
GIST PROPOSAL 2010

**The impact of globalization
on the teaching and preservation of
ancient performing art forms
of South East Asia
(*Kecak, Khmer Classical dance*)
and India
(*Bharathanatyam*)
: A comparison**

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I write this proposal to seek acceptance and funding to the Group Independent Study Travel (GIST) which will be held in Asia in the second half of the Asia Pacific Leadership Program.

INTRODUCTION

There is a great interest world-wide in the preservation of heritage sites, ancient languages, literature, art and various performing art forms. The performing art forms are innately dynamic, subject to change and interpretation. There have been several attempts to adapt teaching pedagogy and present them meaningfully to the community, and to counter the impact of non-traditional cultural influences in the light of globalization. The efforts being made in Hawaii through the Hula Preservation Society to preserve the *Hula* tradition is a good example. Performing art forms can be documented for posterity, on film or photos. However the teaching techniques, nuances and their preservation are dependent on a teacher training several students to carry on a tradition. In India, this is termed as the *guru-sishya parampara* (the teacher-student tradition).

OBJECTIVES: I aim to understand the similarities and differences between the teaching pedagogy and preservation of classical performing arts forms from two different regions of South Asia – the *Kecak, Khmer Classical dance* of Cambodia/Indonesia and *Bharathanatyam* of India.

The specific questions that will be explored will be:

- What is the method of teaching used to teach these classical art forms?
- Have these changed? How have they changed over the years?
- Are there increasing numbers of students enrolling?
- How have the existing “grand masters” tried to adapt and preserve the dance forms?
- What have been the challenges; have these art forms become diluted?
- If there are several “grand masters”, are their approaches similar/different?
- How is this art form perceived/received in the community? What support is offered for such art forms by the community, public, business and particularly the Government?
- How are these art forms being documented, recorded and preserved?
- What is being done to popularize the art form, increasing audiences and students?
- What is the available literature about these art forms?

METHOD: I have established and networked with several resource persons/centres listed below. I will collect data through a structured questionnaire and interviews. I will also document through film and photography, at least two performing art forms in South Asia. Possibly, one in Cambodia and one in Indonesia. I will also explore and study the resources of the UNESCO in Bangkok, and their role in the preservation of the performing arts. These will be compared with my personal experiences and knowledge about the performing art forms in South India (specifically *Bharathanatyam*).

BACKGROUND: I am student of a very ancient dance form, the *Bharathanatyam* (Bha–ra–tha–naat–yam) that has its origins in South India. My *guru* (teacher) is a proponent of a very traditional style within the *Bharathanatyam* genre. I have learnt this dance form from childhood, completed an *arangetram* (a graduation: or a debut, full-length 2 hour solo performance) and have since performed other full-length and short performances in several places including most recently, Honolulu. My interest in the documentation and preservation of cultural heritage was further heightened when I became a student of [art administration at the Dakshin Chitra](#) . “The goddess

explored” (available in DVD format) was my first documentary film which traced the roots of the goddess worship in the villages of Tamil Nadu and its significance to Tamil culture. (This film is shown at Dakshin Chitra on a regular basis.) The other life changing experience was the opportunity to spend two weeks with one of the few existing masters, the grandmaster [Dr. K Vasudevan Pillai](#) in deep rural Kerala, to document on film (available in DVD format) a rare and dying dance art form, [padayani](#). To live in the community, watch, interact, interview, and assimilate was one of the most educational and inspiring learning experiences for me. The deep understanding I got of the influence of culture and traditional practices on the everyday lives of the people, the struggle to maintain and preserve them in the light of the influences of other cultures and globalization, was worth the experience. APLP has given me insights about other eastern cultures through the one- on-one interaction with the APLP G10 group and others in EWC. I believe that there are several lessons (similarities, differences, challenges) to be learnt by interacting closely with teachers and performing artists from cultures other than those which I have had exposure to. The GIST is a great opportunity to compare, learn and possibly promote intercultural understanding. I believe that I am well prepared for this exploration, given my background in psychology (bachelors), classical dance, film making, photography and cultural studies. I also see this as an essential step in my long-term career which is to study and work in the area of cultural anthropology. UNESCO is one of my cherished work destinations. I believe the GIST and the APLP EWC experience are very important essential elements in my career planning.

OUTCOMES:

1. Relating to self: (as a learner)
 - a. Become a person more sensitive to intercultural understanding and communication.
 - b. Establish linkages and networking with several individuals and agencies who have a common interest in the preservation of performing art forms.
 - c. Have a clear strategy for career growth and leadership in the area of cultural anthropology
2. Relating to the community : (as a teacher, fellow traveller)
 - a. Share (because of my background) with individuals and agencies with similar interest through workshop/demonstrations/performances
 - b. Use the learning to share with my community back home and with the larger EWC community the lessons learnt.
3. Relating to East West Center (as an ambassador)
 - a. Bring back to EWC a document sharing of the impact of globalization and influences of western culture in the field of performing arts.
 - b. Carry the message of EWC and its objectives , networking and leadership
 - c. Contribute to the GIST as a member of the group to share and learn from each other.

RESOURCES: In order to be able to achieve my set goals, I have networked with:

- [Dr. M.D.Muthukumaraswamy](#) (Chennai) - anthropologist and Director of the [National Folklore Support Center](#), India
- [Dr. Priya Srinivasan](#)- Bharathanatyam dancer and faculty at the University of California, Riverside, department of performing arts, expert on the history of dance in Asia. Currently on sabbatical in Shanghai, China
- [Dr. Deborah Thyagarajan](#) - Art historian on South East Asia and Director Dakshin Chitra, India
- Ms. Sangeeta Eswaran- dancer/social worker, has worked with a number of organizations in Asia, has learnt and taught different dance forms in many of the rural villages of Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, and in Latin America
- Bobbie Bigby and [Stephanie Khoury](#) who are associated with The Cambodian Living Arts Centre
- Dr. Rajeswari Ghosh (Toronto, Canada) - historian and expert in South East Asian culture
- Ms. Ly Tran- G8 participant who worked with the UNESCO
- Past Gisters and APLP and EWC alumni, who have expressed interest in further helping by sharing their contacts

I have several other leads and contacts that I am pursuing.

GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS OF INTEREST: I want to work with master teachers and communities of classical art forms, such as the [Kecak](#) from Indonesia, and [Khmer classical dance](#) of Cambodia. In addition to Cambodia and Indonesia, I would also like to make contact with the UNESCO in Bangkok, which has a number of projects regarding performing art preservation.

BUDGET:

Expenses	Details	Costs in US \$
Air fares	Bangkok- Bali - Phnom phen - Yangnon- Bangkok (Air Asia)	1200\$
Daily expenses for 99 days	Accommodation, food, travel, incidentals	At 20\$ per day - 1980\$
Visa's and insurance	Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia	100 + 50= 150\$
Total		3330\$

I will conclude by requesting for the 3500\$ category of funding. I am positive that I can make good use of the funding by promoting the preservation of ancient art forms, intercultural understand and the ideals of the East West Center.