

**Yoga, Dance, and Religion**  
**An Experience and Meta-Analysis of Indian Thought, Culture and the Body, Mind, Spirit Connection**

Natasha Peatross  
Caroline Prohosky, MFA  
College of Fine Arts and Communications

**Purpose of the Project**

I am seeking this ORCA grant to help support a trip to India in summer 2014 to study yoga in its original technique, language, and history—experiencing how it relates to and strengthens an individual in both religion and dance in forming a body, mind, and spirit connection.

**Importance of the Project**

This proposal describes my planned senior project, which is required of dance majors. After graduation in Dec. 2014, I would like to make both yoga and dance more accessible to those who might not normally participate in either activity. As a future dance instructor, I want to inspire people to push through hard experiences, work together, and learn how to take care of the human body and mind. In short, I want to uplift, motivate, and to teach others to improve in all aspects of their life through movement and dance.

Yoga in the West, like studio dance, has become very commercialized and imbalanced as our culture centers its focus primarily on physical virtuosity. I believe that Indian thought and culture, in connection with yoga and dance, contain extremely valuable philosophies and experiences that will aid in helping others find fulfilling motives to dance other than for the sake of technical virtuosity and praise. Correctly understanding and using the meditative ‘yoga’ states, can enliven dancers with a greater power to touch, express, and give their art life and meaning “that is emotionally satisfying and which goes beyond mere entertainment”(Shvana, 2).

**Main Proposal Body**

I am proposing a nine-week study in Visakhapatnam, India during summer term 2014 to study in depth body movement as well as the connection of the body, mind, and spirit through yoga and dance. Working with the Site Directors of the BYU India Study Abroad, Dr. Charles Nuckolls and Dr. M.V. Krishnagga, I have received their permission to design my own research program. While in India, I will live at the Lawson’s Bay Colony located in northern, urban Visakhapatnam, India. This facility is a center for BYU students studying abroad in India, which provides food, water, medical care, transportation, and translators. The projected costs are \$3,150 for food and board, \$2,000 for flight and transportation, \$225 for daily private dance lessons in the Kuchipudi style taught by Sowdamini (a well-known professional dance teacher in the area), and \$300-\$600 for daily yoga instruction at the Center for the Study of Yoga and Consciousness (located about 2 kilometers from where I will be staying). A fellow dance student, Kathryn Mecham, is also traveling to India to complete her own individual research project, and will be my traveling companion.

Before arriving in India, preparation is imperative in order to make the most of this experience. Therefore, prior to leaving, I will have completed courses offered at BYU in Indian classical dance, Indian history and Eastern thought, and world religion. I will have interviewed experienced individuals, as well as researched Indian histories, previous studies, and multiple philosophies on yoga and the full integration of the body, mind, and spirit. I am training in yoga at a variety of local studios and in a number of different methods in order to familiarize myself with the way yoga is used and portrayed in America. Throughout my training and research, I will be keeping a list of works cited and a master journal of my findings and impressions from fall 2013 to fall 2014. My preparation will enable me to accurately compare and contrast the views of yoga in American society to that of how it truly is in India where it originated.

Upon completion of the study abroad, I plan to present my research and writings in the fall 2014 National Dance Education Organization conference in Chicago, Illinois. I also plan to submit my writings to NDEO as well as other renowned health and dance journals for publication. My goal is to become a more effective teacher in communicating the worth of movement, strength of creativity, and necessity of balancing the physical, mental, and emotional expression.

### **Qualifications**

I am a dance major at BYU and am currently involved in BYU's danceEnsemble performing company and various student projects. I participated in the spring 2013 Dance Study Abroad to China where we performed and took various dance classes with some of the world's finest dancers. I am a hard worker and I love the discipline of the dance profession. Recently I began taking yoga classes to improve my flexibility and core strength, but I also sense that there is something more in yoga that can really uplift through improved understanding culture, theology, and history. My mentor, Caroline Prohosky, is the faculty member in my department who oversees senior projects. Caroline is a dedicated mentor who pushes us to be creative and to think for ourselves.

### **Project Timetable**

Fall 2013-Winter 2014

Begin journal; Continue to work with Caroline on capstone and research; Take courses for preparation; Continue with yoga classes; Formulate questions to interview Mitchell Rose, a well known artist in dance who traveled to India to study the practice of yoga, and Deni Preston, a yoga instructor at UVU who trained with Brian Kest, about their experiences with yoga to gain advice and insight; Conduct and transcribe interviews; Read at least 4-5 books on yoga, philosophy, and dance; Formulate interviews and surveys for local yogis and gurus in different studios around the area; Continue working with Dr. Nuckolls (India Study Abroad Director of BYU).

Spring 2014

Take India Study Abroad prep course; Continue reading and researching; Conduct and transcribe local interviews and surveys; Formulate interview questions for Indian yoga gurus and yogis.

Summer 2014 (June 22-August 28)

Travel to Visakhapatnam, India for field research and experience; Participate daily in yoga classes at a nearby yoga village (located about 2 kilometers from where we will be staying); Receive private dance instruction from in the traditional Kutchipudi style of Indian classical dance; Conduct and transcribe interviews; Keep a personal record.

Fall 2014

Compile research; Finish paper (October 1<sup>st</sup>); Present findings at the fall 2014 NDEO conference (Chicago Illinois); Complete Senior Capstone in Dance; Prepare paper and findings for publication.

December 31, 2014

Report back to ORCA.

### **Scholarly Sources**

Feuerstein, Georg. *The Yoga Tradition: Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*.

Prescott, Arizona: Hohm Press, 1998. Print.

Atreya, Jagat Prakash. *Mind and Its Function in Indian Thought*. New Delhi, India: Classical Publishing Company, 1985. Print.

Bernard, Theos. *Hindu Philosophy*. New York City, New York: The Philosophical Library, INC. 1947. Print.

Narayan, Shovana. *Indian Classical Dances*. Sterling Publishers PVT. Ltd, Dec 4, 2004. Print.