

From There to Here Script

Since the inception of this project, we devised a participatory structure where our subjects play an integral role in developing and choreographing a poignant awareness-raising dance documentary. Our collaborative design required a constant fluidity and adaptive approach to each day of filming, as evidenced in our Methodology Overview and Movement Script and Documentary Footage Guide.

Methodology Overview & Movement Script

Over a nine month period, Sydney Skov - co-director and choreographer - worked intimately with the dance movement therapy practitioners of Kolkata Sanved, a non-profit organization based in Kolkata, India using dance and dance movement therapy as psychosocial rehabilitation for survivors of human trafficking and violence. A long-time partner of Kolkata Sanved, Sydney worked with the practitioners who are themselves survivors of trafficking and violence throughout the development of our guiding themes, improvisation and choreography.

Beginning with **brainstorming sessions** held in Kolkata Sanved's dance studio, Sydney guided an exploration of each woman's experience being a female dancer, dance therapist, and activist in Indian society. They identified unique religious, familial, and societal pressures impinging upon their access to freedom in an everyday context. Once we established our collection of meaningful experiences we felt committed to sharing as a group and honed our list of ways in which female bodies are restricted, we entered the movement phase of pre-production, using the list of restrictions as a guide.

Sydney introduced Matt Bade of Skånes Dansteater to the movement team and together they lead more than **ten intensive movement workshops**, in which the practitioners experimented with both choreography and improvisational tasks, highlighting and rejecting each restriction through authentic movement based in the their dance and therapy foundation. It was this participatory, creative process that generated the following group choreography and unique improvisational movement for the film.

Arranged by theme, this list outlines each restriction and its movement task, as well as contextual clarity and performance notes, all of which we carried into filming for an adaptable plan with space for improvisation:

1. Legs and Feet Bad, Unclean: In India it's a strongly held cultural practice to touch the feet of highly respected individuals as a gesture of reverence because feet are considered the most unclean part of the body. This skews one's perception of and value for the body. **Movement task: Solo** - entering room and navigating space without using the legs or feet (sitting, moving across the floor, manipulating legs with the hands).

2. Fear of Public Space: Women often fear being in the streets or public spaces, especially at night, and this limits their movements and actions daily.

Movement Task: Solo - pressing against walls and corners.

3. Lack of Access to Training and Education: Stigma and social taboos often lead families to invest only in male members of their community, leaving many women without access to school or specialized training including dance.

Movement Task: Duet - one dancer moves while the partner covers the mover's eyes with their hands. (continuous sequence with 4 – 5)

4. Life is Out of Your Hands: Women who grow up without outlets for expression, who are raised under narrowly defined gender roles, are often unable to even dream of a life beyond the preordained domestic sphere. For many women, dreaming is a luxury. **Movement Task: Duet** - one dancer is moved into various positions by her partner like a marionette puppet.

5. Restrictions Within the Mind: Many restrictions placed on women in Indian society are so pervasive that they affect how women think and act, contributing to feelings of shame and low self-worth. **Movement Task: Solo** - dancer moves through space while the partner stops or restricts their movements from behind.

6. Covering the Body: Women are raised to feel shameful of their bodies. It is common practice for women in India to wear a dupatta (or a scarf worn over the shoulders) in order to conceal the chest. For women in the Muslim community, many are also expected to keep their faces veiled outside the home. **Movement Task: Solo** - hiding and revealing various areas of the body with different limbs, with and without chair as prop.

7. Always As A Pair: Women are expected to be married. If they do not conform, it impacts their ability to survive. For example, it's incredibly difficult for a single woman to rent an apartment in India; enduring cultural beliefs dictate she must live with her father or husband and is considered "bad" if she pursues independence. **Movement Task: Solo** - moving two hands together as a matching pair.

8. Barred from Dancing: It is considered inappropriate by many for "good" women to dance as a profession. In some cases, pursuing any professional aspirations beyond caring for family is discouraged. **Movement Task: Solo** - moving with everyday gestures (waving, opening a door, removing shoes).

9. Carrying the Burden of Mistakes: Often, girls who have been trafficked or sexually violated will not be accepted back into their families; they are deemed "unclean" and are not welcomed. Blame is central to this issue, for example, when a woman is raped it is generally considered to be her fault. Oftentimes, survivors are forced to grow up in shelter homes where caretakers further

stigmatize them for their experiences. **Movement Task: Duet** - moving while a partner pushes down, the feeling and reality of heaviness on your back blocking entry to the room (partners can switch).

Documentary Script

Our cinema vérité approach to capturing and contextualizing the experiences of our featured practitioners and Kolkata Sanved's groundbreaking work was deeply informed by the above list of themes, staying true to the participatory process.

Upon arrival in Kolkata, Janique and Paulius joined Sydney in a mission of capturing "at least one exceptional thing each day" - this was our mantra, and it worked. We took time to establish a rapport with the practitioners, beginning with establishing imagery of Kolkata Sanved, the dance studio, and the Kolkata context before transitioning into interviews and some incredibly powerful, exterior improvisational movement. We found it helpful to dance first, meeting everyone in their comfort zone, and later discuss deeper histories, visit homes and film with some of the practitioners and their families.

We prioritized the following questions in our interviews: How did you come to Kolkata Sanved? How did you become involved in dance movement therapy? How does dancing make you feel? What about facilitating in shelter homes? What risks are involved in pursuing this career? Stigmas faced? Do you see change happening in India, restrictions being challenged? Are you an activist?

Our conversations, mainly in Bengali, grew organically from there and we captured some incredibly riveting and inspiring stories, as well as authentic moments with our practitioners facilitating in a shelter home, bravely performing, rehearsing, participating in classes, and at home to build a solid foundation for our film *From There to Here*.

Generating Improvisation & Choreography

Once our list of restrictions on female bodies was established, each dance movement therapy practitioner chose one restriction (which we called themes) and assigned to it one body part. Then each practitioner worked independently to create a phrase of four movements emanating from or based around their chosen body part. Through a process of peer review, the movements were refined. Finally, six standout phrases were woven into a larger piece of group choreography. Our team documented the final rehearsals and peer critiques before capturing the performance in a historic house, located in North Kolkata.

In addition to the group piece, each practitioner explored improvisational movement in pairs or individually by choosing another theme. We assigned a "movement task" for each theme and the dancers improvised based upon that task. The duets and solos created in this process will be featured in the film as visceral performances that reveal the inner-strength, resilience, and artistry of each woman in the context of her chosen art form.