Delhi Dancescape: Dancers navigating presence and representation

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Abstract

India's capital city, Delhi attracts large number of national and international visitors because of it position as the capital, the fascinating architectural remains, and its role in promoting the performing arts. This has encouraged many art practitioners including dancers to make Delhi their home. This presentation is an attempt to explore the dance ecology, that has developed in this city since Indian independence. The growth of premier institutions, the state patronage, the cultural policies and the overall proximity between the structures of patronage and the dancers, have made this city a hub of dance-related activities. Such activities include dance institutions teaching specific classical and folk dance forms, many dancers migrating to Delhi to make it their home, annual fundings, state recognitions of individuals, forms and institutions, spectacular events such as the Republic Day Celebrations, numerous annual festivals and invitation for foreign tours organized and funded by the Government of India. The active cultural processes in this ecology have been identified by dance scholars as hope/ identity assertions, (re)inventions, claims of authenticity, creative expressions and representation. This presentation analyses the relationship, agency, the sense of rights and expectations that dancers have as inhabitants of Delhi, by using multidisciplinary methodologies of history, performance anthropology, dance studies and cultural studies. It also hopes share some reflections on the research-in-progress that aims to reflect on the dancers' responses and responsibilities in the changing scape of the capital city, the fast-altering audience perceptions and the contemporary trends of aesthetic understanding.