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Towards Moving Responsibly

Kalbeliya dance, named after Rajasthan's Kalbeliya community, has developed into a distinct genre of public performance over the last four decades. As a student of Kalbeliya dance, continuously grappling with my socio-economic and locational privilege, I consider: in what ways can I advocate for equity and serve my teachers' aspirations for their community?

I reflect on the processes of legitimization, the dance form's canonization as Rajasthani "folk" and "intangible cultural heritage," which involve concealing the dance's association with "entertainment" and discursively aligning its aesthetics with state-sanctioned criteria for assessing "heritage value." While the strategic deployment of these designations is important for my teachers' socio-economic mobility, it is my social responsibility to examine the biases and exclusions perpetuated through formalized systems of cultural classification.

Following Kalbeliya dance's circulation through "global" networks, I witness the ongoing denial of differentiation in Orientalist ways of engaging with Indian dance practices; for instance, when classicist epistemological paradigms are imposed on Kalbeliya pedagogy.

Through everyday negotiations concerning my positionality, power relations with my teachers and peers, and a sense of social responsibility that involves both alignment and divergence, I ask: how to develop ways of moving responsibly?