**Manjusri Chaki Sircar (b. 28 August 1934, Pabna, Bangladesh; d. 6 June 2000, Kolkata, India) and Ranjabati Sircar (b. 29 March 1963, Nsukka, Nigeria; d. 23 October 1999, Mumbai, India)**

**Summary**

In early 1980s, Manjusri Chaki Sircar and her daughter Ranjabati Sircar coined the term ‘*Navanritya*’ or New Dance for their methodology of dance training and choreography. The Sircars’ New Dance emerged from the Bengal region of India in a period that simultaneously witnessed a nationwide upsurge of women’s rights movements and the rise of right wing anti-feminist politics. Energized by the feminist movement, the Sircars challenged and critiqued patriarchal frameworks governing the production of dance for the modern Indian stage. They questioned, both through their dancing bodies as well as through their published work, existing conventions of dance-performance such as the stereotypical representation of women in performance. They presented highly innovative and subversive dance works that provided fresh, startling and contemporary interpretations of available literary sources and inherited dance-drama traditions.

**Training**

Manjusri Chaki Sircar trained in several Indian classical dances such as Kathak, Manipuri, Bharatanatyam, and Kathakali with various gurus in Bengal. A graduate from Presidency College, Kolkata, and with a doctoral degree in Anthropology from Columbia University, New York, Manjusri returned to India from the United States and set up the contemporary dance company, Dancers’ Guild, with her daughter Ranjabati in 1983. The company went on to become a significant voice in the cultural landscape of modern India. Ranjabati, as co-artistic director of the Guild, also blended a career as an academic, writer and dancer. A first-class graduate in English Literature from Jadavpur University, Kolkata, and trained in Bharatanatyam and Kathakali, she combined critical thinking with dance training and choreography, performing nationally and internationally both as a solo artist as well as a company member of Dancers’ Guild. Although the Sircars began their early careers by training in Indian classical dance forms, the Guild became their creative laboratory for experimentations with the form, content and pedagogy of Indian dance systems.

**Contributions to modernism**

Manjusri and Ranjabati contributed a modern Indian dance technique, *Navanritya,* to the repository of existing Indian dance forms. They initially described their ‘New Dance’ as an open-ended methodology, which involved a ‘chemical synthesis’ of different Indian classical, semi-classical, folk and martial movements and yoga. The Sircars then systematized their process of synthesizing material from these diverse movement genres. The ‘*Navanritya*’ movement vocabulary was divided into an eight-part structure of movement groups, depending on the body’ s relation to space. They re-envisioned the Indian dancing body’s use of space by incorporating floor movements, body clusters and jumps. Movements sourced from yoga and martial arts demanded greater flexibility and freedom of the moving body than the classical forms. *Navanritya* therefore liberated the body, particularly the female body, from pre-codified structures of physicality in Indian dance. The female body claiming space - physically, symbolically and politically - becomes of utmost significance and is indeed the founding principle in the Sircars’ *Navanritya*.

**Legacy**

The Sircars ‘*Navanritya*’ is currently taught in Dancers’ Guild, Kolkata, which also performs their choreographic works nationally and globally. Through their innovative contributions, the Sircars have informed and energised the minds and bodies of dancers and academics across the world.

**Prarthana Purkayastha**

**List of Key Works**

*Tomari Matir Kanya* (1987)

*Chitrangada* (1988)

*Aranya Amrita* (1989)

*Tasher Desh* (1991)

*Yugasandhi* (1993)

*Gangavataran* (1992)

*Fable for La Gran Sabana* (1993)

*Cassandra* (1994)

*She Said…* (1999/2001)

**References and Further Reading**

Chakraborty, Aishika (2008) *Ranjabati: A Dancer and Her World*. Kolkata: Thema.

A collection of selected writings by Ranjabati Sircar, edited and introduced by historian Dr. Aishika Chakraborty, this book provides an overview of the philosophy and ideology behind Navanritya. It also features published articles, performance reviews, travel writings and essays on gender written by Sircar during her lifetime.

Chakraborty, Aishika (2006) ‘Navanritya: Her Body, Her Dance’, *Sephis e-magazine, South-South Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development,* Vol.2, No.2, January 2006, 7-11.

Chakraborty’s article provides an overview of the ideology underpinning ‘Navanritya’ and examines the historical significance of this dance form in terms of women’s self-representation.

Lopez y Royo, Alessandra (2003) 'Classicism, post-classicism and Ranjabati Sircar's work: re-defining the terms of Indian contemporary dance discourses' in *South Asia Research* 23,1:153-169.

Lopez y Royo’s article discusses the nuanced relationships that exist between classical and ‘post-classical’ dance forms in India, arguing that Ranjabati Sircar’s experimental dance works, particularly her choreography *She Said* (1999/2001) offers an alternative to the conventional understanding and definition of Indian dance forms.

Sircar, Manjusri Chaki (1995) ‘Tagore and Modernization of Dance’ in *Rasa: The Indian Performing Arts in the Last Twenty-Five Years,* Volume 1, Calcutta: Anamika Kala Sangham.

Manjusri Chaki Sircar’s article critically examines key examples of female autonomy within Rabindranath Tagore’s literary repertoire and underscores the significance and impact of his modernist vision on her own choreographic choices. The article situates ‘Navanritya’ firmly within the territory of dance experimentation and female emancipation in performance that Sircar ascribes to Tagore.

**Paratextual Materials:**

Tomari Matir Kanya

Krauncha Katha

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