

Between Folk Dance and World Dance: Kalbelia Dancers as Diaspora

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Kalbelia Dance was born in the 1980s in Rajasthan, India as a Kālbēliyā community dance. Although it was a new dance form coming up and spreading with globalization, it was listed as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2010. This presentation illustrates how Kalbelia Dance worked on the imagination and sense of belongingness of dancers from various communities both inside and outside of India, and how various dance forms were grafted to ever-changing Kalbelia Dance. The Kalbelia Dance remains flexible in terms of form because it evokes a relation between snakes and humans, or the origins of “Gypsies”, as something “lost” for both the dancers and audience. Here the “bodies” of Kalbelia Dancers came to be replaceable by anything or anybody who can fulfill such imagination. It reflects politico-cultural processes of globalization that are progressing by rearranging our imagination through physical experiences. By being neither a folk dance nor a globally consumed world dance, Kalbelia Dance is making space for diasporic dancers to encounter and seek alternative belongingness.