

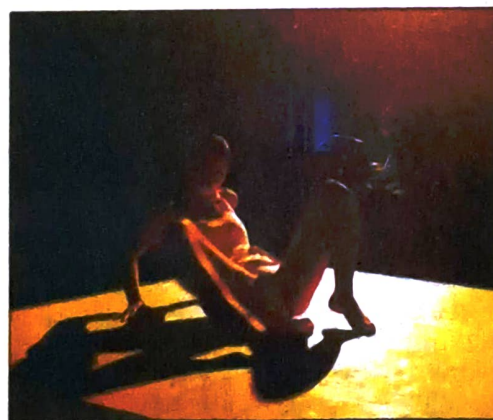
When the body tells tales

DANCE

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Themed "Converging Identities", the recent edition of the *Dance Bridges Festival*, spread across multiple venues and spaces, brought together an eclectic range of impulses, contemporary dance philosophies, energies, flows and movement vocabularies. Among its many offerings was an arresting evening of three mesmerizing solos at the Anuchintan Art Centre's black box, which included Asish Singha's deeply affecting *Anek Lavya*.

Drawing on the myth of Ekalavya, who is denied access to Dronacharya's teaching because of his social status, *Anek Lavya* (picture, top) highlights the irony of a system that excludes the marginalised from knowledge and yet claims ownership over their achievements. Ekalavya's self-acquired skill in archery does not free him from this hierarchy. Instead, his accomplishment becomes the basis for further exploitation. Singha brings this narrative into a conversation with his own reality of growing up in the small town and facing untold abuse and trauma. The work interrogates the structures of privilege and authority, but *Anek Lavya* is also an investigation into the possibilities of the dancing body, which becomes both the subject and the medium of the work. Singha reworks the *alaripu* from the idiom of Bharatanatyam while the piece also draws upon geometric forms and architecture. The division of stage space becomes an integral part of this inquiry, with light and shadow not merely illuminating the performance but also lending it shape and structure. Saheb Sanyal's light design and Subhankar Mondal's music intensify this interplay of body, space and atmosphere. *Anek Lavya* transforms the



dancer's body into a site of vulnerability as well as resistance.

Experimentus Dance Company's *Tear-jerker* (picture, middle), conceived and directed by Paulo Lima and performed by Miguel Ângelo Lima

Rodrigues, unpacks solitude as a physical condition rather than merely an emotional one. Silence, stillness and restrained gesture turn the body into a location where absence is experienced and presence asserted. The use of urban street dance vocabularies makes this meditative premise more complex, introducing rhythmic patterns of physical exercise into a calm physical language. It is due to the creation of this tension that solitude does not sink into passivity. The isolated body remains active, negotiating space and resisting disappearance. Restraint is the key to Rodrigues's performance. He veers away from spectacle, prompting the mind to control the body. One becomes aware of how demanding minimalism can be.

Aseng Borang's *The Chinky Express Comes to Town* (picture, bottom) enquires into the brutalities of racial 'Othering' that acquires sinister overtones in the aftermath of the recent mob lynching of a guitarist from Manipur in New Delhi. The work addresses discrimination against people from Northeast India as a political issue while also processing how such discrimination is experienced through the body. Borang situates the body on a raised platform at the centre of the performance space and examines the ways in which it is controlled by the gaze of others. The body is a site of protest and the movement vocabulary relies on physical strain and the building up of tension through repetition. It is the experiential nature of the choreography that makes the piece, even on a second viewing in two years, intensely engaging and disturbing at once.

One might question the programming of three intensely demanding solo works in a single evening. Each is powerful, but together they are overwhelming. Without breathing space, they are like three detonations with hardly any space between them.