engaged in my artistic intimate practice, I often experienced an indefinable fluid-like state that transcended specific definitions as I embodied this personal journey that was a subjective exploration. This was a way of achieving flow in the creative process and creating a seamless fusion of action of awareness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

H. Conclusion

We pursue conscious and articulatable meaning, perhaps, after the fact. Such meaning is clouded, constructed and filtered in-and-through memory and theories of explanation. The notion of memory implies a time trajectory that has been lived to the present, but it also implies acts of structuring to make sense of those moments in time (Erlil and Nünning, 2008). Phrased alternatively, structuring comes about by drawing on frames of explanation (Bryant and Livholts, 2007). Memories allow experiences to become knowledge and, therefore, a memory is a moment in time that has been structured for explanation in a particular way (Cocodia, 2014; Rajaram, 1993). Some may argue that it is not possible to change memory, but it might be possible to change how memory is integrated back into the body as I have done in the making process. Therefore, experiencing, or the mindful traversing of events through time, is core to transcending from the *Seeming*, *Being* and *Becoming* as the path for the arting process.

This creative problem-solving, I believe, is at the heart of design synthesis that is directly associated with abductive reasoning and sense-making. These positions then are continually interrogated at different intersections of the making and reflecting process. The hybridity, complexity and dynamism of *Subject* formation, as a potentially abductive reasoning process, presents difficult challenges to rationalise owing to the cultural and spiritual influences, familial and work-related pursuits, as well as my own choices in the pursuit of an academic career and creative artistic channels of release, navigation and self-expression. As a woman and academic who realises the importance and necessity of self-rationalisation in the pursuance of self-actualisation, I draw on the core threads that constitute who I am and, thus,

choose the richness and 'nectarian' *rasa* to understand myself. Through this process, I hope that transferability occurs through which other people will be inspired to draw on the wealth of their heritage to aid self-discovery for both themselves and as artists. What follows in Chapter 1 of this thesis is a succinct theoretical description of *rasa* and its ontological application to self.

CHAPTER 1 – SEEMING THROUGH RASA

The aim of Chapter 1 is to engage with *rasa* as both a philosophy and creative strategy located within the intimacy domain. This process will be achieved by exploring the vicissitudes and depth of *rasa* and applying *rasa* components to my being located within the ideological matrix of societal constructs. Emphasis will be placed on the exploration of what *rasa* is and how *rasa* leads to feelings rooted in body-mindedness. In doing so, this chapter will also employ the methodologies of autoethnography and PLR. This chapter begins with the understanding of *rasa* via literary injunction by locating the genesis of *rasa* within the *Nāṭyashāstra* and, thereafter, analysing how *rasa* is the culmination of experience and emotion. The three stages preceding emotion and expression, namely *vibhava*, *bhava* and *anubhava* will be detailed. This elaboration will be achieved by applying the Integrity Model to the engagement of the outwardly expressed/inwardly experienced emotion (*rasa/bhava*) connection. I have utilised this approach to explain the biological/physiological experiences of *rasa* and its preceding emotional experiences.

From the related literature, I demonstrate how *rasa* and *bhava* have a psychosomatic effect and tease out the dialecticism of how the mind and body impact the experience of life itself. The chapter draws on autoethnography by looking at key defining junctures in my life, as well as the intersectionality or the nexus of the complexity of my being²⁴ and the application of *rasa* in rationalisation-come-actualisation. Intersectionality has a psychosomatic effect on me and the trajectory of my life due to how the constructs themselves transform over time and

²⁴ See Crenshaw, 1991; Carrol, 2007 and Ellison, 2001 for ideas around intersectionality.

add gravitas in a grounding realistic way. In this context, *rasa* as a process of rationalisation, works via reverse emotional engineering to reach the root cause of body-mindedness and paves a way forward to achieving of the TEM.

1.1 Structure and Essence of the *Nātyashāstra*

The structure of the *Nātyashāstra* is divided in an endeavour to cover all aspects of the arts. The 6 000 verses are divided into thirty-six chapters that give explicit information about the components of dance for performers concerning their body language, costumes, multiple gestures, décor and architecture of the theatre. The structure of the treaty is summarised as follows: Chapters 1-3 of the *Nātyashāstra* encompass the origins of drama, the construction, and types of theatre, as well as the worship of gods on stage. Chapter 4 describes the different varieties of dance and Chapter 5 explains the conduct of the preliminary rites. Chapters 6-7 provide the treatise on *rasa*. Chapters 8-13 describe gestures and movements specific to performing in dance, dramas and the art of acting. Chapters 14-22 explain the correct words, speech, sounds and language to be used across an assortment of topics and Chapter 23 focuses on costumes, props, adornments²⁵ and make-up. Chapters 24-26 elaborate on the basic representation of beauty, the different temperaments, dealing with special representation, props and ornamentation. Chapter 24 is dedicated to women²⁶ in performing

²⁵ In the *Nātyashāstra* ornaments and attire or costumes had their own rules and were given different names from head to toe. According to the denomination or status of a goddess, queen, princess or celestial nymph (many jewels, including pearls, rubies, and other precious stones and metals) to the daughter and wife of a sage (rosary beads), human (flowers and fruit) or a demon (blue stones), each classification was represented by the different ornaments that are worn by the characters.

²⁶ In the *Nātyashāstra*, Bharata dedicates attention to the role of the female, thus making her very inclusive to the role she played in theatre and society. There are primarily four different types of women described by Bharata according to Ghosh (1951) and Hanna (2010), the divine (goddess), the queen, women of high families and courtesans. These character traits were further broken down into the *uttama* (superior), *madhya* (middle

arts and the theatre, as men traditionally performed all dance, drama and music within the public and private sphere. Chapter 27 deals with the success of dramatic production and Chapters 28-33 contain details of instruments and music. The last four chapters constitute the portrayal of different characters, costumes and the art of histrionics.

Throughout the *Nāṭyashāstra*, elements of beauty are explained and brought forth as an aesthetic appreciation for the different arts and what these encompass. The opposite of aesthetic might be seen as anaesthetic. An anaesthetic dampens the emotional or feeling responses, so an aesthetic can be seen to enhance or bring into being an emotion, feeling or even spiritual experience, which immediately brings into play the TEM, a feeling of *Oneness* with the Divine. The term aesthetics is derived from the Greek word *aesthetikos* or *aesthanomai* that, according to designers Ioannis (Xenakis and Arnellos, 2014), means to perceive. The concept of aesthetics, as encompassed until the nineteenth and early twentieth century in Western philosophy and European modernist sensibilities, was/is tied to European colonisation (Blocker, 2001; Bohls, 1994). Hence, the concept of aesthetics differs from geographical location to cultural interception across communities, societies and space/time. As theorist Walter Mignolo (2007) argues, the word 'aesthetics', itself, became colonial and colonised. The notion is propounded by Indian historian Parul Dave-Mukherji (2016) who explains that aesthetics in the Western tradition was/is a canon understood as formulations hidden under the pretence of naturalisation of common sense, synthesised under the headings of 'beauty' and 'taste'. The attempt is to move away from the colonial and post-

or medium), *adharna* (inferior) and *samkirna* (mixed). Bharata wrote extensively about women and their role as a heroine is described in great detail as the nuances that are displayed through the different, emotions or feelings. The roles depicted by women was transpersonal and related to life in general and through *rasa* as it held the power to bring everything in life to the theatre.

colonial past and transform new sensibilities to a decolonial aspect of performance art that leads to collaboration with alternative ways of knowledge production²⁷.

Indian aesthetics emerged from a different vantage point, for what is now known as aesthetics in the West is known as *rasa* aesthetics in *Nāṭyashāstra*. While Western and colonial notions of aesthetics are fluid and prone to the changes of time, the *Nāṭyashāstra* aesthetic is transcendental to the notion of time altogether, evident in its global praxis exploitation as we see change and experience the evolutions of dance between the Indian sub-continent and its diaspora today despite being thousands of years old. How then does the bifurcation of Western/Eastern aesthetic practices affect the practitioner today? Where do I situate myself as an artist due to being a product of post-colonial and decolonial rule and a practitioner of dance forms? In tackling my position, I initially aligned to a pre-colonial or purely *Nāṭyashāstra* form of aesthetics, but, upon internal probing, became aligned to an alternate form of aesthetics termed “embodied research” explored in *Embodied Research: A Methodology* by Ben Spatz (2017). Western aesthetics of performance art assist the artist in the cognitive rational realisation of life, a sensible, rational approach wherein provocation is cognitively based on an expression of alternate realities of a *Subject* matter. However, the Western cognitive concept uses the *Subject* as an *Object* minus the body-emotional expression or component (Scheer, 2012; Shapiro and Spaulding, 2021). Eastern aesthetics on the other hand put forth a version of performance art that is transcendental to the artist as the *Subject* and the *Object* – the artist is the vessel through which divinity and divine insights are expressed. Embodied research is not a synthesis of the Eastern/Western experience of

²⁷ As pointed out in the introductory chapter, some of the translations of the original texts appear to be reliant on the Westernised/colonial theoretical frameworks to make the translations. In this sense, English translations of concepts like ‘sentiment’ and ‘taste’ need to be treated with caution.

aesthetics, but instead brings attention to body-mindedness. This focus is critical for I argue that the artmaking process is both cognitive and emotional, represented and understood psychosomatically. The experience of TEM is only achieved through the undisputed experience of the honesty of oneself mentally, emotionally and physically. TEM transcends the body/mind/emotional experience not by negation, but by full acceptance and embodied research facilitates that realisation. That is the essence of *rasa*!

As I engaged with this study I questioned how the concepts, themes and descriptions of the *Nātyashāstra* impact upon my daily life. Will my modern, Westernised gaze of South African Hindu Indian culture permutate and affect the colonised version of myself? What is the gap between the essence of the *Nātyashāstra* and its modern-day interpretation, and where am I, as a South African Indian woman, positioned within this gap? The former is part of *Seeming* and the latter is part of *Being* and *Becoming*. These questions formulated part of my self-analysis as I began the exploration. I draw on the *vibhava*, *bhava* and *anubhava* (discussed extensively below), explained by dancers and academics Saswati Chakraborty (2014), Elisa Ganser (2022, p.156), Manmohan Ghosh (1951) and Ganesh Gule (2022) to demonstrate how they impacted my analysis of my social constructs and the manifestations and changes in my life that appeared as a result. The social constructs constitutive of my *Subject* formation under analysis include my identity as made up of being a South African, Indian, female, daughter, mother, widow, visual artist and academic predetermined and determined by my Hindu Gujarati background. The foregrounding of these constructs is important as each chapter, beginning in Chapter 1 itself, demonstrates a poignant evolution of the binaries and *Subject/Object* relation. Furthermore, I emphasize the importance of understanding that my identity is not determined in isolation but is informed by macro and micro changes in the

socio-politico environment. While I am determined and will continue to be informed by the shifting ideologies these constructs are predicated upon, I also possess the free will and self-based determination to pull myself away from ideologies, narratives and environments that tear me away from the realisation of the highest version of myself. When I look at my position as a post-colonial, then decolonial, *Subject* and the impact of the Western gaze, I look at the essence of the *Nātyashāstra* as a transformative experience and a way to interculturally translate my role within the journey of a South African Indian women. As a performance artist, having been trained in the tenets of both the *Nātyashāstra* and the visual arts, this immersion is presented through the gestural dimension. These gestures through dancing and making evoke a self-knowledge and a sociocultural decolonial interpretation by narrating my experience to evoke *rasa* in the viewer or audience as I navigate the map to find Oneness within the fragmented self. Performance art offers a way to assist the reader to attain a greater understanding of the oneself through the human experience engaging the *rasa* theory.

1.2 The Nātyashāstra and Rasa

The *Nātyashāstra*, being the artistic medium and expression of the *Vedas*, is propitiated with the same aim of understanding oneself to understand God and attain *moksha* (liberation or One-with). Accordingly, in Chapter 8, Bharata suggests that *rasa* is the realisation whereby realisation is understood as both a becoming conscious of, and a coming into being of one's consciousness, which may not be easily expressed through words or action but experienced at a more subtle level. Transcendental joy (*ananda*) as a *Oneness* of universal joy has no

parallel to any experience as a personal emotion and, thus, the aesthetic experience is not only about the personal emotion but rather how the experience becomes one of universal emotion. Cognition implies a knowing and this knowing can be conscious or unconscious. Conscious cognition leads to and enhances greater levels of awareness on both a physical and metaphysical level (Kotchoubey, 2018; Nair, 2013) – it is an ebb and flow of life experiences.

Critical to this definition is the notion of ‘interstitiality’²⁸. Interstitiality implies the stitching together of an audience, artist and medium in the moment of co-creation (Král, 2009; Sheth, 2014). Drawing on *rasa*, dancer Royana Mitra (2016, p.1) indicates that the *Nātyashāstra* and *rasa* immersion:

Can only be theorized and experienced as an embodied, psycho-physical state that transpires interstitially between any audience, any artist and any art that is primarily premised on gestural dimensions of communication regardless of interactivity.

Psychologist Adrian Wells (2009, p.118) elucidates and expands on the notion of conscious cognition by defining it as “a state of awareness of being”, which foregrounds a mind that contains sensations, perception and memories. According to (Wells, 2009) a component of the mind is available to introspection, meaning that knowledge held in consciousness is available for recall and the conscious mind itself takes charge of the immediate embodied experience. Awareness is the conscious experience of knowing what something is, what it means, and understanding the experience itself. Unconscious cognition, on the other hand, equates to knowledge stored as long-term memory (Kunde, Reuss and Kiesel, 2012). This fact

²⁸ Whereas by description of interstitially, it seems to imply the in-betweenness of the three presences in the creative moment (which can be seen as a triangulated way of *explaining* the situation), I argue seeing *rasa* as ‘sap’ that permeates the process ‘collapses’ the discrete entities into the moment of co-creation. Thus, there is not stitching of separate entities because they are not separate entities but entities that manifest in different forms for a common purpose/outcome and/or they can change positions to some degree.

is confirmed by Richard Brown (2014) who states that cognition also applies to the broader sense of knowing and not simply an indelible conscious awareness. Antonio Damasio's (1999, p.47) explanation of consciousness is focused on being present, in the moment, especially if feelings are to influence the *Subject* at a given point in time. This author also proposes that consciousness is aimed at one's survival and builds resilience. This state is rooted in the representation/presence of the body in which human feelings and emotions pivot on consciousness. The varied definitions of conscious and unconscious cognition are required for the rationalisation and understanding portion of performance art. Without a conscious rational conception of the time-space continuum, of history, spatial movement, philosophy, and notions of culture, a critical conception of performance art cannot be developed and the pathway towards the realisation of the One cannot be established. The impact of performance art is felt through emotion, but cognitive rationality of the process precedes emotional expression, which also precedes TEM.

1.3 Emotional Expression as a driving force

The *Nātyashāstra* puts forth a dimension of artistic expression wherein music, dance and drama follow a format of creating a build-up leading to a climax of emotions. These components are known as *vibhava*, *bhava* and *anubhava* (i.e., pre-leading components of *rasa* that add to and heighten the totality of the experience and/or moment). These activities are totalised in, and of, themselves but reach the pinnacle of expression in *rasa*.

“Vibhavanubhava-vyabhichari-sanyogad rasa nispathi” (Nātyashāstra: 6:32).

Vibhava causes Bhava causes Anubhava causes Rasa.

Translated, *vibhava* are external stimuli. These external stimuli cause *bhava* or emotions to arise. The arising of emotions results in an internal consequent or internal shifting (*anubhava*) that causes *rasa* - an outward expression of emotions. Sequentially this process can be presented, and resonates throughout the thesis, as:

Vibhava → Bhava → Anubhava → *Rasa*

External stimuli → Internal emotions → Internal shift → Outward expression of interfaced emotions

Determinants → Consequents → Transitory states → *Rasa*

In the first chapter of the *Nāṭyashāstra*, Bharata explains the *Vedic* origin of *rasa*. *Rasa* is not simply an emotional²⁹ response to artistic stimuli but the inner organising principle of the different modes of aesthetic experience and meaning which the artist undergoes. *Rasa* primarily depends on keeping the focused attention on the determinants, consequents and transitory states as harmoniously interwoven. By this explanation I mean that the emotion/*bhava* becomes the *rasa*, both as the driving force but also as the shaping energy/*anubhava* through the action of the three elements. The determinants/*vibhava* are the influences of external stimuli and form the precursors and the basis of emotional and aesthetic responses that will create the *rasa* experience (Vatsyayan, 1996). This practice correlates with the *Seeming*, the pre-event planning, learning and rehearsing. The consequents are the internal reactions to verbal and physical actions as both life and

²⁹ At this stage, it suffices to argue that emotions deal with primal responses to situations and are located in the amygdala and related processes (Damasio, 2010; Zeki, 1998) and drive action and cognition. Feelings, on the other hand, are those manifestations shaped by action and cognition and are culturally bound.

performance moment situations and, in each context, when they arise from the applications of the determinants. This process is the 'being-in-the-moment' state of *rasa*. The transitory states are the varying emotional responses that follow physical actions³⁰. These three dynamics translate as the influences, triggers and actions that develop into emerging manifestations. Although the word *bhava*, as Saurabh Todariya, Shankar Rajaraman and Sangeetha Menon (2022) state, is incorporated into the words *vibhava* and *anubhava*, neither are emotions. It is important that I render the *Seeming, Being, Becoming* to *vibhava, bhava and anubhava*, and *rasa* accordingly. Bharata, furthermore, explains that *bhavas* become a *rasa* because *bhavas* carry no meaning in the absence of a *rasa*. Indian aesthician Srinivasa Rao (2011) explains this concept quite eloquently in the expression of *bhava*, that is, humans experience a range of emotions in life but when another human being experiences this sentiment through art or performance, it takes on new meaning. Through *rasa* practice-led exploration I wish to bring forth this experience. Bharata explains how art universalises emotions, making them channels of appeal through which the human soul experiences a world of emotions. Cognition and rationalisation are required as emotional processors.

This association can be located within the works of the Sanskrit literature scholar, Natalia Lidova (2013, p.209), who states that the relationship between *rasa* and *bhava* possesses a mysticism that only specific emotions can help unlock and heighten, and, owing to the nature of its specificity, as "a cluster of meanings not just as an aesthetic theory but a phenomenon from earlier stages of its evolution, sacral and defying expression and has a connection with

³⁰ This process across an entire series of *rasa* actions can also be theorised from action to action, where the previous action (action in *rasa*) becomes here the domino effect of the determinant for the next action in *rasa* to take place and that the next action in *rasa* then becomes the transitory state for that action in *rasa*. These dynamic acts occur on both macro and micro levels.

bhavas” (Lidova, 2013, p.209). Abhinavagupta a 10th century Kashmiri philosopher and polymath relies on oral tradition to revive and consecrate *bhava*, and states that owing to the transcendence and otherworldliness of *rasa*, a passage of knowledge was not possible because “*Bhavas* generated a more earthly sensation (*sadharan*) whilst *rasa* was extraordinary (*asadharan*), unique and transcendental and brought special pleasure and the utmost bliss in the contemplation and cognition” (in Lidova, 2013, p.211).

1.4 Aesthetic versus anaesthetic

Antonio Carcelen Estrada (2015, p.104) believes that “storytelling, dancing, weaving or any everyday aesthetic practice of re-existence challenged Eurocentric concepts of time and space, that were designed to control.” *Rasa* affords a diverse way to perceive, that means to see, understand and experience differently. The *rasa*, *kathakar* (the dancer or storyteller), and autoethnographic interweaving become increasingly important in bridging and applying the role of the *kathakar* as an autoethnographer. In the colonial-Western sense, this European post modernity was determined by set guidelines as a type of normativity that was to be looked for in the aesthetic *Object*, but *rasa* asks us not to see guidelines, but to experience the emotional moment. In *rasa*, by following the guidelines laid out in the *Nātyashāstra* as strategic lines of inquiry, one could arrive at a point that is a pure experience – a feeling of bliss (*ananda*). If this is the case, then *rasa* is a process of reaching experience whereas the West had a process of reaching cognition. This kind of reflection gave me a chance to recognise the *Otherness*³¹ of myself in other non-Indian practices.

³¹ As I navigate between the *Other* and *Otherness*, I place these words in italics to engage my role. I view my ‘Otherness’ as a marginal within the South African context and because of the particular history of the country. The Indian South African population is the smallest population group in South Africa.

Sanskrit scholar Sheldon Pollock (2016) states that to internalise the expression of *rasa*, the artwork may have the capacity to create and actualise the emotional state. More importantly, Abhinavagupta, (in Pollock, 2016, p.49) points out that the “most essential aesthetic components are those several forms of consciousness that pertain to the ends of man”. It is also about seeing the world through the eyes of becoming. The artist as ‘self’ is the process of performance engaged in different levels of contemplation and reflection, that are not just about this level of *Subjective* identity, but the process stresses the importance of understanding the experience. This phenomenology of awareness allows the artist-researcher to enter and experience the transitional almost transcendental space to connect with the self as the inner being or inner voice. The challenge lies in the awareness of being. This awareness can be meditative and focuses on the experience itself that takes place in the here and now.

The etymology of the word ‘experience’³² suggests something that is ‘tried out’ and implies a journey of discovery. This definition is an extremely important argument as a dialogue happens across time and because, as an art practice, it deals with actions tried out across time and space with intent as I have previously argued. The artist-dancer deconstructs the cultural codes within the identity matrix to reflect and analyse the research and process of creation, the inter- and transcultural approaches to the transformation of knowledge codes through embodied experiences. As art historian Parul Dave Mukherjee in (in Grant and Price (2020), *Decolonising Art History* states, there is a gap in the current area, that art history is again

³² The etymology of the word ‘experience’ according to the *Merriam Webster Dictionary* (n.d.) is the practical knowledge, skill or practice derived from observation, participation or lived through events in an individual’s life.

poised for theoretical rethinking and is experiencing fatigue with Eurocentric art theories. The need to explore alternative openings is important and it may lend itself to a different starting point in the understanding of alternative aesthetic concepts. Jodi Byrd and Micheal Rothberg (2011) speak of the gap between the recognition of the power of these various issues that concerns the post-colonial and the subaltern. Through my practice and performance, I pray, I write, I reflect, I dance, I dream, and I procrastinate. I follow my instinct and shift my gaze. The time, space and energy triangulation are the kinaesthetic experience immersed in the aesthetic experience. My experience allows me to attune the pulse of reality and revisit the small aspects of nature, engaging my spiritually; in fact, this practice has intensified after being inspired by my Western education and my life experiences. Experience, thus, can be seen as a dialogue across time, with intent, between doing and understanding. This puzzle of consciousness represents a struggle between the epistemology of research and the phenomenology of the 'doing' of *rasa* and its engagement in artistic practice.

1.5 Conscious cognition of emotions promotes the experience of *rasa*

As the mind is one of the most complex entities recognised in the entirety of creation, it has the capability to adapt constantly when exposed to a new thought or even when encountering a new experience (Ackerman, 2018, 2020; Doige, 2007). Feelings are not a private language but rather a language of manifestations understood by those who have learned their conventions and usage, but different *rasas* are portrayed as an emotional expression that resides in the situational factors presented in an appropriate language. Physics tells us that the only way to give motion is to draw on both latent and potential energy and with *rasa* such energy lies in the emotions.

Dharitri Ramaprasad (2013) considers emotional expression, or emotional experience, as the process of self-transformation leading to the principles of living. In Ramaprasad (2013) generalised/generic universal emotions are what Abhinavagupta refers to as *sadharanikarana* – one who engages multimodally with sight (visual), sound (auditory) and action (kinaesthetic) to express/explore the desired *rasa*. *Rasa-bhava* is initially experienced by the artist before it can effectively be explored through various mediums. Ramaprasad (2013) also recognises the soul (*atman*) as *Satchidananda*, meaning *sat* (existence), *chit* (consciousness) and *ananda* (bliss), reiterating the three ingredients that move the *rasa* experience across the time, space and body continuum. My particular interest is in the investigation of the distinctive processes that engage the artist-researcher to self-reflect and introspect by looking inward and becoming consciously aware of the body, mind and spirit as part of a larger cosmic plan and then attempting to engage with this experience in creative artmaking processes that flow from the current introspection but also lead to further introspection.

Indian aesthetician Kanti Chandra Pandey (1965, p.69) understands *rasas* to recognise five levels of aesthetic experience: “(a) sense³³, (b) imagination, (c) emotion, (d) catharsis and (e) transcendence”. Pandey aligns his interpretation psychologically to how the artist rises from one level to another, to produce the emotive experience, that consists of the *Subjective* realisation of a de-individualised basic mental state. Pandey (1965) continues to explain that the artist should be in harmonious union with the situation, the embodied changes and the

³³ The five senses refer to sight, smell, touch, taste and hearing.

transient emotions, that are due to identification with the de-individualised focus of the situation. As a *Kathak* dancer, the application of make-up is an integral aspect of the stage performance, serving to express and accentuate the emotions and expressions crucial for storytelling. This meticulous process, along with donning the appropriate costume, embodies the essence of the narrative and enhances the overall repertoire. According to the *Nāṭyashāstra* this combination of costume and make-up is referred to as *aharya* and is an essential component of *abhinaya*. I utilise facial make-up to harmonise my complexion and elevate my appearance, while the carefully chosen costume and ornaments further enrich my portrayal, effectively masking the dancer and immersing the audience in the dancer's narrative. When the performance is over, however, and the make-up is removed, I am unmasked and return to what I am perceived in the world – namely an invisible being. I am not invisible to myself, but I may be to the audience or world around me, because all they have of my existence is the masked presence that has disappeared, so to speak. This situation also refers to my own experience as I 'feel invisible', mundane, ordinary, blending into the humdrum of life and not feeling *rasa*.

Manmohan Ghosh (1951) and Natalia Lidova (2013) describe the three main categories of multimodality of emotive communication as static (*sthayi*), transitory (*vyabhichari*) and responsive (*satvika*). *Sthayi-bhava* is that emotion that is dormant or latent in the body-mind of the artist until *rasa* is created or called forth. In chapter seven of the *Nāṭyashāstra*, Bharata describes the eight *sthayi-bhavas* as resilient, permanent and constant emotions inherent in all human beings.

“Nahi rasadyate kashid apyarthat pravattate”- Bharata (Nāṭyashāstra: 6.16)

“There is no meaning and essence to anything without any kind of *rasa*” (Mund, 2011).

Rasa does not only provide the essence of art but is the essence of life itself. Art historian and critic, Brijinder Nath Goswamy, in his book entitled *Essence of Indian Art* (1986), emphasizes the persistence of a subtle, yet profound, mode of appreciation and experience with, or through, which one can engage with any artwork. The appreciation and experience can be further explained as the synergistic relationship between the body and mind of a person moving beyond physical beauty and attaining a state of super consciousness because this condition allows the dominance of transcendental vibrations and the observation of ‘being-in-the-moment’ to be experienced. It is through this essence that *bhavas* are expressed and experienced. *Bhavas* inspire the appreciator and aesthetically transform the artist’s emotional state into an exalted state of experience. The experience is primarily considered to be the creator of an abundance of feelings. Naturally, the *rasa* experience of every individual is diverse (although the triggers are shared and communal). On a metaphysical level, the understanding of this phenomenon is that the appreciation of the performance experience involves immersing oneself in the artist’s universe.

1.6 Bhava, Rasa and Colour

Colours are omnipresent and have permeated human existence. Human beings have the ability to communicate (that is, manifest and present) their thoughts, feelings and emotions through the use of colours. Colours take on special psychological and physiological meaning during a person’s lifetime and in performance art colours can influence the aesthetic relish or *rasa*. In (von Goethe, and Eastlake, 1994), German poet Goethe’s affinity for lines and colour,

together with theorising their psychological effect, was realised when he expressed his belief that the combination of lines and colours stirred our aesthetic emotions. For example, the linking of red and yellow brought a feeling of warmth and excitement. In most cases, semiotics (or semiology) deals with meaning and analysis, and not experience. The significance of the different colours and my interpretation of, and/or response to, emotion will be reflected in the various works produced, in Chapter 2. Table 1 lists the nine rasas, their English translations and corresponding colour representations:

	Sanskrit term of Rasa Expression	Clarification of Bhava Emotion	Associated Colour
1	<i>Sringara/rati</i>	Pleasure/Erotic	Light Green
2	<i>Hasya</i>	Humour	White
3	<i>Raudra/ krodha</i>	Fury/Anger	Red
4	<i>Karuna/Shoka</i>	Compassion /Sorrow	Grey
5	<i>Vibhatsa/jugupsa</i>	Disgust	Blue
6	<i>Bhayanaka</i>	Fear	Black
7	<i>Veera/utsaha</i>	Heroism	Light Orange
8	<i>Adbhuta</i>	Wonder	Yellow
9	<i>Shanta</i>	Peace	Gold

Table 1: Colour expression, that leads to rasa moment (Venkatesh and Babu, 2016)

There is a continual play between texture, colour, line and other elements as I moved through various stages and progression of the artwork. When I make the spiritual connection, I reflect on what Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky (1972, p.43-45) posits:

There are two things one experiences when looking at a palette of colors, firstly the pure physical effect on the eye itself is enchanted by beauty, a delight, a satisfaction of the physical sensation....[B]ut to a more sensitive soul the effect of colours is deeper and intensely moving and this psychological effect has a corresponding spiritual vibration and it is only as a step towards this that the physical impression is of importance.... [T]hus it is evident that colour harmony must rest ultimately on purposive playing upon the human soul, this is the guiding principles of internal necessity.

There are prescriptive and descriptive deployments of colours (Jha, 2014, p.203), and the way these are used offers a deep awareness of the properties of each colour and the roles they played in terms of compositions, usage and characteristics of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas gunas*³⁴. Colours comprise parts of sense perception and relate to material entities in my visual vocabulary. Colours are an integral part of each person's sense perception due to certain colours evoking particular memories and emotions. Costumes and colour are highly interwoven and channel into the pursuance of tasting the elixir of *rasa*. They are all strategies to guide the user and viewer towards the moment of supreme creation and supreme tasting. As we learn to understand the bodily processes of emotions and motives, Bharata understood and emphasised that *anubhavas* and *sattvikabhavas* demonstrate our awareness of the physiological manifestation of emotions and its association with colour that it is universal and transcends cultures – thus, he associated specific colours with emotions when he disseminated this knowledge through the *Nāṭyashāstra*. As will be seen in Chapter 2, even though some of my art explicitly represents my world, not all of it is serene or beautiful in the traditional transcendent sense of the mind (and yet it is aesthetic, as defined).

³⁴ *Sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* (goodness, passion and ignorance) are the three universal modes that influence the quality or attributes (*gunas*) of a person's actions. A *sattva* personality is characterised by high awareness, mental equilibrium, sensitivity and flexibility. The *rajas guna* is associated with active energy, aggressiveness, passion and dominance of ambition, hardworking, enthusiastic, competitive and action-orientated, whilst *tamas*

1.7 Rasa Engagement

Richard Schechner's (2001) *Rasaesthetics* explains the work with 'RasaBoxes', which is a technique that allows for the stepping in and stepping out of experience to better understand the emotion and the power of the human body³⁵. This technique is used extensively in Western theatre and drama globally. Schechner uses *rasa* as a tool to better understand how any artist is able to understand and take charge of their emotions and hidden feelings to best express their talent or develop their craft or access hidden information.

RAUDRA (Anger)	BHAYANAKA (Terror)	BIBHASTA (Disgust)
HASYA (Laughter)	SHANTA (Peace)	ADBHUTA (Wonder)
KARUNA (Sorrow)	VIRA (Valour)	SRINGARA (Romantic/Devotional)

Table 2: A large Grid is taped to the floor demarcating the Nine rasas with the English translations (Schechner 2001, p.39)

The 'RasaBoxes' technique is primarily an exercise that has each *rasa* represented as nine boxes in my exercise taped and drawn as a grid on the floor. The technique employs the breath as well as codifying and performing the expressions through particular gestures, movements and facial expressions (*abhinaya*) while feelings are in conversation with the

are the passive, negative, dull, confused, sad, angry, fearful and lethargic individuals who hold narrow world views and appear to be helpless (Kashyap, Basavarajappa, Kumar and Sahithya, 2022, p.556).

³⁵ Richard Schechner (2001) uses the word *rasa*, but he does not place it in italics and does not acknowledge the Sanskrit text. However, I have placed the word in italics to give the word more emphasis and to draw attention to the significance of the word. See also the works of Sara Matchett (2016) on the breath as a catalyst and thread that connects the body, mind, imagination and voice in autobiographical performance. I make the connection here to the elixir of experience, and the 'ordinariness' of life where I consciously can think - Schechner's work is the move between these two concepts. Susana Bloch (1993: 128) employs a similar device for "stepping into" and "stepping out of" an emotion. This thesis does not engage breathwork as a method but engages and acknowledges the idea of how breath is engaged in every aspect of performing life, and as a mindful and spiritual practice for my self-dealing with trauma.

experience. The prompts in my space were engaged through words (wife, mother, academic, dancer, women, death, widow) and music. This process allows one (and me in this case) to engage the visual (mental) associations in the grid through embodiment, projection and performance. With the process, I started with *Sringara* (romantic/spiritual) and ended with *Shanta* (peace). As one steps into a *rasa* square, the breath, facial expression and posture are observed – in my case self-observed – and noted like subtle nuances and movements to invite awareness and change or analyse the dynamics of the experience. ‘*Rasaboxes*’ as a method is extensively used for performance training, and this is not what this thesis is focused on but rather with resilience building. Through this alchemical subject formation and working within the reflexivity of the process I was able to transcend the body-mind space. Schechner (2001) is less concerned with the mutuality of the emotional experience in the interaction between actor and audience, whereas *rasa* is deeply concerned with this moment and the differences between preparing for performance for others and performing for self-engagement. I embody that emotion that is triggered by an experience or event, then I engage all my bodies (physical, emotional, spiritual, mental and intellectual) to make sense of the experience to transform, accept and heal through the process. The reflective process is dealt with in a more detailed explanation in the later chapters.

Understanding of emotional effector patterns leads to a focus on the ability to control one’s body and emotions to provide an ideal platform for greater awareness, self-expression and personal transformation (Bloch, Orthous and Santibanez, 1987). This state can only be achieved through observing the emotions and it is developed through breathing and muscle prompting. Research psychologist Susanna Bloch’s (1993) work with alba emoting shows strong similarities with the *Rasaboxes* technique that Schechner (2001) highlights. Schechner

and Bloch draw on Paul Ekman (2003) work on facial expressions but also delve into, and extend, the full use of the body. Alba emoting, according to dramatist Angela Katherine Baker (2008), is the integration of various rehearsal and emotional exploration techniques in acting, dance, theatre and drama performances. Alba emoting allows access to a range of emotions that assist with the stepping-into and stepping-out process from one *Rasabox* to the next and techniques in emotional effector patterns. Bloch's (1993) work is describing movement, breath and facial patterns that would trigger or elicit emotional responses. Thus, each emotion has a set of triggering effector patterns. This process ties directly to my four-arrow explanation above of bhavas and *rasa* detailed earlier and reiterated as.

Vibhava → Bhava → Anubhava → *Rasa*

External stimuli → Internal emotions → Internal shift → Outward expression of interfaced emotions

Determinants → Consequents → Transitory states → *Rasa*

Rasaboxes isolate the intended emotion in a box, but the effector patterns still have to be learned, so stepping into the box would do nothing unless you had learned the effector patterns.

1.8 Body-mindedness of the Brain

The body, according to the *Nāṭyashāstra*, is central to Indian discourse and practice and for this study, I am concerned with, in my practice, how I mediate the embodiment of physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual attributes to attain the TEM moment. On the one hand,

the Integrity Approach *Objectively* describes one's immediate environment encompassed in its totality, and on the other hand, the Intimacy Model manifests and guides the experience in a *Subjective* way that together enhances the experience, the intention and expression. This research has confirmed and consolidated my understanding of how the artist's body, in the context of a discipline, can become the malleable canvas or site for a better understanding of bodily representation in performance art practices and the self.

Phillip Zarrilli (2004), an actor, choreographer and theatre director who has extensively engaged with the theory of *rasa*, combines the practice of yoga and martial arts Kalaripayattu from India and Taiqiquan Wu from China, and describes four types of "bodies" as modes of experience. These descriptions comprise the surface body, the recessive body, the aesthetic inner body-mind and, lastly, the aesthetic outer body through which I believe all the aspects of the artist's body connects with *Oeness*. I will now expand on the types of bodies Zarrilli addresses: the first is the surface body that is expressed as ecstatic and blissful in relation to the world. It is also directed outwards and is seen as an exteroception in the mode of self-perception in this case. As a dancer, I engage the moment *Saam* or *Thaat* – the first stance in my dance repertoire, that is a pose marking my presence in the space. Marc Leman (2012, p.5) describes the body as a "repertoire of gestures and gesture/action consequences and oriented ontology". *Hasta Abhinaya* relates the story through hand gestures that are closely associated to the 'my finger' exercise I described in the Introduction to this thesis. Leman further explains these repertoires to be the connection of sensations (exteroception) to experience and to body movements (proprioception). The surface body speaks to that area from which one exists in the world as a mode of awareness which is mainly associated with

outer appearance. The recessive body is focused inward toward interoception, an awareness of the inner depths actively related to emotions.

From a neuroscientific view, neural circuits of interoception are important for behavioural, cognitive and emotional regulation across conscious and unconscious levels. Zarrilli (2004) speaks of the third body as the aesthetic inner body, that, once it is awakened, acts as a connection between the outward/inward strata and works as a dialectic that is attentive to the exteroception, interoception and proprioception defined as the kinaesthetic artist's body's sense of movement or action that transcends the *Subject-Object* divide and the artist becomes his or her own audience. Through this awareness, I can heighten or voluntarily cultivate my relationship with subtle modes of interiority to the world, mediated through the breath. Finally, the aesthetic outer body is that body constituted by actions, tasks, performance or the character in performance for the gaze of the audience.

In terms of performance art, Zarrilli (1987) believes that the process of exploring the physical body defines this continuous body-mind shift as a dialectical engagement which takes place throughout a period and this experience is further refined to heightened levels of inner awareness. The body is defined on multiple platforms that govern everyday processes, and this understanding extends the sense of self on a spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual level. The "ability to perceive our bodies is the product of complex multisensory systems, integrating information from vision, touch, proprioception and vestibular systems" (Medina and Coslett, 2016, p.1). I believe that inner awareness can only be achieved because the inner subtle body-mind experiences are cultivated by engaging aesthetic potential

through trial and error and continuous practice. The transcendence of the inner experience can be achieved through meditation and self-reflective exercises.

I remembered the *hastas* or *mudras* in dance practice, as I reflected on these processes while writing the thesis. *Mudras* are hand gestures applied in both dance and storytelling (*katha*) and are employed both symbolically and decoratively. As Nair (2013, p.1) explains, “[a] *mudra* connects the *Subjective* and *Objective* worlds in a performance and the body remembers and repeats it through the embodied thinking”. This sense of *Subjective* experiencing that guides and is guided by the *Objective*, involve theorised and external (seemingly *Objective*) stimuli that bring about the weave, or knot, of embodied learning and thinking. The notion of ‘the gesture’ is central to this study. Gestures occur in time and space by drawing attention to locating meaning and intention, and, thus, by their shape and intensity reveal the gesturer (Carroll, Carroll, and Frawley, 2013). Hand gestures that I realised and practised during my dance rehearsals (the word ‘re-hearsal’, with ‘re-peat’ and ‘re-cite/re-site’, are germane because they imply what exists but, paradoxically, also what must come into existence through ‘re-existing’) gave me clearer understanding of how one engages with closing the gap, looking at the hand making the gesture, looking with the hand at the gesture, looking at me looking at the hand looking at/with the gesture (seen as the opening image of this thesis).

At first, the gestures were learned from an outside source – they seemed to have arisen already in the literature of dance and simply required, firstly, a mimicry and then, with practice, an embodiment. Then, as the gap closed between the seeming universal, to the personalised presence of me ‘in’ the gesture, and then to me, the gesture, and the dance becoming connected in the enticing next moment – I began to see patterns of understanding,

and an emergent move from deliberate and conscious work to an emotional sense of wonder and presence. *Mudras*, the plural form, are embodiments of experience and are able to narrate/manifest/bring into being stories, events and emotions as movement energy, that the performance portrays as almost inherent body knowledge and awareness.

In the course of my life analysis, through emotional and mental processing, a neuroscientific view assists in establishing a root cause analysis of emotional experiences and through tracing an emotion expressed outwardly, understanding the trigger for the emotion causes me to navigate the neural pathway of my historicity and pinpoint the exact external stimuli that later became stored in my body and mind. There are two matters that are at play here: firstly, the actual life experiences and using *rasa* to explore and make/perform them, and secondly, a theoretical doctorate needs to explain in parallel terms the *rasa* process, using Western conceptualisations of what, to all intents and purposes, are universal characteristics and processes (thus, simply allowing me a better way to understand the *rasa* process as part of my own academic hybridity). This body-mind connection has not only had an impact on my day-to-day experience of living but also on my life as an artist. Do I choose not to engage in any activities because it causes a resonating sadness? Do I choose to veer away from dancing certain steps because it shows to me the inflexibility of my arms, a sign that my bodily meridians outward expression and view are the product of the stimuli being processed through my life's experience, happiness and hardship. Thus, the association of *vibhava*, *bhava* and *anubhava* run parallel to *Seeming*, *Being* and *Becoming*. *Rasa*, as a transformative experience refers to TEM, a sense of *Oneness* that arises when all mental and emotional barriers dissolve. In this state I connect with the essence of my true self which opens the,

potentially for me to embody a 'divine being' in harmony connected to the supreme divine essence.

1.9 An Autobiographical Reflection of Rasa

Alternative materialities operate beyond the margins of the modern-colonial order as I experience the 'non-selfness' *Other* within my multiple identities and how the *Nātyashāstra* helps me in navigating my seeming 'non-selfness' or *Otherness as explained earlier*. Attuning to the inner self is a journey of self-reflection and is part of being with purpose, creating synergy and discovering the insider. In this study the 'researcher' and the 'researched' is the same individual and the analysis of the 'self' through the eyes of the '*Other*'.

I start the day with Surya Namaskar (salutation to the Sun), followed by a hot cup of masala tea brewed with fresh ingredients from the garden (mint, green tea leaves and lots of ginger). Making tea masala and following my grandmother's recipe is hard work. My memory takes me way back to my grandmother, fondly called Baa, who taught my cousins, siblings and me how to make the tea masala by drying the ingredients in the sun and grinding them through a stone mortar – moving the two pieces of stone with a stick around and around making sure that everything was ground to a fine powder. As the eldest granddaughter, I could never escape that duty. My cousins and I would giggle under our breath as Baa would walk around with her walking stick and her stern, watchful eye making sure we never took any shortcuts. These activities brought and kept a sense of traditional life in the family home. A sure blessing in disguise even as I now use my electric grinder to prepare my masalas to

date. An aroma that fills the room creates a wave of peace and provides a sense of satisfaction. The stone mortar transformed the spices to create an aromatic tea masala just as my feet would create synchronised dance syllables while tapping and feeling the cold hard stone floor beneath my feet. Becoming a widow and being a single mother also felt like I was being ground by the ontology of life, but in doing so, the essence of my strength and vigour emerged. As an academic working within the confines of a cement building, listening to whispers through the corridors, I feel a grinding sense of complete isolation.

As an artist moving through the passage of time and the impact and influence of religion, culture, traditions and technology, among many other issues, I certainly cannot expect to be that artist – a dancer from several hundred years ago. When I embarked on my area of research, I realised that at work and in practice, what I share has a deep cultural and ancestral lineage, but having been educated in, and into, Western and European systems, I use these theories to legitimise my arguments so that my readers may be able to comprehend the point I wish to convey. The power of colonial practice was to replace the unfamiliar with the familiar and I have chosen meditation and mindful practices to look at my heritage and to draw from the seeming to become more resilient in the process.

Arjun Appadurai (in Belamghari, 2020, p.6) explains that in understanding social spaces in search of an inner real identity, one should not forget the ethnicised body. The body can use somatic markers to restore and understand the validity of one's experiencing of *Otherness* as a site for resolving uncertainty, violation, investigation, destruction and disposal. When I

apply a self-reflective gaze and speak of my race or 'colour'³⁶, I am not defined by any 'colour', not as a Black or White or Coloured person, Indian is not a colour but a 'raced' nationality. However, many Indian women now choose to be called 'Brown' women. I question, should I be classified by colour or race, why cannot I just be a woman? But I experience and feel I am the invisible *Other* and I realise the invisible has no colour. This feeling of being left out, of not being included and stigmatised might be a reflection of my own doing. Could it be the subservient mindset cultural identity that does not make me take charge of who I am and does not propel me or give me the status I deserve!? As I explore my own identity, I take cognisance of what Taylor Cox Jr. (1990) claims, which is that race and ethnicity are constructed and are terms used to differentiate between biological and cultural differences.

Cox (1990) coined the term "racio-ethnic" to indicate a biologically and culturally distinct group as they are socially constructed. I approach the gender difference from a psychoanalytic point of view in that many women are raised to be subservient (Carrim, 2012), to be perceived as victims and tend to mirror images of their mothers and adopt those behaviours. These behaviours are then instilled in their daughters and cascade through generations until the cycle is broken – a view of a state of affairs that I share with sociologists Calas Marta and Linda Smircich (2003) and Ayala Malach-Pines and Dafna Schwartz (2006). I face a similar position within this patriarchal, authoritarian system in which some women adopt passive behaviour styles. When I observe myself as 'non-self' dominated, I look at my seeming and early life experiences, learning cultural values as part of being socialised within a family and community was a constant reminder to be selfless in terms of connecting, caring and comforting others

³⁶ Within the Indian communities of South Africa and India there is an unspoken internal racism and bias. There might be other people who argue that this could be either a pre-colonial dynamic which colonialism sedimented in particular ways in the Indian community and this colourism is of varying degrees (Clair and Denis, 2015).

within the socio-home-work environments. On the other hand, a patriarchal notion was one of supporting the women of the family and 'shielding them from the ills of society'; consequently, there were subtle ways of making me or one voiceless³⁷. This coincides with Boaventura De Sousa Santos's (2007) notion of the absence of the subaltern worldview is referred to as an "abyssal divide", where the *Other* is considered to be irrelevant or non-existent. This position created a sense, a feeling of being marginalised, invisible and unimportant, and this sense moulded my future experiences, resulting in my (and many other Indian women's) identities being defined by what we do and not who we are.

One of the racial-cultural-apartheid-based offshoots was the thinking and attitude of being seen but not heard, in terms of supporting and working with your colleagues, giving family all your attention, compromising and sacrificing yourself to an extent but not raising your concerns or questioning their action because this behaviour creates an uncomfortable situation or environment. I share the view of culturist theorist Sara Ahmed's (2006) table metaphor³⁸ in *Queer Phenomenology* and on being a woman – we are shaped by family,

³⁷ Voice and voicelessness ideas are not the only two different interpreting positions. Realising one's voice as an interior voicing is as valid, however one can externalise a voicing beyond oneself in a safe space. This is done to understand 'voice' not just as an articulation but as a delving into the nuances that articulation and interpretation of the inner/outer voice and of the space/ time engagement that this voicing can take place in. It is not a matter of the silenced or the unheard but the reengaging of a 'voice' within a particular context. One's internal voice is a form of identity and self-expression that can lead to empowerment and to a greater understanding of one's place in society and advocate the articulation of the personal narrative as a form of reclaiming agency. Identity is constructed through continuous dialogue between the self and the external world where individuals negotiate their voices in response to societal expectations and personal experiences (Taylor, 1994). The second binary is the notion of the silences versus the unheard, instead it posits that understanding 'voice' encompasses more than mere articulation it involves recognizing the complexities of identity formation in the socio-cultural context. I experienced a form of power dynamics that influence the ability to voice one's identity (Bourdieu, 1991). Moreover, for me the idea of voicelessness transcends the dichotomy of being silenced or the unheard and invites a more critical examination of how identity is performed and perceived. This also aligns with hooks (1990) who emphasises the validity of the internal voice where individuals can challenge dominant narratives and contribute to a more inclusive understanding of identity.

³⁸ The table is the only object that keeps its position within the idea of the flow of perception and how we perceive this idea within the world in relation to the body and objects through action.

friends, communities, institutions, history, language, social circumstances and space-specific contexts, making our identities fluid that change as we flow and meander through life (Maslak and Singhal, 2008). Here I am grateful to my mother who defied the family rules and became an entrepreneur. Her sacrifices and defiance paved the way for me to go to university and pursue a tertiary education. As an Indian woman, my professional identity as an artist was not taken seriously by my family, because they viewed the arts as seen as a hobby and not as professional practice. Women are given an elevated status and recognition only if they are doctors (or anything else within the medical profession), lawyers, chartered accountants, actuaries or engineers. I felt, and continue to feel, marginalised within my professional circle, because within the arts field there are very few Indian academics as part of senior management. I was the only Indian person in the Visual Arts Department at my previous place of employment for a period of time. I had been employed by that institution for twenty-five years but, unfortunately, I was not given any opportunities to grow at the beginning of my career even though I was more qualified than most of my white colleagues at the time. Most of the academic positions were filled by white colleagues. I maintained a silent, quiet demeanour, developing resilience and working harder to continually prove myself.

I am a mother of two daughters and had to single-handedly raise them without any patriarchal dominance because I was widowed early in my marriage. Within the cultural constructs of my families, I am often kept away from participating in any ceremony at the temple or family gathering because of my status as a widow. I believe that my soul is intrinsically connected to the universal *Oneness*, transcending the constraints of outdated ritualistic superstitions and belief systems. These belief systems no longer resonate with me or have a place in my current personal and spiritual journey. The impact of the social constructs in, and of, themselves

became normalised to my very being until I engaged with the feelings they conjured in a systemised manner via this thesis. Through the adjacent partnering of social constructs that I would not naturally join, I see the cross-filtering impact it had and continues to have on my *Subject-being* and *Subject* formation. For example, being the eldest (and female) of all the grandchildren and being watched over by my grandmother as her guidance changed to belittling and shaming while grinding the ingredients for making tea masala, created a sense of subservience. The irony was in the metamorphosis of the ingredients from a hard solid substance to a soft powered state. While this sense of subservience was good, according to my family values and principles, it was completely unhelpful in the workplace because it opened a way through which I allowed people not to respect my boundaries, resulting in my being taken advantage of. My fear of not taking charge, coupled with that of fearing people in power almost crippled my sense of self-worth. I would, sometimes, feel disgusted and angry at myself, but I would not defend myself or point to the injustices, as I feared that it would result in my not having an income to support my family. This same feeling of subservience interplayed in a racialised workplace has caused defeat, sadness and invisibility, as though I did not matter. This feeling arose because when as a child I wanted to play, I was repressed by my grandmother instilling discipline in me through work. The repression, discipline and subservience interplay in a different context resulting in the expression of different emotions that become positively and negatively reinforced in certain environments.

My hybrid identity lies in the 'in-betweenness' of the fusing of cultural and racial lifestyles. Hybridity originally speaks of mixed races; however, hybridity also relates to cultural phenomena (Cieslik and Verkuyten, 2006). According to Homi K. Bhabha (1994), scholars of post-colonial hybrid identities develop as a result of integrating the differences they

encounter when they find themselves in-between or in “a third space”. A third space offers agency, resistance and an opportunity to negotiate identity (that this is a space not only for *Being*, but one that offers the potential for *Becoming*). My experience as a subaltern³⁹ or hybrid artist, deemed *Other*, is manipulated and exoticized in the process. However, Sarat Maharaj (1994, p.6) states that hybridity should not be seen as a “self-standing fixed term but rather as an interdependent term rechanging as it interacts with the aura of the untranslatable”. As a performance artist, I engage moving beyond the *Otherness* and moving into the *Oneness*, by becoming more resilient and aware of myself. During a performance, my identity markers of artist/researcher/mother/widow and so forth, are suspended as I narrate a story and depict the proficiency of an art form. On stage there is no notion of *One* and *Other* – this differentiating principle is suspended in relation to an artistic and divine pursuit. The ability to differentiate elements of my enculturated, inhibited and unliberated personality to be suspended in time, alludes to and denotes its ability to be suspended in life altogether. This practice is what *rasa* affords.

As a visual artist, I embody myself and become my work through different experiments. The knotting, printing and making manifests my personality ... the pain, laughter, anger and love.

³⁹ The ‘subaltern’, a concept by Antonio Gramsci, refers to a group of people who lack political and cultural power, who are economically disadvantaged and who have to deal with social oppression. He introduced the idea of cultural hegemony that needed to be challenged to bring about change, social reform and counter hegemony. I share the views of post-colonial theorists Gayatri Spivak and Ranajit Guha or the rather subservient woman, especially in South Africa, who has moved from the colonial space from being an indentured labourer, accompanying family members or an independent migrant worker looking for better opportunities (Hiralal, 2010) to the post-colonial phase (Pande, 2020) where the subaltern epistemological interventions gave stimulus to women’s voices and perspectives. This process was important for Indian women in South Africa who subverted and transformed several paradigms within the socio-cultural and economic circumstances whilst negotiating their way through Indian cultural traditions dominated by colonial patriarchy such as their participation in the anti-pass, anti-racist protests, Pande (2020). Despite the adverse situations and conditions that Indian women endured, instead of feeling helpless, resilience re-shaped and re-defined them in all their different roles. However, there are many women who still face such conditions and feel silenced.

I have spent hours exploring, moulding and concretising my experience through movement, observation and reflective analysis so that my inner experience parallels the outer masking or costuming. The *rasa* artmaking journey was/is my pathway to *Becoming*.

1.10 Conclusion

Working within the deep complexities of *rasa*, an Indian aesthetic philosophy, I reflect on my identity within the structures of practising both as an academic and an artist. In the pursuit of a clearer autoethnographic understanding of myself, I traverse a sense of my identity (looking back), an understanding of whom I experience myself to be (a phenomenological enterprise) and then explore what I could become (an affirming journey) because this exploration is documented in the artworks in the next chapter. I take *rasa* as a ritualistic and spiritual mechanism with which, and through which, an embodied form of resilience may be achieved, I attempted to unpack the deep, and often conflicting emotions, that come with my 'self-consciousness' as a way of traversing the path.

The next chapter describes my creative practice, presenting the emerging discoveries and provisional findings that arose from the making of a performance art event. This process is undertaken by capturing my working process leading to the artefact through a series of emergent 'works-in-progress', which include my exegesis (design, illustrations, painting, video, photographs), and seeing my journey unfold through the exploration of *Subject* formation and the type of materials I have explored in a creative performance. I present these insights as best as I can as a daughter, mother, sister, friend, academic, dancer, artist, researcher and trauma survivor. My autoethnography is centred on the integration -mind-

soul and explores my experiences and profound truths in my scholarly journey to the pursuit of the visual arts as a form of research. Based on PLR, the reflective analytical writing style is considered to capture thoughts and discourse concerning the research.

CHAPTER 2 – BEING THROUGH RASA

While Chapter 1 was the articulation of the central aspects of *rasa* drawn from the literature, and understood through a framework-oriented autoethnographic approach, Chapter 2 is a curation of visual arts that traces the concrete manifestation of those aspects and components as they blossomed into a visual incarnation. The emergence, description and analysis of each artwork, which is presented as a parallel chronology or narrative to my life, represents the nodal points of my *Being* that propelled a quantum shift in my life. There are four points of analysis per artwork. These include the Technical (the rationale behind the materials used and what they represent symbolically and culturally); The Narrative (the story through my memories and feelings); the Analysis (an explanation of the aspects of *rasa*, identity and performance) and, lastly, a delineation of the Provisional Findings which represent my higher order thinking.

I believe that artistic creativity is an intensely inward journey that artists undertake for reaching into a journey of self-development and analysis in an attempt to connect to space-time connection with the *Oneness*. I tap into the constitutional dynamics and theoretical underpinnings of the art approach known as performance art. Artist John McKenzie (2001) outlines three different paradigms of performance art that can be seen in the cultural, the organisational and the technological. According to McKenzie, performance can be seen as a discipline and mode of measurement, as a performative power and knowledge in terms of the technical environments and circumstances and as teaching and a form of research. Performance art has become a paradigm for analysing contemporary culture to better

understand human interaction and experience that includes value systems, religious beliefs and experiences.

I am fortunate to work within visual art and performance art parameters as a *Kathak* dancer and a visual and graphic artist. Performance art practice is interdisciplinary, traditional, scripted and unscripted, sometimes random in provisional exploration but well-orchestrated in targeted performance as well as something that is planned with or without audience participation (Carlson, 1996; Stiles, 1996). The performance art process speaks to the invisible, that which is not always shown or known in the public space but has a cathartic life-changing experience for the artist. I explore this research through performance art and through the autoethnographer – the *Kathakar*/the dancer or storyteller.

I equate the *Kathakar* to the autoethnographer because these concepts are the same in presenting their journey through the narrative. The *I/Kathakar* enacts, dances and recites the story, whilst, again, I am the autoethnographer who writes the story from an academic vantage point. This dual process does not mean one is less or greater than the other but the medium through which it is expressed is different. My focus in adopting this approach is not on what the artwork means for the world, but on what meaning it has for me. This journey of self-based transformation is about understanding the process to comprehend myself better, to become clearer in my dealings with the world, and to appreciate my *Being* to create my *Becoming*.

I consider performance art to be based on the time, space, body and mind continua and their associated interweaving. This practice is generated and experienced through the five senses

(*panchendriya*), and, in Hinduism, is connected to the five elements. These components include sight as fire, smell as air, taste as water, hearing as ether and touch as earth (Nair, 2013). In providing this elemental-based connection, I am able to transcend boundaries between the body, mind and soul when I engage with the art in trying to understand *Oneness*. Given that I am the *Kathakar* and autoethnographer, I am, thus, the *Subject* and *Object* under investigation. To understand myself in totality, I need to understand the constituent ingredients of myself, and not only the nodal points of my identity development to fully analyse and rationalize my bodily make-up.

What follows in this chapter is a breakdown of the different elements and their importance in the construction and analysis of the artworks presented. The inspiration behind this section was a pensive moment of discovery and understanding of how breathwork before starting every *Kathak* class created calmness, awareness and presence (see Nair, 2013). This was the impetus behind seeing air as a channel of calmness, tranquillity and the presence of the moment, but also for creation and destruction. The elements are nuanced and layered in that they advance a view of how humans as sentient beings are composed of three aspects, namely, the physical material attributes, the subtle or energy bodies and the spiritual aspects (Pokazanyeva, 2016; Vatsyayan, 1997). Within each aspect is a more nuanced element that defines and governs each aspect. The interfacing of *Kathak* as art and life, embodies the utilisation of each aspect to achieve transcendence, to achieve TEM. Within each step towards transcendence, there is an overcoming of each element and its concomitant representation. Additionally, each element is associated with a particular colour, gesture, costume, sound and *rasa*. For example, fire is associated with red and orange and denotes warmth, light, discovery, anger, destruction and so forth. As will be seen in the artworks, there

is a strong primordial focus and the relationship between elements and *rasa* lends itself in a beautifully nuanced format to a higher interpretation of *Being*.

2.1 Elemental dissection for self-based reconstruction

To evoke in oneself a feeling one has once experienced and having evoked it in oneself, then, by means of movements, lines, colors, sounds, or forms . . . so to transmit that feeling that others may experience the same feeling—this is the activity of art (Leo Tolstoy, 1896, p.51).

In this section I explore the different elements that serve as a pathway to self-based reconstruction, aiming to achieve a more harmonious integration and alignment of my inner values and outer being or external expressions as I delve into cultivating an awareness and presence by engaging the following elements:

Breath: Breathing is a simple but profound exercise, and breathing techniques, together with visualisations, are used to open and align/re-align the *chakras* (subtle energy bodies within everyone) as explained by Experience Bryon (2014) and Jennie Harding (2018). The breath is associated with *rasa*, and through cognitive processes, it links emotions and the idea of *Being* so that one is able to engage fully with the embodied experience (Nair, 2013).

I take these notions of composition and apply them to *Kathak* and life itself. Within *Kathak*, rigour is required to master the physical. Through repetitive movements the limbs, arms and muscles become strong and conditioned, and the movements become ingrained/embodied.

It is only once one has a grip over the physical gait and prowess of the technical components that can one express the story-telling or emotional aspects of dance. Here, I/the dancer, use my mind to focus, and my intelligence to remember, and I set aside my self-centredness to demonstrate emotions without feeling judged for them in the moments of *ananda*, the moments of bliss. TEM is experienced when the technical components become embedded to the point that they are experienced as a reflex action. The aspects of the emotive *rasik*⁴⁰ (one who appreciates and enjoys all the various arts) swell and are manifest easily, for I have read, practised and imbibed the history, the sweetness, the sadness and the glory of the stories I am expressing. I have forgotten what I look like to others, how others will judge me for expressing these emotions outwardly in a society dictated by logic over emotion. In that moment of dissolution, I find my TEM moment. The TEM experience is of absolute respite from all that is, all that was, and all that will be. Being fully immersed in the moment causes a suspension of/melting away of all aspects of my material and subtle notions of self. Using *Kathak, rasa* and autoethnography, I am forced to/return to contend with my constitutive self in all its temporality.

Earth: This planet is represented as the divine feminine energy responsible for love, nurturing, intuition and emotional expression. *Chakras* are vortexes as Keith Sherwood (2016) explains and there are one hundred and forty-six *chakras* that correspond to one hundred and forty-six dimensions within the physical and non-physical world, of which thirteen are the most important *chakras* located within the body-space meridians. Of the *chakras*, *she* is the tenth *chakra*, located a few inches below the feet but part of the total auric field (Harding, 2018).

⁴⁰ '*Rasik*' is the adjectival version of the word '*rasa*'.

In many of the artworks I walk on the ground barefoot. Furthermore, I walk barefoot every day in my garden to arouse my own inner divine feminine energies of loving emotions, nurturing and trusted intuition. At the start and end of every dance practice session or performance, the dancer offers a prayer to Mother Earth herself.

Water: Flow indicates ancestry, a rhythmic flow of linking our past to meandering points of the present. I use water as my go-to metaphor, as it brought my mother on the ship from India to South Africa; the release of water in the birthing process as she brought me into this world and as I birthed my children. Water has, and is, the cleansing, purifying and nourishing element, yet it is transparent, almost formless, and takes on the identity it is given. Similarly, in the sentiment (fluid), which is *rasa*, one is moulded and shaped according to the vessel that contains that body. Water in this narrative links my past, present and future (a process that involves the intersection of truth, power and meaning making in the self-creation process that flow, overflow and develops across each other in the emergent process).

Water represents cleansing, nourishing, calmness and it can also mean strength and power, together with forming links to the subconscious- unconscious mind. Water also has destructive properties associated with tsunamis, floods and the dark black waters (*Kaala paani*) that many of our ancestors crossed and some lost their lives for in their journey to South Africa. I also associate water with my ancestors (Cameron, 1998; Chatterjee and Chatterjee, 2001; Pešoutová, 2019). The purification of self and connection to my ancestors is always performed with water, specifically as a steady stream or the ocean itself in which one can offer oblations and into which one can dip. The water cleanses my energy field. I am drawn to the lotus flower. Its symbolism denotes that one should be *in* this world but not *of*

it, that in the muddy waters of the human experience, the beauty of the soul shines. The leaves of the lotus flower have a waxy surface and water droplets fall onto it and immediately slide off. From the lotus leaves I learnt that whatever difficulty and lessons I encounter, I should let the pain or discomfort glide off me and not become the pain or trauma. Water reminds me of the colour blue and, with it, the throat *chakra* responsible for communication. When the throat *chakra* is blocked, one over- or under-communicates, depending on one's default trauma response. However, a clear and open-throat *chakra* enables clear and effective communication across all platforms and channels and, also, helps one maintain and articulate one's boundaries without repose.

Fire: Like air and water, the element fire has a purificatory and destructive implication. At every major event in the life of a Hindu, fire is present. In my context, and as will be demonstrated, the element of fire was present in my life at two critical life-changing moments: at the hour of my marriage and the cremation of my husband. At the time of marriage, fire has precedence as the chief witness to the union between two people. Our marriage vows are taken before the fire, each step we took around the fire, and I placed my puffed rice into the fire denoting the distinguished identity as a single woman to now one of a married one, a soul in the union. However, the same fire that witnessed my marriage and union, is also the same fire that consumed the body of my husband and rendered his physical being to ash. The same fire that witnessed my union, was now an active agent in my becoming a widow. The destruction of fire is generally depicted in dance, most poignantly when Shiva dances at the end of time to destroy the universe. The vigour of his movements creates friction with the air and ether, and, from that friction, a devastating fire is formed that engulfs the universe and turns it into a dark hollow shell. Additionally, fire invokes a yin-yang

connotation. Darkness is the absence of light. Ignorance is the absence of knowledge. One's shadow-self emerges in the absence of the light/higher self (Vatsyayan, 1997). Fire becomes both the light and the warmth that dissipates physical darkness. Knowledge becomes the fire that dissipates the darkness of ignorance (von Franz, 1992).

Energetically, fire is present in all of us through our digestive capacity and is present in the sacral *chakra* situated close to the navel. When there is an overburden of emotions and fear-based energy, one is unable to process or digest their experiences and gut-related issues arise. Here again, we see the connection between the mental and emotional body manifesting through the physical form. The colours associated with fire are orange and red.

Air: The breathwork performed at the start of dance class calms my demeanour, erases all passing thoughts in my mind and calmly creates a presence of mind and focus. Air, while taking my *chakkars* or spins, causes my outfit to flair into air and creates a beauty renowned to *Kathak*. Air is light, calming, purifying and beautifying. Air can also be cloudy and represent clouded judgement. The colour associated with air is white (Harding, 2018). The element air is related to breath and breathing and reminds me of the soul star *chakra*, located at the top of my head.

Ether: Ether is not as visible as the other elements, even though it is all around us, but it is the element through which sound functions (Dagar and Pandey, 2020). Of all material-based elements that are created, ether is the first to appear and the last to be destroyed. It is an

enabler for the evolution of every other element. In the context of dancing, I remember the importance of space and the utility of space when completing my *todas*⁴¹.

These lessons of space extend to life. I am, through social responsibility, expected to exist in a society, and, sometimes, I am crammed into spaces with people I love, and the experience is fun and memorable. The same small space becomes highly suffocating when surrounded by people I have angst with. At times in life, even when I feel diminutive and my actions seem pointless in the schematic of existence, I am forced to expand my energy and my presence in order to be a good role model to my daughters. Space and ether will always exist, yet our occupancy of it is what matters. Space is important to me for clarity of thought, emotional assessment and prayer itself. I see a parallel between 'needing my space' and the desire for silence, or the colloquial but popular adage of 'a person's energy speaks volumes', confirming the ether-sound connection.

Mind: Where my mind goes, my attention follows. The presence of mind and the mind of presence are yin and yang. When my mind is scattered or feels like a whirlwind, my go-to activity is prayer. Within my home, I have my altar and sacred space, and I bow down before the deities in my altar and in supplication give my worry, my fear and my tension in the form of tears as my offering. In my state of absolute helplessness, my mind receives clarity through prayer. My tears are the repositories of my emotions but are also the repositories of my pain and worry. It is in prayer that I find mental peace. I worship through prayer and other spiritual activities through the course of my day that ultimately become an act of offering with a

⁴¹ A *toda* is a short to medium dance composition.

sentiment of supplication to a higher divine order, as I try to find peace and tranquillity and try to live like the lotus. My altar space guides me to my altered space.⁴²

Intelligence: Intelligence is cultivated and impacts the directionality of the mind to take the appropriate action. This description is informed by the words of Lord Krishna spoken to his friend Arjuna is translated by Prabhupāda, (1983) *Bhagavad Gita* (Chapter 6, text 34) below:

canalam hi manah krsna

pramathi balavad drdham

tasyaham nigraham manye

vayor iva su-duskaram

The verse can be interpreted as the mind is restless, turbulent, obstinate and very strong, O Krsna, and to subdue it is, it seems to me, more difficult than controlling the wind.

In the *Vedic* literature translated by Prabhupāda, (1983) *Bhagavad Gita* (Chapter 6, verse 31) below it is said:

atmanam rathinam viddhi sariram ratham eva ca

buddhintu sarathim viddhi manah pragraham eva ca

indriyani hayanahur visayams tesu gocaran

atmendriya-mano-yukto bhoktety ahur manisinah.

⁴² I am torn between the concept of 'praying' and the concept of 'prayering,' which resonates with the tensions between 'arting' and 'artmaking'. As 'praying' is a verb, an actioning of the concept of 'prayering' is a noun as I pray for my children, family and friends for their well-being.

The above verse can be interpreted as the individual is the passenger in the car of the material body, and intelligence is the driver. The mind is the driving instrument, and the senses are the horses. The self, thus, is the enjoyer or sufferer in the association with the mind and senses. So, it is understood by great thinkers. Intelligence is supposed to direct the mind, but the mind is so strong and obstinate that it often overcomes even one's intelligence.

In dance, I used my intelligence to study and understand scripture, music from various parts of the world, and the construction of *ragas* (musical notes) and melodies of various instruments, silhouettes and movements. I use my intelligence to purify and direct my mind. I adapt the same logic to life, to know when and when not to respond to certain situations. To know when to stand up for myself and when not to, for I instantly understand the consequences of my actions. Yet I also question: does my intelligence and decision-making capacity come from fear, institutionalism, divine intervention, intuition or scenario planning? Is intelligence but the wisdom to make choices for the betterment of oneself and others? These thoughts plague my intelligence as I question what intelligence is. Is intelligence the power to memorise and critically think, or does intelligence entail cognitive adaptability, rationalisation and understanding? I ask what the correct emotional response is, and what does 'correct' actually mean, as I attempt to spiritualise my understanding of intelligence. I find that the exercise of intelligence is coming to the realisation that I am not this body alone, but rather the soul within my body. I am the lotus!

Ego: The ego⁴³ has the ability to magnify one's life and/or destroy it. The exaggeration of the ego can reach a point at which people are dissuaded by those who possess a 'larger-than-life' ego. I wish to define the ego not as an entity in, and of, itself that defines a person's character, but as a leviathan that needs to be slayed so one's divinity can shine to discover humility. I see the ego as a layer of the consciousness of self, as the first and last covering of materiality that prevents one from reaching the full realisation of myself. One of the points in experiencing *rasa* is to not identify with the ego, but to rise above it and reach a point of full surrender. It is in that surrender that *ananda/Oneness/TEM* is experienced. It is the largest and most difficult aspect of oneself to conquer. *Kathak*, as a form of offering, causes a cessation of my ego. I think not of others' judgement, but of my own judgement.

The last *chakra* is the crown *chakra* the end point of the *kundalini* rising. The crown *chakra* is depicted as a purple blossoming lotus. When activated it sends purple energy pouring over the body resulting in one achieving TEM and *moksha* (the goal of obtaining liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth). Attaining the complete *rasa* state of *shanta* and *moksha* has a strong spiritual connotation since it is described as a state of expanded consciousness. Abhinavagupta, in his *Abhinavabharati* equates the performance art experience to *rasa's* spiritual potential as the liberation of the soul. It is in surrender to divine will and unrestrained giving of oneself to the divine that all physical aspects are channelled and directed, all subtle aspects of self either dissolve or are poignantly directed. The untamed senses become dominated and charged with purpose and direction to divinity, to TEM.

⁴³ Ego it is part of the *rasa/Sanskrit* literature and I have adapted all references to ego to the notion of "myself". I have accepted the term "the self" in its place, to avoid getting entangled in Freudian and, therefore, Western conceptualisations.

Soul: This is where the physical body becomes an avatar manifesting the emotional and mental self, where the mind is centred and focused on the task at hand, the intelligence is purified, and the ego is dissolved through the process of self-actualisation/self-realisation (von Franz, 1992). In the attainment of *ananda*, one no longer identifies with the material vessel of construction, but the spirit soul situated within that is the engine of life itself. As a Hindu, I draw on my spirituality and I resonate my thoughts with the interdisciplinary studies of researcher Hamilton Inbadas (2018) whose explanation of *Being* is the association of the *Atma* or soul to cosmic unity with a direct connection to ultimate reality originating from *Brahman* or Supreme Divinity. The following translation of a quotation from the *Bhagavad Gita* Chapter 15, Verse 7 (in Śankarāchārya, 1983, p.497) illustrates the relation between the soul and divinity:

An eternal portion of Myself [God] having become a living soul in the world of life, draws to itself the five senses with the mind for the sixth, abiding in Nature.

The very purpose of life in *Vedic* tradition is self-realisation and the fundamental truth about oneself is the realisation of “*Aham Brahmasmi*”: “I am the eternal soul, and the world is One” (Sankara, 2014) *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*⁴⁴, canto 1.4.10 of the *Yajurveda*.

2.2 Pursuing the Beingness

Pursuing the Beingness of being with the self and with others in the moment as it emerges is intimately embedded in universal human nature. We wish to belong, (a phenomenological and intimate moment), and not simply understand that we should belong (a cognitive and

⁴⁴ *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* was written by Yajnavalkya before the mid-first millennium, approximately 700 BCE, and is linked to the *Yajurveda* that contains the philosophy of the *Atman* or the soul. It is one of the principal *Upanishads* and oldest scriptures and a source of spiritual wisdom in Hinduism.

integrity-driven moment). Here I share the view of philosophers Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (1983), Meera Baindur (2015) and Younkyung Hong (2019) that this *Beingness* is, sometimes, considered to be multi-dimensional in nature. Sometimes silences are threads we weave with our thoughts, actions and text depending on the circumstances and according to the artist/maker-researcher/philosopher, to understand the experience. I began this section by stating that I am both the *Kathakar* and autoethnographer. As such, the various aspects of my body are the *Subject* and *Object* of analysis and need to be understood in its essence and totality as part of the *Subject* analysis and deconstruction for *Subject*-form reconstruction – concepts that are discussed in the next chapter.

The seeming inchoate experiences of the past can be explored to induce a potential or seeming identity, a process that is a cognitive pursuit in understanding myself (and oneself). Memory itself is an inductive process of selection, clustering, emphasis and forgetting. Alternatively, taken from a theoretical vantage point, one can identify/deduce via theoretical framing. By combining both perspectives, I see identity not as an entity (such as a dance) but as a process (such as dancing) and, therefore, is ever emerging. Susan Kaiser (2012) articulates this process as one's *Subjectivity* emerging to oneself and others in the moment of 'being'. It becomes a process of *Subject* formation or *Subject* forming. I engage this praxis as a process for my healing and becoming. Despite being a dancer, I no longer perform publicly by choice. But I am still a dancer and *rasa*, and dance are solely for myself as an offering to the Divine. I do not curate performance thinking about how it might be received, for an energetic link is created by the dancer and audience and all emotions are expressed through this link. Insofar as the audience views the dance, they can only feel as much as the dancer is the dance, is the

emotions, is the absolute lived experience in a series of moments that coagulate to form a performance.

This *Subject* formation praxis as healing extends to all paradigms of my life. For example, in becoming a widow I had to redefine myself not just as a loss in terms of a partner, but in terms of family, identity, relationalities, expectations and dreams. *Becoming* allowed me, and allows one, to access the creative, emergent world of *Subject* formation (Kaiser, 2012). An abductive thinking process encourages one to move towards, or target becoming after the experience. The *Subject* formation, thus, is crucial to understanding the *Being* phases in the journey of *Becoming* since this process is not always transparent but, as explained by Annika Thiem (2004, p.4), “remains vulnerable, transient and emergent – all at the same time”, while influenced by “frameworks structured and traversed by social norms”. The performance art of my becoming is presented below and is titled *Intimacy Recital*

2.3 Intimacy Recital

“Intimacy seems to be one of the major highs of life, whether it’s getting to know yourself in a deeper way, or your partner, or the world and the society that you live in.” Jeff Bridges, *The Talks* (2015)

The *Intimacy Recital* is a presentation of nine narrative-based images that have significantly interpellated *Subject* formation ideas following Thiem (2004) and Kaiser (2012). The *Intimacy Recital* follows the chronology of my journey from becoming a wife to evaluating my Indianness and heritage as a South African female Indian within a patriarchal society, having

art-making and *Kathak* as my only outlets of release and freedom, towards a position and state of mind of letting go of all the exegeses that have contributed to but also consumed my being. Each image is accompanied by a narrative of its significance, the materials used and the rationale behind the image and image-making, as well as a presentation of my self-reflective provisional findings that concatenate autoethnography, a/r/tography and *rasa*. It is important to note that while each of the art pieces is presented individually, the narratives are paired. Creating, destroying, reintegrating and reemerging was a process of both deliberate and subconscious action in many of the works I created. Many times, what I envisioned with my mind's eye and what was physically created were separate images/artworks altogether. While this initially created frustration and dismay, I acknowledge that this, in itself, is the *rasa* journey. The tussle with myself, the reliving of memories I had locked away and wished I would never remember, and the desire for a clear output but being faced with hurdles of the past, created impressions and art I did not expect but later accepted. As part of art-ing itself, I included the thinking and emotional process per image because this narrative will feed into the notion of transferability in Chapter 3. I also felt an inner integrity to the reader to showcase the frustrations and necessity of being vulnerable and exposed in order to surrender. This surrender is a critical part of the *rasa* experience and TEM itself.

The material, that includes all the *Objects* I used, created an overall impression of how I evolved as an individual and became prisms through which perspectives were directed. The materials became a matter of value because some were used in daily tasks. Even though I destroyed some of the artworks, I salvaged pieces of them and reintegrated these into other artworks. The narrative that emerges from this association reveals something fundamental about the human relationship. The artworks were created during a two-year span between

2018 and 2020 because the intention was to complete the study in a three-year period, however, due to COVID-19 and other unplanned circumstances, there were no further developments in the creative practice, but engagement and exploration took place with what had already been completed for the study. This practice also gave me time to rethink putting on an exhibition of works because the focus would shift to the 'final outputs' whereas my work is focused on process and the value of that activity for the artist. I engaged my cultural identity by using the material and *Objects* as entry points to understanding my position in the world. As the materials engaged my human experience and emotions, I engaged *rasa* theory as healing or wounding in the process in which one informs the other.

Intimacy Recital, thus, a performance art-based presentation of identity understood (or to be experienced) through *rasa*. The notion of identity is what Kasulis calls, in Western terminology, integrity thinking. Integrity thinking is evidence-based because it relies on what is tangible and, in this case, describes what is, in pursuing identity. My identity is initially constructed by being an Indian woman during the 1980s and 1990s. I was confined to Indian townships by law and had a low race status (Carrim, 2012; Hiralal, 2013). While I was growing up, not only were there severe restrictions regarding educational opportunities but also access to employment and career trajectories. Additionally, while there are eight classical forms of Indian dance, in South Africa there is only exposure to two (i.e., *Bharatanatyam* and *Kathak*). Being a female and wanting to find a semblance of heritage outside of cuisine and prayer-based rituals, the only avenue during apartheid for Indian girls to be 'cultured' was through dance. Also, because of the trade and cultural bans imposed on South Africa during apartheid, there was limited access to learning Indian music and the different dance forms

(see Kurtz, 2010). As I take on the role of a/r/tographer, to explain the artwork there are two processes in my thesis: the first is the emergence of the artwork or the outcome, which is a process in itself (I have an Intimacy Approach in the making process, but an Integrity Approach in the description and explanation process). The second is the “analysis” of the end-artwork as located in the domain of performance art and an analysis of the efficacy of the entire experiment. My performance of identity *Subject* formation presented in this thesis forms a major part of the research.

2.3.1 Journeying



Figure 1: *Journeying* (Maharajh, 2018)

Journeying (Figure1) (<https://sunelles.wixsite.com/reshma-maharajh/general-5>) represents my feelings of mental and emotional strangulation and capitulation upon getting married and having children without a support structure. My husband and children were not the cause of my feelings of dissonance, but these arose from my wanting to explore the world and all its wonders but having to exist within a highly controlled and restricted patriarchal situation of being as a result of family expectations. Within the artwork, I tried to create the same atmosphere as the day of my wedding and photographed the artwork with my phone and a camera to create a 1990s look and feel. At the time, there were no video cameras or cell phones that the majority of middle-class Indian families could afford. These memories are ingrained in my subconscious mind and created neural pathways of my wedding day and the experience of entering a new space and taking up the role of a wife and daughter-in-law. Experimenting with my lived experience, as part of my artwork, led me to investigate various ways that relate to my performance by exploring the *Subject-Object* nexus within the relation of the transformative aesthetic experience.

The materials I used include white organza, a copper pot, rice, white paper, a gun, bullets, a rubber duck, candles, the *Shri Yantra*⁴⁵, bangles, tea-light candles, a silver plate with red powder and water, a silver plate with white powder and water and a lotus flower candle holder. The process of creating the artwork began by carefully laying the white organza fabric on the ground in a straight line leading from the front door of my house into the lounge. I

⁴⁵ The *Shri Yantra* is known as the queen of *yantras*, and it is the divine mother symbol and source of all energy, power and creativity and *Vedic* sacred geometry. The outer square represents the earth element and is associated with the emotions of anger and fear. The circles represent the past, present and future, as well as the five elements of earth, fire, water, air and ether. The innermost triangle represents pure consciousness and the original state of Being or Oneness (Huet, 2002).

placed the copper pot at the entrance of the door, then I placed a silver plate of red paint a few centimetres away, and, halfway through, I placed the silver plate with white paint. Between the plates, I placed a rubber duck and counting beads and, a little further away from there, a gun with loose bullets. After the silver plate with white paint, I placed a flower candle holder with tea-light candles. I dressed in the sari that I wore on my wedding day (it still looked so beautiful), a gift from my late aunt. I set the cameras up and I proceeded to follow the ritual of entering the home as a new bride. Recreating and, subsequently, reliving these moments, whilst now acutely consciously participating in my own story, created a feeling of unexplainable anxiety and a feeling of letting go. An ordinary day, an extraordinary event: my wedding day and the journey that followed.

I remember the long journey to Durban, cramped in the back seat of a car with space for only half my thigh. It was my wedding day, and I was still adorned in my wedding sari and heavy jewellery. As I got out of the car, my legs were numb, and I was unable to move. It was raining. I was about to enter the family home of my spouse as a married woman for the first time. Standing in front of the doorway, I had mixed feelings as my gaze shifted to a new presence. I was scared and excited at the same time. Customarily, I took my first step with my right foot into the home by tipping the copper pot filled with rice as I stepped across the doorway. I then stepped into a tray of red-coloured liquid (*kumkum*), and I walked into the house. I am considered to represent the Goddess Lakshmi⁴⁶. I leave a trail of footprints as I make my way to the living area.

⁴⁶ Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth, the consort of Vishnu. Lakshmi is also the incarnation of the Mother Goddess who bestows fortune. When a woman gets married, she is considered the Lakshmi of the home, who provides in abundance Bhalla (2007).

The image of white organza and paper represents a clean slate. I lived with my family for all of my life, but coming from a patriarchal culture, it was customary for a bride to enter and take occupancy in the home of her in-laws. In the 1980s it was normative in orthodox homes to live as a joint family – a single family wherein the parents, sons, daughters-in-law and children live as a single unit. Based on the hierarchy and social order, I was a daughter-in-law of the family before being recognised as a wife, let alone a human being with intelligence and agency. The white organza and paper laid on the ground are symbolic of me leaving behind the *brahmacharini*⁴⁷ role and starting life as a *grhsta*⁴⁸. A symbolic clean slate. The copper pot holding rice represents abundance and prosperity and a new bride walking in the red paste taking each step carefully is a symbol of her bringing wealth, prosperity and abundance into the home. Red, as a colour, is generally associated with the Goddess Lakshmi and most brides wear red on their wedding day, red *sindoor* (coloured powder) a red *bindi* every day as symbols of married life⁴⁹. Whilst I consciously laid these artefacts and memories to bare, upon reflection I realise that I subconsciously laid a white cloth on the floor. Whilst red is a colour used to mark a married woman, white is the colour used to mark a widow. At my husband's funeral, the red *sindoor* and red *bindi* was washed off my forehead. My red bangles were broken off my wrists and the only colour I am allowed to wear is white. Is my identity as a widow equally tied to my identity as a wife? Did the rain at my in-law's home the day I arrived

⁴⁷ Brahmacharini is a single devoted female student or child. The goddess Brahmacharini is identified as one who performs penance, a *yogini* and the epitome of knowledge and wisdom. Brahmacharini is also worshipped to attain the strength to strive and move forward without getting disheartened by the numerous challenges in life's journey according to Chakraborty, Kumar and Dille (2020).

⁴⁸ According to Vedic scripture, there are four ashrams of phases of an individual's life. From birth to 25 years a person is meant to be single; the second is that of marriage; the third phase begins at the age of 50 years when a married couple breaks away from society to focus on spiritual practices, and the fourth – and last – phase is that of a *sannyasa* or renunciate where one gives up all materially-oriented desires and focuses on spiritual practices solely. While *Vedic* scripture provides this outline, most Hindus follow the rituals associated with marriage and limit the practice thereof Mehta (2010).

⁴⁹ Red *sindoor* is a coloured powder applied at the parting of the hairline and the red *bindi* or 'dot' is applied at the center of the forehead between the eyebrows.

symbolise the washing away of my identity as a wife? Red is also symbolic of the root *chakra*, as I am meant to be rooted in a new home and easily adopt a new way of life.

As a young naïve bride, I was not aware of the full scope of rituals, rules and processes observed by my in-laws. I had to quickly learn to adapt to wearing a sari every day, preparing and cooking elaborate dishes, serving the male figures and elders of the family first and then only being allowed to partake in the meal once everyone has eaten. My being was shaken, and I felt jarred. I was not allowed to give an opinion or question anything but was forced to accept quintessential patriarchal dominance. The effect of being the subservient wife, a quiet complacent individual had an emotional toll on me as I struggled to speak or communicate my thoughts and feelings. Communication is something I still struggle with today. I was born during apartheid and educated in a post-colonial period. Exposure to apartheid and a Eurocentric curriculum moulded and shaped my thinking. I was taught to express myself and to think boldly and critically. Despite the confines of apartheid, I was exposed sufficiently to less oppressive practices to want to become someone of value. Transitioning to the traditional Indian way of life, philosophy, and ideals involved exposure to practices, within the cultural and intellectual traditions, learning scripture and the vernacular languages (Gujarati, Hindi, Sanskrit) – the multicultural exposure of South African and Indian heritage became a tug-of-war as my sense of Indian identity continued to grow amidst my Western and Africanised way of life.

The fact that I became a mother two-year post-marriage added to my newfound responsibilities and challenges. My role and identity as a wife turned into that of a mother. The placing of the rubber duck and abacus in *Journeying* (Figure 1) reminded me of the joy

(*hasya*) my children brought to my life even though they were in and out of hospital for the first year of their lives. The experiences made me more tenacious and braver (*Veera*) by taking charge and not losing hope.

In Figure 1, there is a gun with bullets placed between the red and white plates and this represents the death of my husband by a bullet⁵⁰. The gun and bullets were placed in the same way as they were found near his murdered body. Silence gripped my body as I placed these objects on the floor. I was trembling as the fear (*bhaya*) gripped me and created wrenched knots in my stomach as I relived the moment. I do not have the strength to repeat the staged process because it made me relive those emotions all over again, a feeling that I want to put behind me.

From the selection of materials to the placing of the *Objects* in sequence, my thoughts and emotions were in constant battle. Internal battles waged and a sense of fear emerged as I tried to stay composed during this process. There was a rush of emotions, and I was overwhelmed with pain as the memories and flashbacks took on their own identity. I started ‘tearing-up – I heard a faint pitter-patter outside it had started to rain and the events were unfolding as they had on my wedding day. Was nature colluding with me or feeling my anxiety and anguish? I began and allowed the process to flow, however, there was an urgency to complete this performance and I felt as if I was not in a sober state of mind because of the mixed emotions I was experiencing. But as I stepped onto the bullets I was jolted from the hazy perplexed feeling to a stark reality. The scream was a cathartic moment of overcoming

⁵⁰ My husband was a victim of circumstance, shot and killed during a hijacking.

that fear and embracing myself as it echoed through space and time breaking the tension and allowing me to take charge of my being. I felt a sense of release and letting go. I experienced a sense of peace (*shanta*) as the glow from the candle reminded me of the *Oneness* and the TEM.

2.3.2 Restraint

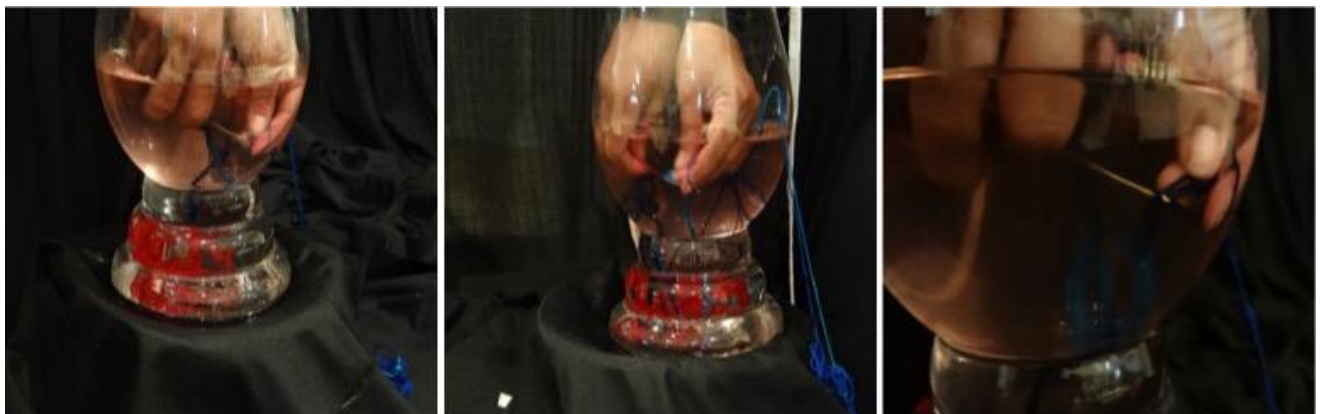


Figure 2: Restraint (Maharajh, 2018)

Restraint (Figure 2) (<https://sunelles.wixsite.com/reshma-maharajh/general-5>) encapsulates my experience of being a subservient Indian woman and how the lack of scope to express myself in a safe and healthy environment/space had a damaging impact on my health and the well-being of my daughters. The materials I used are a glass vase for the dictates of women are visible for all to see; black fabric to represent ether/space and my feeling of being in an emotional abyss; water to magnify my suffocation/feeling of drowning; and crochet cotton and needle to depict me trying to weave a safety line for myself in the struggle against the suffocation and restraint. It also subconsciously symbolises my scream for help by the use of the red and blue thread, as I truly felt entrapped by space and endangered by literal sickness and the psychological disease of judgement and expectation. I covered a small pedestal with

black fabric, then I placed the vase on top of it. I wore black pants that tied me to the surroundings, and a white sari blouse – one that normally I would wear to a funeral. I set up the camera, then proceeded to pour the water into the vase. Finally, I threaded the cotton through the hole at the top of the vase and started crocheting my knots. Both the discomfort and clinking of the needle against the walls of the vase were unnerving and stressful because of my fear of breaking the vase.

The physicality of non-expression, non-agency (and note my use of ‘non-’, for it renders not the absolute denial of, but the negation of) had a physical manifestation and I developed serious health issues during my second pregnancy and being further normatively corroborated into a non-being by the dictates of male members of my family and a male doctor, as evidenced by the following statements.

“Oh God, oh God my child.... how badly hurt is she? I need to rush her to a hospital.”

“My baby was crying uncontrollably...”

“Stop panicking, she will be fine...”

“You’re over-reacting.”

“Don’t make it such a big issue.”

“We are doing a prayer over here; no harm will come to her. You are spreading your bad luck around here.”

“My child needs urgent medical attention” were my cries falling on deaf ears because no one listened to me. A mother’s instinct is the strongest, but I was helpless. I was shouted at and cursed for supposedly trying to ruin a prayer session and bringing bad luck to the family. I was cursed for being dark-skinned and for being an outsider, I was told that I did not belong. Amidst the onslaught of such humiliation, I was pleading for help to take my baby to a doctor

because she was crying non-stop, and I could sense something was wrong. I felt the knots tighten in my stomach wrenching the fibre of my being. I became an outcast in a few seconds, not even my husband supported me. I felt alone.

As the hours passed, the cries of my baby stopped but she developed a fever and her body lay limp. I was scared and did not know what to do. I cried helplessly as I rushed her to the hospital later that evening. She was whisked from my arms. "We need to do an urgent MRI scan, we need authorisation." She had several blood clots in her brain, which could have affected different brain functions. She lay there almost lifeless.... barely breathing... so I started to bargain with my Creator, the universe. Questioning God and spirituality, I repeatedly asked "why me?" After months of rehabilitation, going to temples, churches and mosques, fasting and being in constant prayer, I could feel the mental and physical exhaustion consuming me, but my saving grace was that my child was recovering.

I explore what happens at that particular moment in the context of the space that determines culturally placed conditioning. During my second pregnancy, I remember my doctor telling me to, *"abort the foetus if you know what is good for you, otherwise you would be a horrible mother bringing a child into this world with deformities to suffer"*. Irrespective of the doctor's opinion, I decided not to abort my baby. I was going to bring another life into this world and my daughter was born normal and healthy. But time played a trick on me. Eleven days after the birth of my second daughter, whilst I was at home holding her in my arms, I knew something was wrong - her breath was almost non-existent. This cannot be, not again. I was unable to find a doctor at that time of the night. I called a friend who is a paediatrician, and he asked me to take my daughter to him. I prayed silently. He examined her and said, *"Drive*

as fast as you can, like you have never driven before, put your hazards on, do not stop anywhere, not even a stop street or robot. I will be behind you.” When I reached the hospital, the doctors whisked her away but would not allow me to be with her.

“Please wait outside,” they said. I started panicking. A few minutes later the nurse came out and said, *“I’m sorry we tried everything.”* I fell on my knees crying uncontrollably negotiating with my Creator once again in the icy wind outside emergency services. I kept her, not aborting the pregnancy just so that she would live and now (S)He was taking her away after just eleven days? How could I call the Creator compassionate? I waged war on my faith, again. It seemed to have worked when I saw the doctors rush past me with her in an incubator to the Intensive Care Unit where she stayed for over two months until she recovered. The next few months that followed were extremely difficult because we had to administer special care until my second daughter had fully recovered.

2.3.3 A Quest to Self, A Quest to See



Figure 3: A Quest to Self, A Quest to See (Maharajh, 2018)

A Quest to Self, A Quest to See (Figure 3) (<https://sunelles.wixsite.com/reshma-maharajh/general-5>) explores my identity as a South African Indian woman, feelings of *Otherness* and *Kathak* that not only anchored me to Indian heritage and spirituality but also gave me a voice through motion that I otherwise did not possess.

I walk to the Durban beachfront between the North and Central Beaches, close to the harbour and feel the sand between my toes, grainy and wet. I feel so heavy as I sink into the sand with every step I take. I try to imagine the dock where my mother arrived on a ship from India in 1952, travelling by herself without the accompaniment of any adult family member. As I stood at the edge of the seashore, I heard a humming echo from the sea and felt as if the sea was speaking to me. At first, I was alarmed and scared but I felt a calming, almost embracing, touch and I reflected on the following questions and statements:

Does the sand and sea relationship transgress their duty?

Salt and water – seawater is the surrender!?

The pathway to self-realisation and mindfulness is about letting go to understand the wider problem.

The embodiment of not being separate in the creating and designing.

Everything that matters comes from the inside, from within.

The mindfulness reflection is attuning and understanding the emerging action and composure.

Learning is the work, the co-creation.

The porous experience is the emotional and even spiritual expression.

Creating the whole person paradigm shift.

Artistic magic is a collaboration by getting the work out there, which is interdisciplinary and not dense and inaccessible.

Mapping my thoughts and mapping my processes.

*The significance of this knowledge and what makes it different and how this is experienced,
the emotions as creative embellishments.*

Understanding the lived experience of *Otherness* and the emergence of Self, I am able to experience *Oneness*⁵¹. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (2017) speak of multimodal language to articulate oneself within the field of new knowledge, which is discipline specific. The act of affirming the 'not knowing' and rising and dealing with the disquieting anxiety is a sublime divine gift. The slow insurgency and dislocating of the compass needle allow it to inhabit the uncertainty. Our bodies know what is happening before cognitive intelligence (Otero, Salgado and Moscoso, 2021) and the aesthetic experiment is knowledge-making. Being in the moment of making is understanding the space of what happens before and after the experiment. *Rasa* is the narrative power of change – I think, therefore, that I design and explore through performance art and what makes me 'me' in South Africa. Had my mother not travelled the passage from India to South Africa, would I even be here. Later that day I decided to Google the humming from the sea and was astonished to find that it was a phenomenon that had been experienced by many people around the world on that particular day (Tangermann, 2020). This knowledge acted as another gentle reminder of interconnectedness. The water had a liquid mirror-like reflection and the glare of the refracted light on the seascape created teary-eyed wetness.

Even though there is interconnectedness I am frequently reminded of my *Otherness* in the process of identity formation in everyday life. An understanding of the different experiences of *Otherness* includes the idea that identity lies with power and the relationship with the Self.

⁵¹ *Oneness* here does not refer to the One-Other dynamic, but *Oneness* as a spiritual connection to divinity.

My *Otherness* is a marker of apartheid, being Indian, non-White or Brown and the feeling that I have been (or am still being) walked on/over, along with feeling of being Othered within Indian culture because of how my in-laws and wider society made me feel. Feeling Othered in the workplace was another experience that I had to become accustomed to. Many times, the opportunity to be promoted or even given the chance to advance my studies were hampered by predominantly male heads of departments. The common excuse was, 'You are an Indian, and we do not have any Indian students' or 'Your administrative position does not require further studies' or, sometimes, I was blatantly told the available promotional opportunities were reserved for Black and White colleagues and not for me – an Indian female.

Performance offers me respite because during this process I am in direct connection with the *Oneness* so all the feelings of *Otherness* wash away. The water does not wash away the colour of the sand but co-exists with it in perfect harmony. The ocean is a mixture of water from everywhere in the world and, yet no one discriminates against the water or questions its identity, but as we mix in society we tend to discriminate. This sketch of creative practice as research, as potential new forms, has been the exploratory form and process.

2.3.4 As Above, So Below



Figure 4: As Above, So Below (Maharajh 2018)

As Above, So Below (Figure 4) (<https://sunelles.wixsite.com/reshma-maharajh/general-5>) began as an experiment, that simulated a glorified water feature, that sought to discover what would happen to white organza fabric if it was stretched across a frame and water was run through it. An ‘aha’ moment occurred for me when the water was rendered invisible via the organza, a feeling that resonated with my invisibility. I pondered on this notion of invisibility; I thought about how others make me feel invisible and how I allow them to render me invisible and feel numb inside. However, by adopting a dualistic narrative, I explored invisibility as power, as an agency to go about life doing what I want without anyone caring. The same feeling of invisibility that entrapped me now freed me. I am the water confined

within the water feature; I am the same water freely flowing. I control my mind and direct my emotions. I positively deviate from the traditional pathways of invisibility to power and freedom. This switch, this transition, encompasses *Being to Becoming* – self-reflection to subject formation.

The work entitled *As Above So Below* (Figure 4) is a mixed media piece, that comprises a Perspex box filled with water, nine discs in the shape and colour of the moon, etched with the gazes of the *Kathak* dancer. The materials I used were a 1m x 1m Perspex box, a false floor with 9 LED lights, nine Perspex discs with images of dancers' laser printed on them, a small water pump, water, nine coloured powders and ink. The autoethnography is not primarily about my personhood (a detailed and critical autobiography), but it is what is revealed as I progress through the making process. I become a witness to the action immersed as if I am speaking to myself. I become aware of the journey in and out and how the different parts of the data are captured. The artwork *As Above, So Below* embodies this process.

In my moments of heightened happiness, I used a cursory approach of creating a false floor and adding LED lights in nine different spaces. I took each laser-printed disc of the dancer and placed it on top of the lighted area and filled the box with water. I then took different coloured powders that represented the different *rasas* and put them into the water. I took my index finger and started swirling the water. All the coloured powder started sticking to my fingers and it resembled the Hindu colour festival of *Holi*⁵². I decided to add a small water pump that would make the water swirl on its own. The swirling movements created beautiful patterns

⁵² *Holi* is a festival of colour celebrated to mark the beginning of spring at the beginning of March every year in India. It is rooted in the Vaishnavite tradition but celebrated throughout the world by Hindus and Non-Hindus alike. *Holi* is also associated with spiritual awakening and the eternal love that Radha and Krishna share.

in the water. As I looked at the water and watched the colours merge and swirl around and around, I felt self-healed. The process was cathartic.

I experienced alchemy/transmutation/subject formation, the creation of my happiness using the same ingredients that once caused me pain and hurt. The white of a widow, the white of being an outcast, the white of invisibility, as well as White supremacy, now become coloured because of my purpose and intention. *Rasa* empowers, colour enlivens, and in surrender to the process, I find glimmers of TEM. Theorist Donald Winnicott (in Schechner, 2001) describes the eye as a point of exploring the outer world, between the true and false selves and a true self is the only way one can connect with creativity. This practice can also be identified and interpreted as the ultimate union of consciousness with the Supreme Reality. The inside-outside interplay and merging of the artwork, colour and *rasa* create a sense of curiosity and wonder. Powerful cultural memories can be evoked through the experience of *rasa*. As Bharata aptly states (in Thampi, 1965), *rasa* is the realisation of one's consciousness as coloured by emotion.

I could have included images of my daughters, my pets, my Gods, my graphic design work, personal favourite artworks, but my heart naturally flows to performance as the source of my happiness and creative outlet. It is a space, an expanse, wherein I find and connect very closely to myself. It is also my strongest memory and experience of finding myself and being independent.

One of my memories of my childhood is of going to the hospital every month. My mother never really explained the reason for these visits; however, I think she decided I should dance

to make me stronger and forget about what might be different about me. Through the guidance received from my mother and the support of my school principal, Mr Patel, dance was all I ever thought about. My parents could not afford to send me to a dance school, so my mother became my first teacher. Upon seeing my penchant for dance, my parents decided that I should be given some formal training and sent my sisters and me to live with my grandparents in Durban where we would have access to dance schools.

“Pack your things and please make sure you have everything sweetheart”.

I was given a plastic bag in which to put my belongings, that I further wrapped in a larger refuse bag, because we could not afford a suitcase.

“You will sit behind the taxi driver’s seat. Make sure you don’t fall asleep. Your sisters are coming with you. Keep them on your lap.”

I was seven years old. As my mother whispered these words in my ears, I could feel the knots in my stomach at the fear of separation from my parents and travelling in a taxi full of strangers in the dark. I was sent to my grandfather’s house in Richmond, a very small town in KwaZulu-Natal.

“Be ready early in the morning, the truck will drop you off in Durban where you will start dance classes tomorrow. Your mum is sacrificing a lot for you to become a dancer. Practice daily, be a good student and do not disappoint her.”

These were the words of my grandfather who knew and understood our circumstances and helped to fulfil a dream. After, two weeks of staying in Durban, I cried and begged my grandfather to take me away from the dance class because my teacher was so strict. At merely seven years old, I had to navigate a new life on my own. I had to become emotionally and mentally self-sufficient. Throughout many weeks of agony, my love-hate relationship with dance continued. For years I alternated between two dance teachers and two completely different dance styles until I eventually graduated in *Kathak* in Mauritius. This process was a ten-year-long journey and I fondly remember the words of Charles Darwin (in Chang, 2006, p.312), “It is not the strongest of the species that survives [...] It is the one that is most adaptable to change”. As an artist I would see these images in my mind’s eye and begin to understand the nature of things by representing them through my paintings, prints or installations. It is through my *Kathak* training that a deeply embodied experience of learning and performing informs my research and creative practice. Learning dance gave me the gift of resilience – my strength to endure life’s challenges, persevere and remain composed and dignified were all born from my relationship with dance.

In *As Above So Below* (Figure 4) I intentionally placed the *Kathak* images in a circular disc because the white circles reminded me of the moon. The moon governs emotions and by curating the artwork, I see myself as an active agent of my destiny with control over my emotional well-being. I, furthermore, placed the discs in a star formation, without the lines, to invoke the elemental symbolism and the adage, ‘As above, So below’ – that encompasses the need to draw upon higher principles and ideals and import them into everyday life to achieve a higher state of consciousness, to achieve a *kundalini* rising, and reach TEM. In both *A Quest to Self*, *A Quest to See* and *As Above, So Below* (Figures 3, 4 above), I deal with my

emotional reflection and nuances of *Subject* analysis to engage with *Subject* form. Consequently, *Gaath -The Knots* and *Unshackling* (Figures 5, 6 below) engage with my finding mental freedom and breaking away from the strong shackles and entanglements. Both artworks will be analysed in tandem.

2.3.5 *Gaath -The Knots*



Figure 5: *Gaath - The Knots* (Maharajh, 2019)

My artworks *Gaath - The Knots* (Figure 5) and *Unshackling* (Figure 6) (<https://sunelles.wixsite.com/reshma-maharajh/general-5>) are inspired by my breaking away from patriarchal norms and societal expectations and taking ownership of my life on my terms. I trample upon and break away from ideologues that shackled me to an antiquated way of thinking. I find my agency based on the mental imprisonment I experienced and released myself from. These artworks eventually transformed into a single performative

piece. The materials used are similar to that of *Journeying* (Figure 1 above) and, thus, represent a full circle from capitulation and strangulation to freedom. These materials include white organza, red paint, bangles, white string and crochet cotton.

As mentioned earlier, the body is constitutive of the material elements, as well as the subtle elements of which the mind, intelligence and ego are composite. Steve Biko (1978, p.92) in a speech delivered in Cape Town in 1971, stated that “The most potent weapon in the hand of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed”. Drawing on Biko’s powerful words, I question my oppression as a result of Indian-based patriarchy. Upon marriage, I was bound to new rules and rituals, and yet I was the one forced to adapt to an entirely new life, I was seen as subservient and given no support, kindness or compassion. As a mother, I created a life that broadens and enriches the family, yet upon becoming a widow I am looked down upon for being a single mother. Being a widow and a single mother are both incredibly difficult, yet the society I belong to, instead of providing a supporting hand, belittles and ostracises widows. In an academic environment, I experienced an uncomfortable feeling of being ostracised as well because I was unable to pursue research because of the political agendas within the department management structure. For decades I was able to withstand and tolerate this treatment but like any human being, I reached a breaking point. *Gaath - The Knots* (Figure 5 above) represents these emotions. Furthermore, I see these images as the *rasa* moment of my experience. *Bhava* is the latency of emotion that is kept within and interacts with the mental and emotional body. It processes scenario plans and, to a large degree, prevents an outburst of emotions. Through a simultaneous literary and creative outlet via this thesis, my *bhava* was able to be expressed outwardly as *rasa* and the build-up of TEM ensued.

In *Gaath - The Knots* (Figure 5) I use organza fabric and place my red handprints (signifying the welcoming of the bride as a goddess into the home). At the same time, I explore the notions of purity, shame, humiliation and invisibility brought about by my racialised and intra-Indian *Otherness*. I also had bangles tied to a knotted crocheted dome to acknowledge and liberate myself from the ostracization of widowhood. The crocheted dome hung above me to symbolise society's opinions constantly hanging and looming above me. The continual preparation and practice – from collecting the bangles, purchasing white organza and crocheting the dome – have impacted the *vyabhicharibhava phase* as explained in Chapter 1 of this thesis that engages my artist's body, mind and soul on all levels of intervention, including the emotional and intellectual side, building tolerance, tenacity and resilience. In this context, the colourful bangles represent the fun, sad and responsible aspects, the organza fabric my invisible identity and the crocheted dome the rules that one is knotted to. The art process begins when each bangle is knotted and hung to the floor from the crocheted dome. Meters of white organza fabric covered with my red-stained handprints are draped and knotted and then used to and circumnavigate the crocheted dome.

This transformative process in understanding my own embodied experience of resilience was cathartic, the breaking away from Hindu cultural and societal norms and stereotypes of tying and untying the knots that I expressed in *Gaath -The Knots* (Figure 5 above). Tying the knot is a very cursory way of the simple tying of the knot for the bride and groom to circumambulate the sacred fire during the wedding ceremony, joining one soul to the other. As my journey progressed, these knots took on a different meaning. They represented the period when my children were sick and hospitalised, when my husband died, when I was humiliated by my colleagues for being an Indian woman trying to step into academia and put in a position that

did not value my degree (received from an institution for non-Whites during apartheid) even though I was more qualified than most of my colleagues at the time. The personal experiences of life and the relationship between the knots also represented the subtle energy systems within the body, the *chakras* that need to be functional optimally and allow the feeling of *ananda*.

I explored the placing of my red-dyed handprints on the fabric with just the use of my left hand as the wife is always on the left-hand side of the husband, because he represents masculine energy and she feminine energy (Pal, 2019). The joining of hands (*hasta milaap*) during the ceremony is the combination of the wife's creative and loving nature to the husband's firmness and authority which leads to success in auspicious ceremonies. The kinetic movement of dancing and breaking the bangles under my feet was symbolic of overcoming my fear, anxiety and anger, and accepting my resistance and taking control of my emotions. The action of dancing on the bangles that followed fleetingly expressed the pain and danger of the performance.

My *Otherness* is central to my consciousness. The white organza represents many aspects of my identity as a South African woman. The fluidity of the cloth represents the flexibility of my movement in navigating many roles. The colour represents purity, merging with the Divine that is achieved during TEM, and engaging with performance art. However, most poignantly, the white organza fabric represents a canvas but, the use of the red handprint – my identity – that is invented, imagined and shaped through societal interpretations and conditioning, redefined my being. Homi Bhabha's (1994, p.66) idea of imposed colonial discourse enforcing distinctions between the self and the other comes to mind. However, within the context of

this study, the South African representation of the *Other* offers new ways to create a multifaceted framework in a diverse socio-economic, political and cultural society. My *Otherness* is steeped in many layers of cultural and social *Subjectivities* and perspectives (Maharajh, 2022, p.9).

2.3.6 Unshackling



Figure 6: *Unshackling* (Maharajh, 2019)

In the creation of *Unshackling* (Figure 6) (<https://sunelles.wixsite.com/reshma-maharajh/general-5>) I placed an assortment of mainly red bangles on a cement floor and, wearing black leggings and a red dress, performed *Kathak* footwork on them. Bangles, in Indian societies, have a significant role because they express the different stages of a woman's growth. From a toddler to a teenager, one would wear black bangles to ward off any evil eye; green bangles represent luck and fertility; red bangles classify the status of a married woman, as well as representing energy and prosperity; yellow bangles denote happiness; orange stands for success; white for new beginnings; silver denotes strength; and gold is the ultimate

symbol of fortune and affluence. Thus, my connection to the earth, a sense of grounding since for me all the elements emerge from the earth and manifest in different forms.

One of my first memories of *Kathak* was the pain of being beaten with a cane on my feet when my footwork was out of sync. This pain is stored as muscle memory and again 're-practised' with the pain of loss. (Nair, 2013) suggests that the body is always about practice, and practice is the only way to access the body. The stamping on the bangles in *Unshackling* -Figure 6 represents acceptance of heritage and culture. I wore red bangles the day I was married and felt entrapped within a patriarchal system. During this performance, I trample upon those bangles, not out of disregard for my heritage, but for people's ill-treatment of me in the name of culture and heritage. There was also pain and bleeding in this process, as there is in most cases of reckoning and healing. The feeling of fear and punishment was trapped in my muscle memory and through the making and breaking processes, I felt relieved and ready in my quest for *Becoming* through the *Subject* formation process. All of these experiences have shaped me since I was born and have created a particular subject formation and through these daily experiences, I explore the possibility of reformulating a different subject formation: one that excludes the 'non-selfnesses'. Traditionally every dance class starts and ends with a prayer to Mother Earth. Subsequently, I ended my release by praying to Mother Earth for the courage to stand in my strength, just as She stands in hers.

2.4 Pre-Becoming

2.4.1 The Invisible

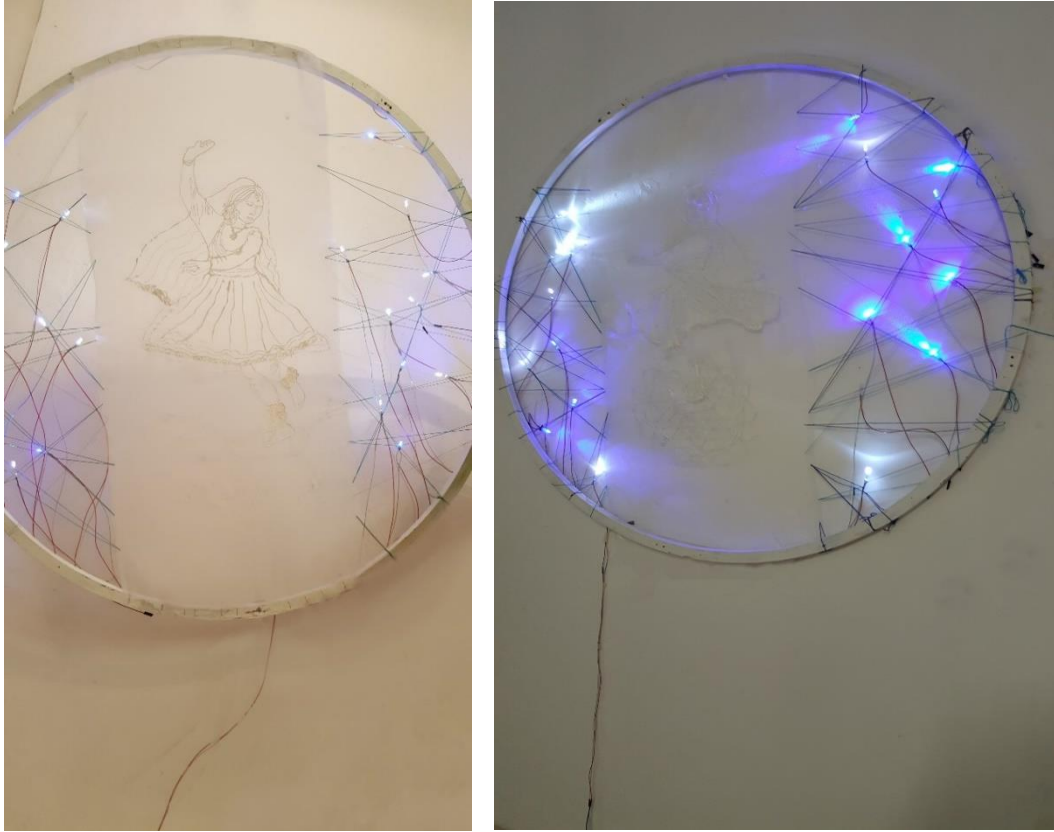


Figure 7: *The Invisible* (Maharajh, 2019)

The embroidery rings seen in *The Invisible* (Figure 7) (<https://sunelles.wixsite.com/reshma-maharajh/general>) were brought from India by my grandfather. My grandmother and aunts used to embroider duvet covers (*gudris*) when sitting around the embroidery circle and sharing the day's events and activities. During this process the fabric of the duvet covered the entire ring but when I engaged the fabric during the creation of the above artwork, I took the white organza and spread it across the middle of the ring leaving the sides exposed. The feeling of being exposed, strung together by lights representing shimmers of hope, has a direct association between *rasa*, the body, emotion and meaning. In the act of putting the

artwork together, I realised that the emptiness in the ring without the lights made me feel exposed. Interestingly, I did not feel vacant or minimal, nor did I want to place myself as the focus, but I felt exposed.

The Invisible (Figure 7) is a 1m x 1m wooden embroidery ring over which white organza fabric (with a drawn image of myself in *Kathak* attire) is stretched across the middle of the ring and threaded with LED lights. As I painstakingly threaded the lights, I reflected on how delicate and fragile life is and the interconnectedness between oneself and the *Other*. The inclusion of the LED lights represented shimmers and glimmers of hope. The juxtaposition of the emptiness, feeling of exposure and the lights, showed the positive aspect of contrasting feelings because the feeling of exposure warranted not a feeling of wanting to cover up, but rather a desire for hope. Even if one feels invisible, the responsibility of keeping things together is part of the play of life. I visibly saw, and tangibly felt, the connection between *rasa* (the outward expression), emotion and the attribution of meaning.

Here I refer again to the idea of the gaping garment (discussed in Chapter 1 above) because it talks about vulnerability of feeling and being exposed and how I dealt with vulnerabilities even through a state of *Being*. The issues discussed in *The Invisible* and *Refracted Energy* (2019) were largely experimental and activated physiological components of particular emotions associated with *rasa*. *Rasa* provided a clearer map when working with emotional experiences as a tool for embodying reflections. Touch is an important experience when working with different materials during the decision-making process. The skill and tacit knowledge built on the embodied experience in the reflective process allowed me to understand the meaning related to my abilities and limitations. Apart from the emotions that

surfaced through the tactile experience, there is a decision-making and problem-solving ability to re-negotiate and re-member the knowing as the body maps the exploration to overcome these challenges. During the art-making process, there are many unresolved emotional experiences which surface and remain unresolved. My creative process can be described as altering positions of consciousness and serendipity that allowed intuitive waves to flow with time for reflection during intermittent breaks.

2.4.2 *Refracted Energy*



Figure 8: *Refracted Energy* (Maharajh, 2019)

In the moments of making and observing the *Object*, what I observe as the human condition is that experience incorporates art, dance, philosophy and the chemistry between all of these elements. I call this process 'refracted modernism', that becomes a term based on the

dissolution of traditional ways and the impact this practice has in dealing with family, life and work-embodied identity (this process is not only about letting things happen but actively engaging in one's biography). This refracted identity involves making sense of moving from the relational sense of self through to the exploration of the self into a deeper engaged valuable self within the multiple roles and personas in the journey of life experiences. In the multiple embodied roles, these experiences are refracted through different, divergent lenses. The refracted light was a representation of my dispersed feelings in this research trajectory, through experimenting with the material.

Refracted energy (Figure 8) has three wooden light boxes, with dance images on tracing paper at the front, geometric laser cut *yantras* at the back and low voltage lights. I decided to create a trilogy of three dance images on tracing paper, with each dancer in different moments of *Saam*⁵³. I then constructed the wooden boxes (40cm x 30cm x 10cm) in a rectangular format to fit the images on the box. I carefully placed the globes in every corner of the light boxes, with a tape across the globes, so as to control the amount of light that passes through them. Once I had completed these actions, I placed the different laser-cut *yantras*⁵⁴ at the back of the light boxes. The reflection of light was refracted through the *yantra* and felt like my identity.

According to Robin Nelson (2010), the body exists 'as both and through' the idea of intermediality, because it engages space and time in its multiple representations of the way

⁵³ *Saam* is the first and last beat of a graceful movement, stance or pose in the dance sequence.

⁵⁴ A *yantra* is a diagram made up of lines and geometric patterns used during worship and ritual that have mantras embedded in them. The *yantra* is energy paralleling the cosmic evolution, symbolising the principles and elements of the universe, the human body and consciousness according to Dongart (2016, p.22).

the body is constructed and manifested. This idea emerges in race and Black feminist theories from the 1990s as well (see Patrician Hill Collins’s book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*). These discoveries I made while working in the studio were not about finding a solution to problems but addressing the emotional challenges through making and doing, and this knowledge is the critical reflection that results in the TEM.

2.4.3 Letting Go, Letting Flow



Figure 9 : Letting Go, Letting Flow (Maharajh, 2020)

The *Letting Go, Letting Flow* (Figure 9) (<https://sunelles.wixsite.com/reshma-maharajh/general>) artwork represents me letting go of the old version of myself that accepted who I was told to be. I stand on a green field, with the wind blowing and offer to surrender myself to all that was. At the same time, I gather the lessons, wisdom and gems of remnants of my old self and re-position a life predicated on all things that are joy contributors. In my moments of surrender, I accept that life will never be without problems and difficulty, but through art and *Kathak*, through *rasa* and through the desire to reach TEM, that equi-position to the universal structure is where TEM resides. I accept, in this process, that levels of consciousness do not exist in a material plane, higher and lower than ourselves, but it is a state of *Being* that one cultivates.

I wore black pants and a black sari blouse, and I took different coloured long scarves (*dupatta*) with me to scenario of this performance. I placed the scarves down on the grass and connected with my breath as I sat in silence. I heard the insects and birds chirping in the near distance and the long grass slightly rustled in the wind. I realised that I am not apart from nature, but very much a part of nature. This realisation ushered in an acceptance of the cyclical nature of life itself. Some aspects of life will be perennial: once a mother, always a mother, other aspects are less constant. I think of my career and how at times it felt stagnant and dry and other times full of life, beauty, growth and prosperity. Similarly, in my *sarangati*, in my surrender, I hold no animosity towards anyone or anything but offer gratitude for the lessons that have brought me to the position of equi-position. The leviathan has been slain and I experience my Being, I experience TEM.

I pick up the scarves and throw them into the wind, as I would if it were *Holi*. My life is coloured stroke by stroke and, at this moment, I step back, look at the canvas and feel gratitude. The sky slowly changes from baby blue to a myriad of colours. My *Being*, my point in life, my identity is coming to a close. I must absorb its beauty and imprint the memories. The sky is colourful, I am wearing black, and, in the calm and depth of darkness, I will reinvent myself.

The *Letting Go, Letting Flow* artwork (Figure 9) uses colour and other elements to demonstrate the importance of acknowledging emotions and memories, experiencing how emotions influence our human experience, and through the assimilation of these experiences, one is not meant to hold onto emotions because they are motions and meant to flow and, in that moment of flow and letting go, TEM and *ananda* are achieved – absolute bliss via the achievement of inner equilibrium. It encompasses experiencing all *rasas* fully in their moments, however long those moments may seem, and letting go to allow for the malleability of self to evolve to higher thresholds of happiness and TEMs. Ravi Kumar (2015) explains *Being* as a configuration of trances and impressions, not necessarily left by human interaction in the form of emotion and reason, but between the rational selves or between the emotional selves.

2.5 Conclusion

The *Objective* of Chapter 2 of this thesis was to interpret my *Being*, my lived experience, through the lens of *rasa* and the dynamism of performance art. This chapter interrogated my personal, professional, artistic and creative discoveries in the making process. It documented

and explored the emergent or the '*Becoming*' process of the (my) artist's body as (projected but synthesised from *rasa* theory) the researcher's body. This chapter set up the intimacy of the artist as a creative being engaged in a project, and the integrity of the researcher's body attempting to make sense of the emergent phenomena that traces, presents and discusses the performance art phenomenon. It described the actual creative practice, presenting the emerging discoveries that arise from the making of the performance art event. According to the *Shaivism*⁵⁵ school of thought, an equilibrium is created when the positive and negative energy sources meet. However, according to my understanding, the meeting or union of positive and negative creates dynamism.

This chapter demonstrated that through privileging the intersectionality, and later amalgamating the positive aspects of life-based understanding interfacing with negative emotions and situations, performance art can become a dynamically driven tactile, kinetic, visual and auditory interwoven set of creative processes as the principal lens of self-reflective analysis that creates an equilibrium of self. This sense of equilibrium is important, for it neither negates the past nor engages in intended forgetfulness but enables an acceptance and surrender that primes all aspects of the body for the *rasa* experience. The engagement of all aspects of oneself, all future postulations, and all forms of ideologies that traditionally inform one's sense of identity, need to be made peace with because it is in the state of calm and peace that higher order principles, thinking and experience can be felt and lived within the human vessel. Being is, thus, an acceptance of all that was, all that is and all that will be, and in this state can the transition towards *Becoming* occur.

⁵⁵ One of four spiritual and religious lineages that originated and continue to predominate in India today. The lineage was started by Lord Shiva incarnated as Sri Shankaracharya who believes that the soul merges into *Oneness* at the time of death.

CHAPTER 3- BECOMING

Writing *Becoming* produced feelings of confusion and uncertainty. It became a space of *Being* where my personal growth and change engaged with a myriad of experiences whilst I was trying to deconstruct and reshape myself and find a new space in my journey. Upon reflecting and revisiting this multi-pronged journey, as a mother, academic, dancer, artist, spiritual seeker, emotional being and intellectual, I reflected on my experiences, looking for a way to cover my wounds while choreographing my journey forward. In hindsight, standing by the values I wished to imbibe, and trusting my instincts and processes, provided the opportunity for the landscape to change and I was able to share my experiences with others, a healing process. My *Becoming* was not a singular 'aha' moment filled with proverbial unicorns and rainbows but was a highly cognitive and emotional-oriented journey during which I was breathing into myself and being breathed at the same time – a stretching of self to allow a remoulding. According to Kasulis (2002), *Being* is defined in a dialectic – I am because of what I was, and what I was is defined by the things that affected and shaped me and *Being* manifests in the post-experience description but not in the moment. For *rasa*, following Kasulis, *Being* is an intimacy moment that is, inevitably, simply 'present' in the experience, and dissipates upon analysis. I purposefully use my identity as a seeming moment of realisation as a basis to explore self, so that, through making, a process of *Subject* formation can materialise.

Chapter 3 or '*Becoming*' is an expansion of my *Subject* formation trajectory. In order to map out the *Subject*-form trajectory, I ask the following questions: What does *Becoming* mean to me? Why is *Becoming* important? What is the interplay between *Becoming* and *rasa*? How does *Becoming* promote a change in ideological review related to socio-culturalism and decolonial thought and practice? How does *Becoming* impact performance art for both myself and the audience? Why is *Subject* 're'-formation important to this autoethnography, literary and art pursuance?

To answer these questions, this chapter will begin by firstly explaining the importance of *Becoming* and its link to transferability. This section of this thesis, as it has developed, has acted akin to the 'Munchausen effect' (the Baron who pulled himself up by his bootstraps). I recognise that other women, South Africans and mothers are similarly affected by the negative interplay of mental and emotional self-based historicity, and I hope, like dance, like arting, this literary functionality will not only aid and awaken the necessity of 'pulling' oneself out of oneself but also provide the tools as to how one can idiosyncratically do so. This notion of transferability is a literary function of the performer relation, an invisible thread that binds one for a fractional moment in time that has a ripple effect on the mental and emotional body that creates a sense of upheaval, peace and plenitude. Secondly, this chapter will knead out the relationship between *Becoming* and *rasa*. This action is critical in that through *rasa*, as a theory, ideology and practice, I have found *Oneness* and TEM, and the praxis of transferability deepens in that I apply the same presence of mind, surrender and absolute self-acceptance to everyday life. The person I am on stage is different, yet non-different, from the person off-stage, and I take the non-difference and practice it in everyday living. Not only is this research

novel in that it engages in identity deconstruction and identity analysis through *rasa*, but in this chapter it will also identity construct and position through *rasa*. *Rasa*, as the emotional expression post the stimuli and post-*bhava*, is the ultimate expression of emotion felt by oneself and expressed outwardly. Thirdly, the focus will be on assessing the impact of *Becoming* on the change in analysing and viewing the socio-politico-cultural constructs that are self-constitutive. 'Being' was a pivotal chapter in my life, owing to its sense of self-confrontation of trauma and character-building. As I journeyed through the *Intimacy Recital* of creating the artworks, I initially felt dense, heavy and burdened but ended the process with gratitude, acceptance, surrender and release as I engaged with the central living strategies. My understanding of the central living strategies was to surrender to the unconditional acceptance of circumstances by embracing both the negative and positive experiences. This involved recognising the limits of personal control and allowing life to flow without the need to control outcomes by finding peace in the present moment regardless of my personal preferences. I could only achieve this when I surrendered to a universal will or higher purpose, which led to insights of life flowing through myself. This surrender did not equate to apathy but by remaining open to whatever results arose, even if some factors were beyond my control. This very form of releasing emotions and experiences allowed me to connect with my inner wisdom and navigate life with greater clarity and transformation. It was my TEM. In this chapter I navigate and postulate how my view of self-specific social constructs has changed via autoethnography.

Through the *Subject* formation, I discovered three points of criticality that are presented in detail in each of the sub-sections below. Firstly, we live life being conditioned by various ideologies and practices as we become adults and live as mature beings. Aspects of identity

are, sometimes, questioned in isolation, but very rarely do they prompt a radical change in a person unless a radical event catalysis change. Secondly, in the South African context, a significant amount of literature and news is economic/capitalist, racial/colonial/apartheid, and gender-related for the probing of identity rootism. The intention and the necessity of Chapter 3 bring into question the acute level of consciousness required for end-to-end *Subject* form analysis. The self-confrontational process is both jarring and beautiful and prompts a significant elevation of self. Third, *Becoming* is also a process of character de-cluttering, a mental, emotional and psychological 'spring clean' during which an assessment is made of what memories are still relevant to the person I am today, what proverbial artefacts still hold worth and are they of value to the space that they occupy? The process is a shift from emotional and mental maximalism to one of minimalism, in order to refill oneself to a maximal level but with a consciousness of newness, freshness, vibrance and transcendence. Chapter 3 also allows a questioning of the *Subject/Object* relationality. I ask myself per binary, per social construct if I am an *Object* or a *Subject*? In discourse and narratives of colonial, post-colonial and decolonial thought, I no longer feel like an *Object* but a *Subject* for I now actively infuse my identity with a sense of self-worth and dignity. I have achieved this change via culturalism – dance, art, clothing, heritage, food, language, literature and so forth, to reach the decolonial living experience. A more sustainable exploration of the challenges of post-colonial logic enables epistemologies that explore the idea that they are not an alternative methodology (to Western thought) but rather its engaged with by people that are pre-colonial with their own currency, ethnicity or cultural background. Performance art has been drawn into it as a decolonial method, but it is not really decolonial because it existed prior to the colonial period, but has been used as 'decolonising' methodology. As I explored each social construct in which I located myself as a *Subject/Object* on the binary scale, I also questioned

the necessity of having a position on it. In the course of navigating a new *Subject*-form, I realised that my position and mothering nature is a central and core aspect of my identity.

3.1 Becoming and Transferability

Before actualising the relationship between *Becoming* and transferability, I wish to recapitulate the meaning of transferability itself. Transferability, in qualitative research, is the phenomenon or findings described in one study that is/are applicable and can be useful to theory and practice and is/are extrapolated for future research (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams and Blackman, 2016, p.17). As noted in Chapter 2 above, there is a congruence between me as the *Kathakar* and the autoethnographer in that both relay a journey through a narrative. The notion of transferability is important in Chapter 2 and also in the context of Chapter 3 because it foregrounds a third application, that is, a provisional “toolkit” or pathway for myself of *Subject* construction analysis, somatic response as a form of trauma finding, the adoption of certain self-applicable practices to aid in one’s discovery of TEM, as well as the adaptation and presentation of *Subject*-based reconstruction through mental and emotional release and re-findings. Thus, for me, moving beyond body/mind limiting dichotomies that shaped our human experience and the subject/object split often used to distance ourselves from our own embodied experience, can be refigured to acknowledge the inherent interconnectedness of our physical, mental and spiritual selves and transcend through a holistic approach. More so, through this process, we are able to challenge the Western divide between the sacred and secular to better understand ourselves and others.

The act of writing about transferability draws my memories to my first dance performance, as well as my dance graduation. In both instances, irrespective of how much I had prepared, and how many years I had dedicated to the craft, I nonetheless suffered from ‘imposter syndrome’ (Levy, 2022) – I felt that I would never be good enough, but upon an anchoring of self on stage, all thoughts, all sounds and all people melted away and I not only embraced the divinity inside of me, but I also expanded it for the audience to experience. The hope in baring my soul and sharing my most vulnerable traumatic moments is that it will connect with the reader, with the audience and, in some small way, act as an impetus for self-reflection and betterment that leads to a sense of surrender and a sense of not being trapped by oneself, by society and by ideals. (Over the years I cannot recollect the number of people who have told me that my dance or art has affected and inspired them.) The next section discusses how transferability further relates to *Becoming*.

As an artist today, I have been programmed to analyse the visual and performing arts through a Western microscopic lens as I look at the journey from both a nearer and further point of view. I straddle between the juxtaposition of my personal set of beliefs, values and interactions with myself and others, my ‘inside self’ and the reception and perception of my ‘outside self’ defined according to my race, gender and nationality. I draw on PLR as a methodological framework to blend the consideration of the artist and the concomitant idiosyncratic identities and centralities to the creative and research process that is also Western-informed. The requirements of research have created a conflict between providing a solution(s) to a problem that art procedures experience, and the need to find a way to record, justify, or explain the process and provide some form of finding transferability that might result from the creative act. The requirement for the justification act may also be

perceived to direct the problem-solving process, resulting in a dichotomous, visual-to-verbal-and-back-again contradiction, as opposed to the final art (design) manifesting as the results (Maharajh, 2019, p.158).

Another aspect within transferability I aim to draw attention to is the start-to-end points of the epistemological artistic intentions and transferability into everyday ontological truths. To further extrapolate, I draw on the aesthetic/anaesthetic discourse, as well as Western/Eastern viewpoints. Here I draw on a difference with the end-result of Western, namely *Vedic* injunction. According to the former, the culmination of the artistic process results in cognitive awareness and understanding, whereas according to the latter, the culmination is a relinquishing of cognisance, both of the mind, intelligence and ego, and the transcendental emotional connection to the *One*. Artistic actions are experience-driven, whereas aesthetic perception is traditionally seen as the realm of the artist/designer. A sense of elevated consciousness is reached by allowing creative, emergent, cognitive and/or emotional experiences to spill into and fill up the ultimate metaphysical experience of transcendence. A strategic creative focus of *rasa* is on three main areas of design and meaning making. The form comes first (the world, shapes of the world, the shapes of the world as designed or artistic shapes, the world as arty shapes and so on). The second area is the experience or the activity that moves through time and form, while being motivated and energised by emotion, *bhava*, or life energies. Lastly, the meaning and significance are ever emergent, contextual, present and shaping (Maharajh, 2019, p.161).

To comprehend or be present in the moment of creative work, the embodied lived experience involves a search for the senses, awareness, contemplation and encoding/decoding of

emotion. *Rasa* calls for the artist to link everyone's external environment, experience or world to a profoundly felt inner connection. This change is thought to express the aspects of beauty (well-being) and joy in a *Subject* formation. The artist or designer and their creation have an almost symbiotic relationship attributed to this inside/outside link. The theory acknowledges how feelings become accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds via art/arting, serving as a medium for appeal. In the course of an emotionally charged engagement, the artist, the piece of art and the viewer, all mould or evolve together. This growth describes what Western philosophy alludes to as an instance of perfect empathy resulting from forming a shared experience.

Thus, the interplay between *Becoming* and *rasa*, as argued in Chapter 2 of this thesis, is a natural shedding of identifications to social constructs related to material and subtle elements. A Western ethos assists the audience, the reader and the artist to reach a point of cognisance, as the end goal. However, the novelty of *rasa* and the speciality of the dictums and praxis of the *Nāṭyashāstra*, carry the artist and the viewer not only on a sensory and/or cognitive journey but takes them to the realm of complete transcendence of any boundaries, to a platform of TEM. It is at this point that the outer and inner self merge into one and the time, space and energy spectrum completely suspends. Transferability in *Becoming* is a concept that aids in the merging of all, allowing the emergence of a higher collective consciousness.

3.2 The Interplay of *Subject* Formation and *Rasa*

I sit quietly before I engage in the art practice, I inhale keeping my poise and position before I begin any dance and this instantaneously creates the body-mind-spirit connection, merging the inside-outside as I slowly exhale.

The *Becoming* connection for the artist(me) is to experience a dialogue between inner consciousness and outward expression. The *rasa* experience is a concentrated metaphorical fluid that flows through the body and infuses it with vitality as an energised life force or *prana*. Life force can be defined as the breath, and (Nair 2007, p.7) describes the breath as an involuntary action that connects the flow of life and death and the basis of all human activity that involves the artistic, intellectual, emotional and physical. Nair elaborates that the functioning of breath is the dynamic interconnectedness of the soul and emotions. This state is manifested through dance in the expressing of emotions and the concept of life force for me is construed as the body-mind interconnectedness in the pursuit of living. As I dance, a painting in motion emerges, with space as the canvas enfolding the dancer – the breath engages my body (posture and facial expressions), my mind (intellectual, emotional), and my spirit (*Oneness*). *Rasa* engages with the human lived experience, the search for senses including awareness, reflection and the subconscious decoding of the emotion to experience and understand the artistic practice. I describe *rasa* as an expressive state during an interaction and I am particularly concerned with the conceptualisation, creation, consciousness and experience of performance art practice guided by *rasa*.

3.3 Becoming and Resilience

As the different narratives unfold through the making, the construction of the life story includes the experience and exploration of the autoethnographer/autobiographer, together with the meaning of those experiences. As an Indian woman, constructing my identity gives me the opportunity to closely offer insight into how autobiography embraces *rasa* to make sense of the interwoven *Seeming-Being-Becoming* journey. The phenomenon describes the lived experience within the multicultural exploration in terms of performance, work, research and home environments.⁵⁶

I recognised the powerful impact of society on identity construction as a young teenager and how I had to become more resilient through my many early life experiences. I consciously understood that a sense of silencing or reservation was occurring, and my inner and outer voices were abandoned for the sake of my family and community, mainly to avoid conflict and disrespect. I remember as a teenager being told not to dance anymore because I should concentrate on household chores despite dance being my only solace. During my many dance performances as a 'person of Colour' prior to 1994, there were separate waiting areas before going onto stage. Many times, I was the only Indian person performing at different events and that slowly built my inner resilience to feeling isolated and dealing with that emotion in the workspace. When I married, I was told that I should 'do something about the colour of my skin'. The brownness of my skin was not favoured in my in-law's family. Irrespective of the

⁵⁶ I use the notion of 'culture' here to foreground and offer up for consideration the domains of performance, work, research, the home and so on. People have their own cultural dynamics of doing, thinking and valuing in domain-specific ways.

genesis of the notion, the remarks made around my skin colour were not only offensive but also acted as attrition to my sense of confidence, and self-worth. As a result, I started investing in weekly beauty rituals of ayurvedic homemade skin-lightening processes and ingredients. A process I later abandoned as I accepted myself and built resilience in my environment.

An important observation is how one interprets the 'I' in this journey's 're-silence' and resilience explorative processes. From an intimate point of view, the silence leads to what psychologists Eric Pfeifer and Mark Wittmann (2020, p.2) refer to as adjustments in the senses of time, space and the self. The silence engages the mood and emotions to understand processes involving self-reflection and flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The immersion of performance and process in becoming the *Oneness* is always connected to the silence with the breath and becomes the flow. In Christianity, the Roman Catholic Church introduced the Centering Prayer⁵⁷ a method of meditation that places emphasis on the inner silence that helps to calm the body, mind and nervous system. The *Book of Genesis* (2,7) speaks of God breathing life into the dust of the land and forming the living soul and this image is a powerful Biblical icon and an awareness of the power of breathing (Halkias, 2006). Furthermore, in China the breath is also known as the *chi*, a subtle force that enters the body through heaven (Yu, 1987, p.13). During the *salat* prayer in Islam, the technique of breathing-in prescribes that there is no God "*la ilaha*" and whilst breathing out alludes to there is none except God (*Allah*) by reciting "*illa Allah*". Focusing on the breath silences the mind and allows one to

⁵⁷ The Centering prayer according to Contemplative Outreach, (n.d.) was a response to a call from the Vatican in the 1960s developed by a Trappist monk. William Meninger, Thomas Keating and Basil Pennington draw inspiration from the *Lectio Divina* (divine reading). These practices include inner silence and meditation based on the Sermon on the Mount by Jesus to experience an intimate connection to God's presence. The Centering prayer is adopted from the ancient practices of Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Francis de Sales and Thomas Merton, and involves quieting the mind, controlling the breath, using a word or a phrase and resting in God's presence – a method that can be practiced by various Christian denominations.

“witness the contents of our consciousness that cultivates the inner technology of knowing” (Hart, 2004). The breath in *kathak* has multiple silences, pauses and movements from one action to the next, eventually culminating in the *Saam*, that is the beginning of a cyclical rhythm and the coming together as a resolution. When my husband died and I was left with many hard decisions to make, I used the time to pause and chose silence, quiet perseverance, and a reserved invisible identity. These silences are not uncommon in dance because they represent the pauses between dialogues, between exits and entrances of dancers and form part of the dance repertoire, thus, creating moments of Oneness between moments of exertion and recuperation. Creating a sense of independence gives stability to identity formation and I had to continually engage in the self-monitoring process and remind myself that I am a researcher in the writing process itself. The silent inward meditation through my spiritual practices became the source of my resilience. Spirituality became my anchor and support in the absence of external support from friends and family.

Understanding the artist as ‘self’ during the making of an artwork and the different levels of contemplation and reflection that one engages with, is not just about this level of *Subjective* identity, but is important for coming to terms with the experience. This phenomenology of awareness allows the artist-researcher (me) to enter and experience the transitional, almost transcendental space, and to connect with the self (also known as the inner being or inner voice). The artist relates to this experience and self-reflection, a state that is far more than the mundane conditions and trappings of daily life and moves beyond transcendental contemplation.

In this project, these social norms are encapsulated in my life journey, or perhaps more clearly stated, in attempting to come to terms with who I am, I need to explore who I think I was, why I think I was like that as it now 'seems' to me and, perhaps, through the art exploration, whom I might become. In other words, my subjective relationships with social norms had to be interrogated, used as a springboard for artmaking, and realigned in the future. It emerged in, and through, practice, through time. By following my proverbial breath and flow of water I am forced to confront the pervasive dichotomies that have constructed my inner and outer world, as this directly relates to Kasulis's Intimacy idea and the concept of the Yin and Yang approach. The traditional male/female, husband/wife and daughter/daughter-in-law binaries within highly conservative Indian families had a dominating and crippling effect on my sense of self, from which I eventually began to tentatively emerge as a whole being.

Through *rasa* and the *rasik* journey, I have realised that the journey itself is not only a breaking away from Western ontologies, but also a breaking away out from the shell of certain Hindu practices that positions segregation and isolation above togetherness. I have come to realise that in as much as religious and spiritual texts and tenets are imbued with purity, devotion and pathways to enlightenment, these ideals, when understood through the perceptions of uninformed people who seek to divide for the sake of maintaining their position within society, pollute the sanctity of sacred text. The process of *Becoming* through *rasa* is not just a break away from decolonial thought from Western White colonisers, but also from Indian conservative colonisers who weaponize culture for micro-domination. Here there are two points, one that speaks to Homi Bhabha and what he described as the Third Space in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994) and to Gayatri Spivak's breaking of the subaltern bonds in her article *Can the Subaltern speak?* (1988). Upon reading these texts one is able to separate

dogma and spirituality, a practice that allows for what I call, in metaphoric terms, the breath of the text to enter oneself. Briefly reflecting on Homi Bhabha's ideas in the post-colonial context provides a terrain to analyse cultures in diaspora, post-colonial culture and emerging cultures as this discourse requires at least another separate study. Leading the gap identified in related literature is one that the theory of *rasa* reflects on literature, drama, dance and music but there is no evidence of its application in the literature on contemporary performance art in South Africa. This deficiency led me to ask "How do I shift the narrative from being viewed and experienced as an *Object* of life, an *Object* of time and history, to seeing myself as an active agent, as a *Subject*?"

Through *rasa*, I achieve TEM, I surrender to where my breath is and silence everything around me. Acceptance does not come from the volume of applause at the of a dance, or the number of compliments or disparagement about my artwork, it comes from the degree of self-surrender given to the *One*. I can only accept others when I have fully accepted myself. This process of *nritya-yoga* is one of a re-lease to re-live. As I unpack the notion of re-lease, I muster the strength to break away from the stereotypical bondage that is imposed on one through community or society. Through *Becoming* and taking charge of myself, I attained a new lease on life. Somatically, I embodied the re-lease to re-live and breaking away from the bondage, the unnerving shackles that bind the body, mind and spirit.

In the next section, through an analysis of self-based social constructs, I demonstrate how through experience of the diverse 'tastes' of life, I have shifted from a dialogical to a monological being. I have changed from the definition of Integrity Model to an Intimacy Modality. As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, through an analysis of my self-

constitution per binary/per social construct, I explore my position as a *Subject/Object*. As will be discussed in this thesis, in much of the '*Seeming*' and '*Being*' portion of my life, I was an *Object*, a centripetal point of Othering. However, in the '*Becoming*' phase of life, I become the *Subject* of my narrative, a centrifugal force that through the aim of transcendence and TEM dissolves binaries altogether. I silence the dialogue brought upon by my dialogical thought process of societal emotional and mental environmentalism, and trim, blend and assimilate points of relevance to my *Being* for my *Becoming*.

3.4 Subject Anchoring

Everyday experiences precipitate a change in oneself. One cannot go back to the experience but can re-collect, re-locate, re-connect and re-search experience, that is part of the continual subject formation process. Creating a Subject-anchoring is a complex process for anyone, including myself. This process of understanding the evolution of the self, and accounting for self-perception in a challenging environment is different for everyone. As I explored the purpose of this study, I used my identity (a *Seeming* moment of realisation) as a basis to explore self so that, through making, a different process of Subject formation can materialise. Thus, I am the 'canvas' from which, and on which, I am working. The intimacy, as discussed in the previous chapter of self, and the material used through the engagement process is interactive.

Annika Thiem (2004, p.2) points out that "we must acknowledge being a subject as a continuous process of becoming a subject". Identity formation as an anchoring process is complex for an individual and cannot be taken out of context or separated within

relationships and the different connections it makes or has. Grappling with how the reconfiguring of oneself and one's ever emerging identity is also an acceptance of the fluidity of constructs that define oneself. Identity development appears to happen so naturally and unconsciously, thus, one never really has to grapple with the totality of their entire identity, but sometimes only parts or aspects of who they are. This thesis has forced me to confront the totality of my being and to acknowledge the ever-emergent nature of my identity, whilst at the same time healing and releasing years, if not decades, of stored trauma. In the process, I have accepted that my identity is simultaneously created by changes to the external environment, but it is also a creation of my response to what happens. Through social engagement and workshops, I am able now to give back to the community by sharing my skills and experiences. Part of the change I experienced resulted from my working with children and teaching them art and dancing on Friday evenings.

As I trace the map of my life, I have to ask what matters to me presently and where am I in life now. Deconstructing such questions brings about an understanding of the macro-micro level of *Otherness*, the tacit and, yet paradoxical unambiguity that shapes everyone's understanding of themselves and the world around them. I have difficulty contending with where I am currently and where I thought I would be. Part of the process is 'twirling' in my mind and emotions with the power of intelligence. I do so by taking charge of work, creative performance (*Subject* formation/state-of-being), the feeling of sorrow and joy. Yet, at the same time, the relationship within the experience depends on the *Subject* and artist-performance realisation. Meditation and dance are no longer an escape but an eagerly anticipated time to spend with myself. With trauma release and a cognitive shift, day-to-day activities do not change, but I have changed! I am the change! I no longer operate with

viewing life through a lens of pain and neglect but view life through a lens of gratitude and a sense of appreciation. *Becoming* and experiencing TEM, thus, is a process of resolving past desires, making peace with instead of creating a future reality that is growing from a sense of hurt and deprivation. The engaged practice is able to transmute all painful feelings through resilience into joy. The pain can be associated with the form of disgust (*vibhatsa*), a contemplative attitude when one draws on this feeling because of experience and an awareness of faith and vision to navigate the map and there is a sense of enjoyment and wonder (*adbhuta*). This result highlights the importance of being present and accepting life's experiences to which the *rasa* creative journey has led me.

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this section of the thesis is a re-postulation of self, based on my apparent socio-politico-cultural DNA. As demonstrated throughout this thesis, my identity is caught between two cultures and the gazes under which my subject form is judged. At a macro- and micro-level these constructs feel exhausted, antiquated and stale to me. I no longer feel defined and trapped by my identity as a Gujarati, Indian, South African, female, mother of two daughters, widow, academic and dancer impacted by the socio-economic and psychological imprints of post-colonialism. Has my initial notion changed? Is it something of value to my well-being and self-identification? To what extent is there an interplay of culturalism and religiosity and do I still possess an affinity for both? The question, therefore, arises, what is culture and how do we look at cultural diversity from multiple points of view? Culture is rooted in our history and shaped by us, and our traditional values even in an era of globalisation and commercialisation.

According to anthropologists Lawrence Harrison and Samuel Huntington (2000), culture is an amalgamation of common morals, values and principles which govern daily practices and lifestyles, and impact actions and experiences that have an emotive significance. Further, these authors catechize culture as being a domineering and censorious process that effectively acts within one's environment by following the rules of engagement and processes 'prescribed' by the culture. Culture, as defined by Elizebeth Hallam and Tim Ingold (2007), is not static or rigid but rather an emergent, developing temporaneous and context bound entity and, according to Kaiser (2012), an individual within a culture 'naturally' has a cultural identity which she classifies as "subject formation". Culture within this context is positioned as a creative identity, and subject formation as an arbiter to either accept or reject, include or exclude and/or demarcate or delimit oneself. Appiah (2019) presents a threefold critique of culture, firstly, it is constructed and cannot be essential, secondly, it is used as a weapon for *Othering* and thirdly it is a domain for people who share similar characteristics. As I discovered through my 'journey' within culture there exists the triangulation of being born and bred into a culture, from the domain of choice (lifestyle, work, interactions) to acceptance into the decolonial cultural approach I choose to follow.

Through the process of trauma-based de-cluttering, I see that my culture as a Gujarati and my practices has given me innumerable fond memories and anchoring. Through culture, I was able to find dance, able to find *rasa*, able to be seen while I danced. I was able to experience TEM and see the importance of discipline in yielding results. Through dressing-up for performances, I can now reflect that we are required to live by the rules of society. Each classical and folk-dance form has a particular set of clothing and adornments, that a dancer is required to wear when performing. These adornments enhance the aesthetic and *rasa* of

dance. I apply this notion to life that, insofar I have no desire to fulfil certain societal obligations, it is purely a mandatory function of living. In the same way, I am not my costume, I am not the flowers around my hair bun and I, too, am not the perception of others.

It will be invaluable for myself and the present and future readers of this thesis, to see how *rasa*, how artistic and performance-led pursuits with a spiritual under-current act as an alchemical process in transforming stagnant, antiquated ways of thinking and being into something positive, something healthy and something transformative and fresh. I have learnt to trust my breath (inner-being) in leading me to the correct decisions and, in so doing, I shift the narrative from Integrity-dialogical-*Object* to Intimacy-monological-*Subject*.

The notion of culture and Indianness is no longer anchored to the limited knowledge that was brought via indentured labourers. Technology, the internet, the vast numbers of Indians in South Africa, connectivity over social media and ease of access to India itself, has opened infinite scope to discover untapped and unexplored parts of Indian culture and heritage and interface and integrate this knowledge into modern life today. Given the level of access that exists, the notion and gaze of South African Indians are no longer defined by a Eurocentric view, a view that I venture to say seems stale, outdated and antiquated – a version of reality that very few South African⁵⁸ Indians and South African Indian women in particular can identify with today. Given the redundancy of a Eurocentric view what does this cultural re-positioning look like?

⁵⁸ Given the African geo-specific location of this thesis and having it embedded in the African soil the intention is not to erase the idea of Africanness but rather emphasize Indianness and Westernness because of being schooled academically in the Western paradigm and having had cultural schooling in the Indian paradigm.

Now that I draw from an infinite pool of culturalisms that can access all things around me that are affordances for my *rasa* growth and formation. It is at this point that I realise the importance of reverse engineering. TEM, *Oneness* and transcendence are the goals, what aspects of my life, and what moments in time did I feel *Oneness*, feel TEM, and how do I use muscle memory and the power of recollection to find the root of those threads so that I can broaden them, add more of itself to itself and, thus, increase the affinity to the *Oneness*.

Whilst I spent most of my life looking for support, acceptance and validation from others consciously/subconsciously, through the process of *Being* and *Becoming*, I recognise that I was self-totalised the entire time and societal conditions made me feel unworthy despite my actions going beyond the call of duty and responsibility. Today, the questions of ‘what-ifs’ fall away permanently. According to scientist Steven Hawking (1998), the time-space notion is dynamic, and all life is cyclic and not static or aimless but in continuous flux. The energies of experience for an individual become an extraordinary activity through the time-space-body integration as explained by dancer Joan Kealiinohomoku (1997) in her article ‘Dance, Myth and Ritual in Time and Space’. This process leads to the *Becoming* or the abductive phase. Many psychologists (Almquist and Lupton, 2010; Dunne and Martin, 2006; Folkmann, 2010; Shank, 1998) suggest the abductive sphere of reasoning is the “what could occur” phase and offers opportunities and potentialities to the artist and researcher to pursue acts of redefining that emerge from the emotional experience. While I attempted to locate myself on the monological/dialogical, *Subject/Object* dichotomies, prior to writing this thesis, I would engage in acts of self-flagellation for not-knowing, but today I accept this not-knowing as part of the journey and, furthermore, I trust that I will know at the appropriate time.

In terms of my nationality, what does it mean to be South African? What does it mean to be an Indian South African? How has my view of nationality changed, if at all? Does *Becoming* offer a novel and nuanced knowledge base to decolonial thought in SA? Will my modern, Westernised gaze of Indian culture permutate and affect the colonised version of myself? What is the gap between the essence of the *Nāṭyashāstra* and its modern-day interpretation, and where am I, as a South African Indian woman, positioned within this gap?

One of the racial-cultural-apartheid-based offshoots was the thinking and attitude of being seen but not heard, in terms of supporting and working with your colleagues, giving family all your attention, compromising and sacrificing yourself to an extent but not raising your concerns or questioning your own or others' actions, because such actions might create an uncomfortable situation or environment. My view of my worth as an academic and artist fluctuates. In the process of writing this PhD, I questioned its value and contribution to society, and when I receive positive or negative feedback it affects my outlook towards myself as I probe these feelings of worthiness/unworthiness. While my parents did create the facility to allow me to dance, they created the best opportunities within their means and abilities, my needs of being held, of being doted upon and loved unconditionally for myself were never met by middle-class parents who were busy making ends meet. However, I now employ the use of Western aesthetics and engage abductive reasoning to help me position myself to a point of cognisance and make sense of my experiences thus far.

I have to honestly recognise that not every part of me will heal at the same rate as other aspects of myself. Indeed, I wish to become a fully rationalised, self-actualised *Subject*, but at

this juncture, on this construct, I liken the experience to my first dance performance. Was it my best dance performance ever? Most definitely not! Was it perfect, correct and precise for who I was then and everything I had learnt up to that point? Most definitely! The same compassion, acceptance and understanding I give to others I have to learn to give to myself. At this juncture in my life, being positioned on the Integrity-Dialogical-*Object* side of the scale is legitimate, given that prior to this moment, I had no knowledge that this scale even existed. Akin to the essence of this chapter, and to regain a sense of balance, how do I 'Become' as I shift the narrative and scale to Intimacy-Monological-*Subject*, and I leave this gap as an area of the garden of life that requires extra tending.

Articulated differently, the world can be perceived through emotions (*bhava*), but can identity be reduced to emotions alone. Does this latter action not contradict the entire concept of *rasa*? Do I not want, instead, to show and live in such a way that we should let emotions flow like water through us, but not let them become us, because, as my experiences have shown, the attachment and storage of emotions, especially negative ones, are the seat of trauma. This trauma is born from infrastructure of socio-political practices, from my home and the cultural environment of a patriarchal society. Amongst an invisible system, creative practices were my only outlet for self-expression and, thus, I held onto the creative aspects of cultural Indianness and spirituality because I found a moment of breath, a moment to be, while everything else fell away. The subject formation here, therefore, is to ask, using the tools of self-analysis, through the process of rationalisation of life, what are the key takeaways in terms of socio-politicisms, culturalism, etc., that I can now use to engineer an identity that is not defined by trauma, not defined by an anaesthetic view, but through the essence and beauty of *rasa* will help me achieve *Oneness*, help me live TEM in ontological trueness? And

how can I further take the full embodiment of TEM and enable and capacitate others through knowledge sharing to also release and let go so that they too can enter a phase of '*Becoming*' in which one is not defined by the dualism of *One/Other* but by the notion and practice of transcendence? Transferability is the transfer of consciousness; it is also a transfer of realisations and a transfer of knowledge that I wish to leave the reader with, following guidelines and realities based on the entire thesis thus far.

3.5 My Becoming Discoveries

Journeying through the Intimacy recital left its imprints in lived bodily integrations, in which the recorded experience is retained in the muscle memory and is uncovered through intimate bodily and tactile kinaesthetic contact. These imprints can then be uncovered and understood by examining movement in the written historical and cultural record and the lived experience between bodies and art. My researcher's role in the field is unclear as an artist and audience. It would appear that in conducting my research, I am an 'insider' in my 'home or studio' and yet, as my research reveals, my presence disrupts the dichotomy of 'field site' and 'home site' destabilising notions of 'insider' or 'outsider'. I have held insider and outsider status simultaneously, and each research site has been both home and field for me, the only constant being the practice of art and dance. I highlight certain aspects of the form to demonstrate an argument or because those aspects hold certain meanings for me as a performer and researcher. I focus on the dramatic components of the repertoire far more than the rhythmic components. As a dancer I love to perform *abhinaya* pieces, the narrative dances that require role-playing, far more than the abstract, rhythm-based pieces *jugal bandhi* (conversation between the dancer and *tabla* percussion instruments).

In writing about the dance spaces that my body housed, I take the position of a participant observer, but I understand this position in a framework of self-*Other* dualities. The embodied perspective comes from the experience of being a dancer, an artist and a researcher, and I become my informant. I allow myself to morph back and forth between artist and dancer, just as I might do in performance. I also become an audience member, a *rasika*, in my work. As a former Kathak dancer I no longer perform for an audience, but the experiences have influenced me, and this autoethnographic study that uses Practice-led Research is between myself as producer and myself as audience. The move between the intimate 'I' and a stepping away reflexive 'I' is the gaze I use as I look at creativity not as outward public-facing but as creativity for the sake of the creative – and what possibilities that has for me in the healing as I navigate different perspectives, finding a creative voicing. This looking inward has also other implications in terms of how people think of creativity as something 'for' others even if it starts from the personal but that it helps others through their own learning, rethinking, and so forth as it is functional and operationalised. The connection to the dance and the hands can be felt with the dancing, knotting and struggling in the vase that are depicted in the examples of my work provided in the previous chapter. So, the fundamental question raised is that of 'art for one's sake?', and the *rasa-bhava* theory engages the outer audience, however, the value of this research lies in my autoethnographic approach to using my family as my audience and my experiences through time as I address the central living strategies to become more resilient.

As mentioned earlier, the act of *Being* and *Becoming* is a process of spring cleaning of ideas, perceptions, assumptions and memories that were kept and held in me that no longer serve the person I am and the person I want to Become. These memories are being surfaced and

integrated back into the body so that they can live differently in the body. They do not go away, but rather, one's relationship with them changes. As witnessed through my journey, I have released and realised significantly. I have emptied myself of older versions of myself that occupied space unnecessarily and weighed down the lightness of my spirit. In the new Oneness, the memories 'serve' in another way as I sit today, postulating the aspects of myself that I love, and further considering who I want to be. I am finally not following the road map given by others but creating my own! I begin by reflecting on my role as a mother.

The refracted splintering of mothering and motherism is the gap and the centrality of roles that address identity. The role of the mother is strategic cultural coding and core in connection to identity development, constitution and identification. 'Motherism' merges concepts of both the individual and community as part of a more intrinsic larger identity (Walker, 1995; Kapoor, 2021). Mothering, in my case, not only refers to my daughters but also mothering the students I teach, or younger members of the community I engage with. Motherism as a feminist movement can also speak to the African philosophy of 'ubuntu' (I am because we are, since we are, therefore I am). Ironically my name is Reshma and I have been taking the role of mothering since a young age.

My sex defined my role as a mother, but upon becoming a widow I had to play the role of both mother and father to my daughters. In addition to fulfilling the traditional function of being the nurturer, caretaker, harbinger and producer of emotional balance and logic, I duly had to be the breadwinner, the protector, the disciplinarian and the grounded masculine energy in the home. Motherhood for me is not singular but encapsulates both parentages. However, with the swelling of the transgender movement, I probe the meaning of sex and

gender in relation to the meaning of motherhood. The social environment surrounding marriage and parenthood is markedly changing, with increased divorce rates, global migrant labour, LGBTQ narratives, both parents having to work and children being cared for by 'house help' or nannies, single mothers living off the social grant. With such multifarious factors at play, what does it mean to be a mother? Have I carried the burden of victimhood or is this the new normal? I am not the first single parent, and I am in the state of coming to this acceptance of destiny without anger and enmity⁵⁹. Upon reflection, I realise that motherhood is loving – loving and protecting unequivocally all those who cross your path irrespective of the nature of relations. I no longer fight being everything and more to my daughters but embrace it as my superpower. A core component of my identity ethos is being a mother, in all functions of the term and a bit more. Holding *mandala* workshops with meditative practices became another way in which I grew and expanded on my spiritual development by giving back and becoming more confident. Through my becoming, I was able to provide a space for awareness and immersion but not only having momentary sensations but lasting impressions in an instinctive, intuitive way.

⁵⁹ *Rasa* of anger at God and destiny, and disgust at my in-law's treatment of me.

3.6 Conclusion

The novel and nuanced perspective that *rasa* brings to the discourse on the subject form is invaluable. As a human being, I experience life emotionally first and then apply logic to a situation and to a decision. *Rasa* has enabled me to understand emotions and the interplay of emotions at a performance art level and this consciousness has filtered into my daily lived reality. *Rasa* has enabled me to experience TEM, and, through the consciousness of transcendence, I no longer allocate and position my identity on the spectrum of social constructs or at certain points within the ideological matrix, but I strive to no longer define myself by constructs altogether. My worth, my respect, my dignity and my identity are now aimed at being anchored in transcendental experiences. This practice allows me the sublimity of being anchored to a peaceful reality as social constructs change. Within my lifetime alone gender, race and sexual orientation have seen marked and vivid fluctuations and transformations and will continuously do so.

While I accept that I live in a society and will be assessed and judged on social constructs, *rasa* as a tool has capacitated me with wings to fly above the clouds when there is a storm and anchor myself in a Higher Truth when the winds blow strongly, and the environment is tumultuous. The journey of autoethnography and psychosomaticism is the desire to live TEM as an ongoing consciousness. The conscious choice and pensiveness surrounding a re-articulation of my identity through *rasa* has shown me the duality of life and experiences – from being a daughter with no value to being a mother and seeing my daughters as my only value; wife to widow; *One-Other*; academic versus creative; spirituality versus religious indoctrination – identity analysis through *rasa* has shown me that breath, that living, is not predicated upon positionality on the dualism spectrums but true living is TEM, which is the

transcendence of duality and its markers. Through *Becoming* there is a healing of the inner child, as I postulate today, not through academia, but through the characteristic development, there is a fantastical sense of release, innocence and a place of knowledge. As the path of transcendence is ever unfolding who do I become in retrospect? I reflect on the gaping garment and how the transcendental experience exposes my vulnerabilities and fears, not to make me weak, but to make me strong to the point of indifference so that I can rise above and experience TEM.

CONCLUSION – SAAM

I sit in the spot I did when I started writing this thesis. I sit silently in the warm rays peering through my kitchen window and slowly inhale. I close my eyes and as air slowly fills my chest, I use my index finger to draw a line through space. As I exhale, I feel the pace of my finger moving through the ether much slower this time. I open my eyes and witness everything around me as it was years ago. But I am different. I am simultaneously the same yet different.

The genesis of this thesis was an understanding of life, of my life, through *rasa*. I propositioned myself as the *Subject* and *Object* of the experience to better enhance my acquisition, understanding and transferability of knowledge. My findings on frameworks, *bhava*, *rasa*, dance, visual art, as well as self-based social constructs through colonial, postcolonial and decolonial thought, have been chronicled extensively thus far in this document. In conclusion, I wish to share my personal experience of writing this thesis. As I write this conclusion, I am recovering from surgery, my parents and several of my siblings have emigrated, my daughters no longer live at home, and I have started to work in a new academic institution and environment after twenty-five years. Through this thesis, I have relived memories and uncovered and recovered from a plethora of traumas throughout my life that has shaped me by *Seeming*, *Being* and *Becoming*. In this research exploration and experience, I have used Indian philosophy, dance and visual art, that puts me in a unique position because this knowledge empowers me at an epistemic level of meta-thinking, which not only contributes

to my self-discovery, but makes me a better person both in this journey and beyond it. Through my reflection and desire as a guiding process for research, pathways took on an embodied and organic move to understand frameworks. The transitions of how I evolved and what I felt inside of me, as well as what I embodied from the past to the present time into the *Oneness* was the mould of strategic epistemological thought that propounded ontologically in performance art.

“Dance, the most intangible and ephemeral of all art forms, living in and dying with the body of the performer, is arguably more a physical than a cerebral exercise” (Chakraborty, 2011, p.1). A performance piece is a spectacle, exuding emotions and expressions through the body, plausibly communicating a subtle message. My focus in this research study was on the counter-hegemonic agency of myself and opening up as *Other* in a discursive space for, and through, cultural and spatial politics expressed through my own lived experiences, signalling a feminist intervention in this mapped journey. As a point of positionality I am not a feminist, however feminist thought acknowledges various forms of oppression such as race, class and gender and these intersect to shape individual experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). This perspective has prompted me to reflect critically on societal structures that perpetuate inequality. As performance art flows free in contemporary life, artistic practice becomes an inward journey into oneself in the re-mapping and re-constructing of decolonialising *Otherness*. The intention is to question my story and life experience, and also question my embodied culture so that others may identify with it to overcome or transgress their subversive patriarchal, racial and academic status quo. As I reflect on my diasporic self, I engage the multi-layered, multi-faceted openings, closures and absences through the explorative, kinaesthetic, tactile and philosophical autoethnographic journey. Performance

art must capture the running moments in time, not in snapshots but in continual change, in its flux and fluidity. I do not consider myself 'a goddess' as I attempt to redefine the roles of a wife, mother and academic female; rather, I see myself as a regular woman seeking to push the boundaries with the help of my story and by providing an alternative perception of tradition through performance and *rasa*.

A. Seeming

To make sense of my identity I 'picked' and 'unpicked' the discrete moments of my character development, exploring their *Seeming* potential integrity, in pursuit of an *Objective* explanation. While *Subject* formation offered an emergent and intimate dynamic that reaches into the future to Become, a *Seeming* inchoate experience was used with other inchoate experiences to attempt to create a structure that would make a sense of memory or the inchoate experience fitting into an extant structure to make sense of memory. The seeming disruptions can be seen as opportunities to gain knowledge while searching for balance out of these disruptions for a more transformative experience. interstitially and *rasa* were used as key outputs from the *Nāṭyashāstra* to connect and, idiosyncratically and dynamically, rationalise pivotal moments in my life. This process allowed me to prepare theoretical frames to interrogate experiences or to generate experiences that can be harnessed into the making of a theoretical frame. These two dynamics form the bedrock of practice-led research and autoethnography.

What emerged from writing about the process of '*Seeming*' was a following of my breath to my buried emotions, memories and trauma that required a mature cognisant sense of self, free of bewilderment and emotional manipulation, in order to be acknowledged. A '*Seeming*' moment of looking at myself from the perspective of another who is myself. I questioned why I had never before confronted these emotions, as well as the brevity and definitive nature of these earlier experiences and realised that this thesis posited me as the *Subject* and the *Object*. From the perspective of the former, I felt like a victim of life. It saddened and disturbed me to look at my life through the pain. However, from the perspective of the latter, it seemed as though I was staring at my life as if it was a piece of artwork and rationalising with a series of 'whys'. The coherent, choate articulation of answers emerged via *rasa*. *Rasa* became the principal lens of analysis through which I could succinctly position myself as an *Object* and "*Objectively*" see myself through different lenses and emotions as well as through the eyes of many others and finally through my own eyes. This process laid the foundation of my *Being* and *Becoming*, of my *bhava* and *rasa*, of the attainment of my TEM, both epistemologically and ontologically.

B. Being

The concept of *Being* can be interpreted in many ways. Psychologist and psychotherapist Rudolph Bauer (2011, p.1) states in his essay *Object and Being*, that the, "Beingness of being is the experience and awareness of our being." *Being* allows for cultivating the aesthetic understanding of deep and complex links or knowing through the senses by having an active relationship with the environment (Gupta, 2021; Paranjpe, 1998). The process of understanding the artist/academic construct as self during the making of an artwork and the

different levels of contemplation and reflection that I engaged with, is not merely about the level of subjective identity, but, more importantly, about comprehending the experience. This phenomenology of awareness allows me as the artist-researcher to enter and experience the transitional, almost transcendental space and to connect with the self. This practice also positioned my character analysis and development parlance of colonial thought and Western forms of thinking that resulted in the penultimate form of self as cognisance, whereas *rasa*-led theory pushes one from cognisance and rationalisation into the realm of experience or emotion. A shift from latency within to kinaesthesia without anaesthetic to aesthetic.

The ethnography employed in this thesis does not constitute a critical and sociological/political engagement with my South African Indianness, but rather focuses on how life experiences are engaged with, revealed and clarified through the art-making process. The practice-led methodology creates new realities through art and performance and these changes in experience transform how the elements of the world are recognised, and the emotion is understood by the artist-researcher. While I conceptualised this process of working and linking the artwork to *rasa* and my own experiences, I had to understand the dynamic that might play out by rooting it to my history and the use of different elements and *Objects*. For example, the use of my wedding saris, the white sheer organza fabric, water, red and white paint, cotton, bangles and other objects, all of which have a spiritual and contextual/conceptual link in generating lines of inquiry that would lead to a better understanding of myself. Walking the path, journeying the map, is the *Seeming, Being and Becoming* self-discovery trajectory.

In my research process I deliberated on external sources such as literature and how to incorporate all the different media and material sources into my work as part of a data collection process. This approach draws on my performance as well, and not only on the physical *Objects* incorporated into the artwork but also on the physiological and the body, since it plays with the sensual, material and psychological. For example, as an Indian woman, I used saris in many of the works I created and other delicate fabrics in my processes since these best resonated with how I felt and who I felt I am. My use of cotton threads brought me a step closer to my association with sewing, tailoring, threading my map and stitching my experience and memories. I subconsciously used crocheting in deference to my childhood memories. Even though I experienced some restrictions during this period, it was the only time in my life when I explored the world freely without dogmatic thoughts and opinions because I was sheltered from these by my mother. It is also a generational inheritance. We generally think of inheritance in financial terms, but this research process showed me that inheritance comes in various forms, and, today, I have the liberty and power to accept or decline my inheritance. It became important for me to know the differences and associations between what the material (real and ethereal) stood for through the art-making process. I had not executed all the work that I planned because the action of making and processing allowed me to detour and reflect on what I had already engaged with.

The retrospective experience of writing *Being* and creating the respective artworks as part of the *Intimacy Recital*, was truly cathartic. *Seeming* was a literary presentation of my autoethnography and *Being* was a visual representation of it. Through this process I saw my view of art as beauty and as an enhancement. Whilst the memories and experiences were

replete with pain, I wanted to make the artwork beautiful. In retrospect, I see this desire as a movement of mind, a transformation of self from chrysalis to butterfly. I, furthermore, saw my behaviour as metonymical, something I had never realised previously. I could have easily presented grotesque and gruesome images that matched the pain and hurt I felt within, but the boldness would not have matched my sense of identity and awareness of self, that I perceived as a redundant cog in a gigantic machine. At the time of writing *Being*, I still felt invisible to myself and others. Thus, the tying of threads, the crocheting, the violence of bangles breaking underfoot and the use of several elements that were seemingly colourless, all came to the fore. As can be seen in the chronology of the artworks, there is no presence of my physical self in the first few artworks, but the works conclude with a picture of my whole self, feeling free and colourfully literally letting all go. I resonate with German philosopher Hegel's famous idea (in Chen, 2018, p.564) that, "One must die to live". I had to experience a death of myself, a letting go of all aspects of me that were anchored to a reality that was no longer mine, an ontology I wished to no longer be defined by. This process involved the death of the weight of others' opinions of me, the death of a colonised version of identification, the death of academic invisibility and the death of memories that played viscerally like a dream but were not a part of my waking life. It was only in letting go in order to let live that *Being* created a space within my auric field, within the defined space of my life, that I could magnitudely hold, that I could Become.

Seeming was a presentation of the stimuli of my character development, of myself. *Being* was akin to *anubhava and vibhava*, the internal rationalisation of emotions within the ideological matrix of my *Being*. *Being* also demonstrated that my holding onto emotions instead of letting

them pass/flow resulted in the amalgamation of emotions to myself. I think of my monthly menstrual cycles, a release so that fertility can be experienced. In moments of heightened stress, my menstrual cycle would be erratic, or the flow disrupted. Sometimes as relieving as it was to not experience my menstrual cycle, over a period of time I realised it was a sign of my infertility. What was I holding onto that was preventing the flow? The body responds to emotions. In the same stroke (which laid the foundation for *Becoming*), it is mandatory to let emotions pass to reach the state of *Oneness* of TEM. In dance, whenever I experienced *Oneness*, there was a divine sense of the flow of fluidity replete with surrender and detachment to all things external. The finality of being able to articulate the feeling of TEM and wanting others to experience the sublimity of surrender sparked the desire and necessitation for both conscious self-reconstruction and transferability.

Thus, arriving at a description of my identity is driven by both inductive and deductive thinking as artmaking is generative, emergent, contextual and contemporaneous (Hallam and Ingold, 2007). Performance art is, by its nature, kinaesthetic, moving a body/materiality in a particular space/environment (constructed or otherwise) and at a particular time, with intent (within the making or the analysis), which, in this case, was during the making process, has been exploratory and drawn from my ethnography as suggested in my autobiography. I began this experience with a deep spiritual and emotional connection of the artist (myself) to the dance/dancing. Performance art (now defined, as 'performance arting') has created a platform to test new ideas and find varied audiences.

On a spiritual level, performance art reminds me of a verse that I was taught from Sankara (2014) the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (canto 1.3.28), "*asatoma satgamaya, tamasoma*

jyotirgamaya, mrityorma amritam gamaya, om shanti, shanti, shanti”, which translates as follows: “Lead me from ignorance to the truth, lead me from darkness to light, lead me from death to immortality, peace, peace, peace”. This quotation represents the artist’s silent aspiration of seeking one’s truth through artistic practice, moving from a dark space of not knowing to a continual search for light. This concept of non-duality is a translation of the Sanskrit word *Advaita*, which points to the *Oeness* of life. It points to the intimacy of the present-moment experience. Despite the appearance of angst, pleasure or pain, there is only one reality, namely, the reality of *Oeness*. Performance art not only aims to act as a tool of interpretation but also challenges and experiments with the idea of an aesthetic transcendental emotion moment – a TEM.

C. Becoming

I had anticipated the writing of Chapter 3 to be the easiest task. I posited a fantasised version of my life based on the superlative aspects of myself. Unfortunately, the opposite was true. The deconstruction of each strand of my identitarian constitution, analysed through a decolonial and *Subject/Object* deliberation, proved to be the most challenging. Whilst *Being* was emotionally jarring through reliving traumatic memories and having to alchemically engage in the relativisation of self to the politicisation of artwork, Chapter 3 was equally gruelling but on a mental plane. The interrogation of self-revealed to me how interwoven each social construct is to one another and that conscious detanglement is only possible to a certain degree. I had to accept that TEM is not possible on the spectrum of each social construct and that fact that in some contexts I am the *Object* and not the *Subject* was equally revealing. I had to take the notion of transferability and apply it to myself as well – everything

cannot be accomplished in a single master stroke, and the healing of self to achieve transcendence is an ongoing process and a continuous journey.

When I began my autoethnographic study I collected information and pasted it into a visual journal, that also included sketches. Short extracts of what I remember as a child and young adult, including conversations with my parents and even remembering key moments during my life's journey were documented. I captured or recorded these experiences as the artist through the artwork. As a dancer and visual artist, I used self-shot videos and photography to capture my journey. To engage in this research project as a PLR enterprise, I make data and analyse data from pre-existing data and from emergent and creative interactions that are and need to be both socially and artistically contextualised. I had to capture the emergent interactions in some way so that I could reflect on both the interactions, but also on the final artwork and, if the research proceeds in that direction, on my social and artistic contexts. To complete the above actions, I pursued the following: (1) a creative context in which to work, namely performance art and the strategies and ethos of *rasa*; (2) a social context from which to draw my autobiographical position; and (3) a system to capture the data. In this last case, autoethnography supplied systems of personal social contextual capture, and systems to capture emergent artistic or creative processes. This process was fundamental to understand myself to the best of my comprehension before I could self-postulate in all variegatedness.

I found it interesting that I experienced the neuroscientific psycho-somatic nature of my thesis personally. For much of my life, I was in the position of being a caretaker, breadwinner, and nurturer and used creativity as an outlet for an emotional reprise. Four months before my submission date I experienced severe hormonal fluctuations that caused heavy bleeding. I

discovered that I had fibroids on my uterus and required surgery to have my uterus removed. Whilst the experience itself was extremely disturbing, it also felt like a body-mind-spirit triadic self-regulation. The bleeding was a release of all emotions that I carried; the removal of my uterus eliminated the need to mandatorily adopt several roles I never wanted but which destiny forced me to accept. For several decades I can veritably say that my *modus operandi* was survival and through this Integrity-Intimacy dynamism I am shifting from either/or to equilibrium and my body is mirroring that change.

Furthermore, I have a new job at a tertiary institution where I feel my world is expanding. As my world grows and I am exposed to more diversity in the workplace, I ask myself where I fit in. I question the value of cross-culturalism and if I will lose my culture in trying to 'fit in' and feel accepted. I contemplate the view of sociologist Carlos Martinez-Vela (2010) who echoed the thoughts of Foucault, in that the colonised mirrors the behaviour of the coloniser? Once again, through the *Subject-Object* framework and format of deliberation, I no longer see culture as the all-defining functionality of *Being*. I recognise the importance of contextuality and substance over form. I may not always enunciate my culture by wearing traditional ethnic wear every day, however, as an academic I will conduct research to demonstrate cultural preservation as an ontology – i.e., something that is not just worn, but that is the ethos of one's being and has the capacity to expand and contract. I adopt this notion of contraction and expansion and apply it to the various identities and roles that we have in society. While one of these may predominate at a certain juncture in life, it does not mean that it holds more relevance, but simply that it is intercepting and interfacing with a larger pedagogic change.

Through *Becoming* and through *rasa* I am no longer attached and no longer solely identify my entire character to incidences at particular junctures in life, but I allow the dynamism of flow to become me. The purpose of this thesis started as a rationalisation of self through *rasa* and resulted in underscoring the importance of healthy non-attachment via acceptance, surrender and the importance of experiencing emotions and letting them go through a vestibular channel one chooses that which aligns with the highest notion of personal *Oeness* and TEM.

The last few months of holding on and releasing trauma manifested physically because I was holding onto everything it was incumbent to physically release, let go and become the TEM in *Oeness*. Within this world, death was touching all aspects – a disgust (*vibhatsa*) and fear (*bhaya*), together with sadness (*karuna*) – but at the same time trying to restore harmony. *Sringara* (love) is intensified by the blood that flows from the feet the breaking away, from the throwing of the scarves, and the untangling of knots as life's sacrifices are thrust forward. It is in the moments of deep experiences that we become timeless. As a *Kathakar*, I tell my story and share my experience and evaluate my emotional response that belongs to my world as distinct aesthetic emotions lead one to engage oneself.

This thesis was not about providing a handbook or 'toolbox' for others about the lived experience but rather as a notion of transferability as a concept in research writing. Transferability involves the reader's ability to draw parallels between the research context and their own experiences (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As a technique, transferability helps to ensure that the findings are relevant across different contexts, thereby increasing the potential for enhanced transferability in qualitative research (Tuckett, 2005). This is why the

notion of transferability as concept in research writing is important as it details the contextualised understanding of integrating empathy that not only deepens the researcher's connection but bridges the gap between the research findings to be more vivid and relatable and to foreground their potential applicability in other settings (Tuckett, 2020). I acknowledge that this is what some people would want from scholarly research and that has not been the goal of the research, but this research is more about the self, with the hope that others might read the work and identify or find something helpful. This thesis is not just generally *rasa*-focused but it is *rasa*-focused within the visual arts context and what I was able to draw on as a visual artist. The limitation of this study is that I was not trying to make it relevant for Indian South Africans, or women of colour or Hindus, but I am one person who was immersed in these methodologies in this study and found them to be very influential and impactful. There is an implicit invitation for others to identify with it, but it is not an explicit one.

The subject formation process *rasa* then becomes the experience through which I embody myself once I have undergone the process of self-reflection, and a/r/tography that captures this living experience. This occurrence further demonstrates how the making process leads to articulating the narrative as the synergistic inter-twining between experience and emotions. In the moments of body-mindedness and, in the course of traversing the intimacy and integration aspects of self-reflection, I move from a bodily concept to a soul concept because these states are in tandem. One of the unexpected results was a reliving detachment and non-attachment to several social constructs themselves. By cutting away parts of myself that were no longer relevant to who I want to be, I felt a deep sense of inner capacitation and freedom. As a dancer, the penultimate feeling is a suspension of time, people, lights, costume and place, due to the feeling of being connected to the divine *Oneness*. Through physical and mental

practice and emotional emptying of oneself, as an artist and dancer, I am able to do both by spiritually connecting to various entities and by connecting to spiritual entities. The experience of *Oneness* is not a negation of self but an enduring unabashed acceptance of, and complete immersion into self, free of any tugs of resistance.

As this project was influenced by artmaking and the insights I arrived at, I discovered *Seeming* was most affected by the process. The process itself was informed by Debi Prasad Dash and Francois Nsenga (2011), based on their proposition that the Seaming process embodies the potential to reveal through artist-researcher insights, knowledge and understanding. As highlighted by Graeme Sullivan (2006, p.24) that:

The role of the lived experience, subjectivity and memory [that] are seen as agents in knowledge construction, and strategies such as self-study, collaboration, and textual critiques [that] are used to reveal important insights, to interpret meaning and value and to improve one's creative outputs in the emergent and reflective processes.

Gazing at my practice has allowed me to thread my thinking, making and reflecting in and out of the artworks created. As I work, this gaze allows one to look into my arting but at the same time, hopefully, provokes one to look into their creative practice, identity and *Becoming* journey. In essence, the journey I have undertaken, as artist, as autoethnographer, as an idiosyncratic human being, has led to these insights, because I followed the roadmap of *rasa*. The spiritual journey that *rasa* has taken me on, and the material journeys of autoethnography, performance art/practice guided research have strongly directed the path that has led to resilience, catharsis, self-insight, together with healing and growing or flourishing. This individual change is sufficient as a starting point. But such a moment was integral to move beyond the catharsis to "*Becoming*" or TEM.

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