Louise Lightfoot in Search of India

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An Australian Dancer's Experience

By

Louise Lightfoot

Edited by

Amit Sarwal

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Dr Amit Sarwal
Melbourne, 2017

FOREWORD

MARGARET ALLEN[1]

Louise Lightfoot (1902-1979) was remarkable, even as a young woman. The first woman to graduate in architecture in Melbourne, she worked as an apprentice and a qualified architect in the studio of the American architects and designers of Canberra, Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin. Perhaps with them, she started some association with Theosophy, which encouraged racial and gender equality and saw all the world's great religions as equally important repositories of human wisdom and morality. Certainly, as Amit Sarwal documents, in the introduction to *Louise Lightfoot in Search of India: An Australian Dancer's Experience*, she was open to new influences and able to break away from narrow and conformist ideas about culture and art. Like so many Australians of her time, and sadly even today, she had little knowledge of Indian cultures and art forms. It was in Paris that she had her first experience of Indian dance when she saw a performance of Uday Shankar's troupe.

Her real introduction to India came when she made a visit in 1938. Her initial response might appear to be Orientalist and exoticising for she wrote of her feelings as her ship approached the shore: "I was amazed...at this great flood of ecstasy which now came over me—ecstasy, anticipation, reverence, yearning, a bursting sensation as if my whole body would dissolve. I remember as we walked the streets of Bombay that day, I had the feeling of being 'home at last.'"

However, as Sarwal notes, her interactions with Indian dance and dancers were those of great respect. She spent some years at the feet of Indian teachers, learning their art and of the cultural and religious beliefs which supported them. In studying the South Indian dance, Kathakali, being the first Western woman to do so, she was one artist appreciating the

[1] Margaret Allen is Professor Emerita at the University of Adelaide. She is interested in transnational, postcolonial and feminist histories and whiteness. She has also researched 19th-century Australian women writers and the making of a colonial culture. She is on the editorial boards of *Australian Feminist Studies*, *Critical Race and Whiteness Studies*, *Hecate*, and *Outskirts*.

art and technique of other artists. Later she was to go to the North-East regions to study Manipuri dancing and indeed published a study of it.

Lightfoot worked to promote Indian dance in India itself, in Australia and further afield. Such work had deeply practical and arduous elements, arranging programs, organising venues and travel arrangements. In her project of cultural translation, she saw the need to adapt these dance forms for Western audiences. In her writing, some of which is collected here, she sought to educate audiences about Indian dance. Most importantly for us in Australia, she worked to lessen the cultural ignorance and isolation which came from the restrictive immigration policies and the subservience to European, largely British culture.

In common with only a few other far-sighted Australians in the 1930s and 1940s, she saw the necessity for Australia to know and engage with her neighbours on a basis of equality: “we are so close to India here, we know comparatively nothing of the art of this great ancient land. It is not our fault exactly. We are not educated up to think that there is anything of particular interest for us in this neighbouring country.” She worked to educate Australians to operate in a world in which, on their very doorstep, European colonialism was being displaced by new nations.

Furthermore, the international exposure she facilitated for Indian dance and dancers, such as Ananda Shivaram, Rajkumar Priyagopal Singh and Ibetombi Devi, afforded some dignity to Indians emerging from a long period of European domination and humiliation.

During the 1940s and 1950s, with the dangerous environment of the Cold War, she looked ahead to a better world where cultural exchange could promote international good will and understanding.

In bringing together Lightfoot’s writing from a variety of Indian and Australian publications, Amit Sarwal is continuing some of Lightfoot’s own project and making a valuable contribution to fostering understanding between India and Australia. In exploring the histories of Indian and Australian interactions, it is important to understand those who went before, who stood against the narrow-minded Anglo-conformism of cultural life in Australia and dared to travel, both physically and in the imagination to appreciate what was represented as the other and as incomprehensible.

INTRODUCTION

AMIT SARWAL

I

For many Australians, India is and has been a land of mysticism, magic, *moksha* (spiritual emancipation) or a land of "*sahibs*, *sadhus* and spinners," as the title of a 2009 Australian short story collection suggests. However, there are many shared commonalities between the two countries like the history of British imperialism, English language, trade and love of cricket. What is not popular knowledge is the fact that India was more actually a lifeline for colonial Australia.

As part of the British colonists' world, Australia made the first trade links with India. Recent sociological, anthropological and genetics studies have thrown light on linguistic similarities between Aborigines and Andamanese tribes. They also point to earlier links between pre-colonial Australia and the Indian subcontinent, such as the trade between Aborigines and Makassar seamen. Later, with the beginning of British colonialism, in Australia the Ghans and hawkers, who connected the outback with towns and cities, were brought from Northern India. Lawyer John Lang, who represented the Indian Queen of Jhansi, Rani Lakshmibai, in Court against the British, was the first Australian-born novelist. The rum of the Rum Rebellion or Great Rebellion of 1808 came from India. Also notable is that the habit of drinking tea, closely associated with British life in the tropics, came from India—an Australian named James "Rajah" Inglis, made a fortune through his "Billy Tea" brand. Similarly, in India, Walers—the great horses of the British Raj used in Polo—were imported from New South Wales, and the Mahalaxmi Racecourse in Mumbai was designed after Caulfield and Randwick Racecourses. Even today, some Australian towns and pastoral properties carry Indian names reflecting a deep connection between the two countries.[1]

[1] See also Walker (1999) and Westrip and Holroyde (2010).

Given the above maritime, trade and cultural links between Australia and India in the 19th century, both nations attracted many curious and enthusiastic travellers. The last Nizam of Hyderabad made Western Australia his home for some time. On the other hand, Australians had been attracted to Indian curios, artworks, colourful clothes, and paintings of grand Indian palaces and bazaars. The great Inter-colonial Exhibition of Australia, held in Melbourne, 1866-1867, had evinced the wide popularity of Indian *nautch* girls as well. In the early 20th century, Australians were entertained by foreign dance troupes and companies performing full-length ballets, and a "vulgarised" form of Hindu dance. By contrast, Indian classical dance, as it has come to be known, was virtually unknown and unseen in Australia at that time.

Today, thanks to a small number of dedicated scholars and their research, people are aware of Indian-Australian historical encounters and interconnections. In January 2013, with a view to extend the scope of our cultural engagements, I began a two-year postdoctoral research project, titled "Cross-Cultural Diplomacy: Indian Visitors to Australia, 1947 to 1980," at Deakin University, Australia. This project aimed to systematically examine how Australia and India viewed each other in the aftermath of decolonisation, particularly with reference to key Indian visitors—noted dancers, journalists, writers and researchers—who came during the period under survey. I came to know about an Australian architect turned ballet teacher and impresario, Louise Lightfoot. In Australia, Louise was known for her Indian–Australian dance and cultural collaborations. In the late 1970s, before her death, Louise had donated her life's work—handwritten notes, photographs, negatives, scrapbooks, sketches, press cuttings, programs, posters, brochures, letters, invoices, books, musical notes, maps, costumes, props, and audio/video reels—in boxes and trunks to the Music Archives of Monash University. In connection with this project, I accessed the Music Archives. At that time my whole focus was on Indian dancers—Ananda Shivaram, Janaki Devi, Rajkumar Priyagopal Singh, Lakshman Singh, and Ibetombi Devi—whose tours to Australia were organised by Louise, from 1947 to 1976.[2] But by the end of the year, as I delved deeper into this archival collection, I realised that despite decades of hard work and dedication to Indian dancing and creating awareness about India in Australia, Louise's work and life are relatively unknown in both the countries.

During this research, I also found out that in many of her letters, written around the early 1950s, to her friends and fellow dancers—Shivaram, Priyagopal and Ibetombi in particular—Louise referred to her

[2] See Sarwal and Walker (2013) and Sarwal (2014a; 2014b).

interest in publishing a book of her adventures in India—an autobiography with lots of photographs. So, I decided to recreate Louise's Indian adventures using her published essays.

This book, *Louise Lightfoot in Search of India: An Australian Dancer's Experience*, contains thirty-three essays written by Louise Lightfoot, which first appeared in national and international newspapers and magazines between the late 1930s and 1950s. These essays were most notably published in *The Hindu*, *The Horizon*, *BP Magazine*, *Mysindia*, *The Orient Illustrated Weekly*, *Bombay Chronicle*, *The Indian Express*, *Triveni Quarterly*, *The Dancing Times*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *The Argus*, *The Mail*, and also in her book *Dance-Rituals of Manipur, India*. Louise's writings range from her impressions of South India (Malabar Coast and its culture) to the future of Indian Classical Dance in India and abroad. She also notes the emergence of Bombay Cinema and its impact on Indian dance and dancers. For ease of reading, this book has been divided into the following seven thematic sections rather than the chronology of publication—South India; The Origins of Kathakali; Ballet and Kathakali; Dance Schools/Centres and Performances; Women and Dancing; Manipuri Dances; and Bombay Cinema and Kathakali. The essays presented here reflect Louise Lightfoot's broader worldview as a dancer, choreographer, and impresario. Louise's essays segue into each other and echo her various encounters with India and its diverse cultural conditions, beliefs and philosophies.

II

Louise Lightfoot (aka Louisa Mary Lightfoot),[3] born in Yangery (near Warrnambool, Victoria) on 22 May 1902, was the fourth child and third daughter of Victorian-born parents Charles Lightfoot, a schoolteacher, and his wife Mary, née Graham.[4] At the Catholic Ladies' College, East Melbourne,[5] she won exhibitions in drawing and mathematics, and in 1920 her father sent her to study Architecture at the University of Melbourne. She passed her final subjects in the Diploma of Architecture in 1923, the

[3] I have used Lightfoot and Quartly (2005); M. Lightfoot (2008); NLAdance (2010); Brissenden and Glennon (2010); and hand-written explanatory notes of Louise Lightfoot available at Music Archive of Monash University to compile her biography.

[4] See Lightfoot and Quartly (2005).

[5] Founded in 1902 in East Melbourne by the Sisters of Charity, Catholic Ladies' College shifted to Eltham in 1971.

first woman to have then done so.[6] While still a student, she began a four-year apprenticeship in the innovative architectural office of Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin in Melbourne.[7] In 1925 the Griffins moved to Castlecrag, Sydney,[8] a new suburb intended as an ideal community in harmony with nature and culture. Louise went too, as a mate to Marion, as well as a planner and designer for Griffins' office. In the words of Walter Griffin, Louise showed "resourcefulness and trustworthiness, as well as artistic comprehension and diligence."[9]

Louise was "tall, slender and graceful, striking in profile, beautiful rather than pretty."[10] She was fond of dancing but could see no way to practise it as a profession. Marion Griffin encouraged Louise's natural talent and love of dance. Louise started learning "Eurhythmic" Greek dancing from Gertrude Sievers and found it "a little dull." On Anna Pavlova's first tour of Australia in 1926, Louise found her fusion of classical technique and romantic emotion a "revelation."[11] Inspired by seeing Pavlova dance Grand Russian Ballet, Louise dreamed of bringing the same to life in Australia. Through the Griffins, she met the Russian folk dancer Misha Burlakov, who had danced with Pavlova's tour.[12] Louise persuaded him to teach her the Russian mazurka and felt that her "real happiness started" when she danced with him in "peasant costume and red leather boots."[13] The "tall, willowy blonde" (Lightfoot) and the "strong, dark, jolly Russian" (Burlakov) danced at clubs, parties and

[6] See Lightfoot and Quartly (2005).

[7] Walter Burley Griffin was an American architect and landscape architect, who is best known for his role in designing Canberra, Australia's capital city. Griffin visited Lucknow (India) in the 1930s and was inspired by the architecture and culture of India. He died of peritonitis in early 1937, five days after gall bladder surgery at King George's Hospital in Lucknow, and was buried in Christian Cemetery in Lucknow.

[8] Castlecrag was originally planned by Walter Burley Griffin, who named the suburb after a towering crag of rock overlooking Middle Harbour, known locally as Edinburgh Castle. Griffin came to Castlecrag in 1925 after tiring of the politics surrounding the implementation of his designs for Australia's capital city, Canberra.

[9] See Lightfoot and Quartly (2005).

[10] See Lightfoot and Quartly (2005).

[11] See Lightfoot and Quartly (2005).

[12] Misha (or Mischa) Burlakov was born in Ukraine and came to Australia in 1913. He had performed national and folk dances for various clubs and schools and also appeared in classical ballet recitals in NSW. See Brissenden and Glennon, 82.

[13] See Lightfoot and Quartly (2005).

soirees in the homes of artistic or wealthy Sydney-siders.[14] The duo studied whatever forms of dance they could find, and opened a dance school, teaching folk dances, also known as "character" dance and ballet to a growing number of students. Louise took tuition from Ivan Sergieff, who was a member of Pavlova's dance company in both Australian tours.

Lightfoot and Burlakov established a ballet studio and large dance school at Circular Quay, Sydney out of which would grow the First Australian Ballet. The first public appearances by dancers of the Lightfoot-Burlakov school were in 1929 when Lightfoot and Burlakov, along with some of their pupils, began appearing in opera performances, dance recitals, and in various divertissements at Castlecrag.[15] Louise's passion for dance was the driving force, complemented by Misha's dancing, mime, and carpentry skills. They took every opportunity to "show their girls" on stage, and the students helped with costumes and scenery. At the request of the Feminist Club and the Theosophical Society,[16] performing in pageants and revues, at fetes and garden parties, in aid of Music Week, Red Cross or the Women's Hospital, the students and parents "contributed culturally and financially while building their repertoire of dances and excerpts."[17] In 1930, Louise studied modern dance with Sonia Revid, in the technique of Mary Wigman, and added to their repertoire dances in that starkly modern style.[18]

By March 1931 these early initiatives had developed to the stage where they presented their first classical dance production. Mary Louise Lightfoot notes that Rukmini Arundale, wife of the prominent British Theosophist Dr. George Arundale, who had settled for some time in Sydney, stimulated the idea of a larger stage production for Lightfoot and Burlakov's students in which she would dance Pavlova's own creation *Indian Wedding*. This was seen as part of *Oriental Impressions*, a ballet created from Uday Shankar's collaboration with Pavlova.[19] Rukmini had met Pavlova on the ship to Australia, and since been studying ballet at the

[14] See M. Lightfoot (2008).
[15] See Brissenden and Glennon, 82-83.
[16] Theosophy, derived from the Greek word *theosophia*, means divine wisdom. Its main aim is to impart teachings on the subject of integral knowledge on the state of human consciousness, universe, humanity, and divinity. Theosophical Society was founded in 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky with Colonel Henry Steel Olcott and others in New York, USA. Its international headquarters is at Adyar in Chennai, India and has been in existence in Australia since 1895. For a detailed discussion, see Roe (1986).
[17] See M. Lightfoot (2008).
[18] See Brissenden and Glennon, 82 and Lightfoot and Quartly (2005).
[19] See Part 1, Chapter 3 of M. Lightfoot (2015).

Lightfoot-Burlakov studio. Carl Sauer conducted the orchestra while Julian Ashton supervised the décor and production. This performance at the Savoy Theatre, Sydney, was the birth of the First Australian Ballet.

In November 1931, the First Australian Ballet presented their first full ballet production—a two-act version of *Coppelia*.[20] In J. C. Williamson's library, Lightfoot found a score of this ballet with extensive notes.[21] Burlakov has seen Geneé's version and Louise was confident that she could design, produce and stage it. On 4 November 1931, at the Savoy Theatre, Sydney, Burlakov danced as Franz and the role of Swanhilda was shared between Jessie Cree (Act I) and Bertha Minoutochka (Act II). Dance critic Valerie Lawson called the First Australian Ballet "the starting block of professional ballet in Australia" and "an important building block for the professional companies to follow."[22]

Following the success of this show, the company continued to perform regularly either in theatres or stages in the studio at get-togethers or monthly meetings over the next decade. The Lightfoot-Burlakov studio also became a meeting place for visiting artists and dancers. Some of the main dancers and performers at these meetings were: Moya Beaver, Trafford Whitelock, Bette Ainsworth, Gwen Ainsworth, Dorothy Evans, and Sylvia Evans. Peter Finch, Ronnie Randell and John Antill attended classes at the Lightfoot-Burlakov studio and appeared in a few productions. In 1936 Louise choreographed her version of *Petrouchka*.[23] This production featured Trafford Whitelock as Petrouchka, Moya Beaver as the Ballerina and Burlakov as the Blackamoor and was presented on 18 and 20 July 1936 at the Conservatorium, Sydney. Other works presented by the company in the 1930s included *Le Carnaval*, *Les Sylphides*, *Le*

[20] *Coppélia* is a comic ballet originally choreographed by Arthur Saint-Léon to the music of Léo Delibes, with libretto by Charles Nuitter. Nuitter's libretto and mise-en-scène were based upon two stories by E. T. A. Hoffmann: *Der Sandmann* (The Sandman), and *Die Puppe* (The Doll). *Coppélia* concerns an inventor, Dr. Coppelius, who has made a life-size dancing doll. It is so lifelike that Franz, a village swain, becomes infatuated with it and sets aside his true heart's desire, Swanhilde. She shows him his folly by dressing as the doll, pretending to make it come to life and ultimately saving him from an untimely end at the hands of the inventor.

[21] See Brissenden and Glennon, 82.

[22] M. Lightfoot (2008).

[23] *Petrushka* (French: *Pétrouchka*) is a ballet set to music by the Russian composer Igor Stravinsky. It was composed in 1910–11 and revised in 1947. The ballet tells the story of a Russian traditional puppet Petrushka, who is made of straw, with a bag of sawdust as his body, but who comes to life and develops emotions.

Spectre de la Rose, and *Scheherazade*.[24] Original works included *Roksanda* with a commissioned score from Roy Maling, which premiered on 17 June 1933, and Louise's production of *The Blue God*.[25]

Louise choreographed and produced several ballets a year in the 1930s, sometimes from her memory of productions seen in Australia, often from descriptions in books and magazines. Lightfoot-Burlakov faced many difficulties in producing their works—from studios in buildings which were threatened to be pulled down to getting copyrights of musical scores and performance rights from overseas publishers and companies.[26]

In 1937, to learn more about emerging dance styles and to secure the rights to perform a number of new ballets, Lightfoot visited London and Paris with Burlakov.

When the ship stopped in Bombay en route, Louise straightaway "fell under the spell of India."[27] She "purchased Indian dance costumes and socialised with handsome Indians back on board, almost to the displeasure of the mostly white passengers."[28] Louise noted about her experience:

> A very strange thing happened to me when we neared the shore of India and were standing on the deck watching the figures on the wharf grow more distinct…I had never had any special interest in India. My heart was set on Europe…I was amazed then at this great flood of ecstasy which now came over me—ecstasy, anticipation, reverence, yearning, a bursting sensation as if my whole body would dissolve. I remember as we walked the streets of Bombay that day, I had the feeling of being "home at last."[29]

In Paris, the new home of Russian ballet, Louise and Misha found ballet scores they wanted and Louise also attended classes with famous Russian émigré teachers and experts in modern, Spanish and Hindu dances.[30] She was particularly impressed by seeing Indian dance for the first time—performances by the great Indian dancer and impresario Uday Shankar and his Indian Dance Company.

Louise told the *Woman's Weekly* that she intended to create a new Indian ballet on her return to Australia.[31] So, to bring more authenticity to

[24] See Brissenden and Glennon, 83.
[25] See M. Lightfoot (2008) and Brissenden and Glennon, 83.
[26] See Brissenden and Glennon, 83.
[27] See M. Lightfoot (2008).
[28] See M. Lightfoot (2008).
[29] Qtd. in Gibson (1999).
[30] See M. Lightfoot (2008).
[31] See Lightfoot and Quartly (2005).

her ballet, Louise got off the ship in Bombay (now Mumbai) to study Indian dance.

After five months in India (when she again met Rukmini Devi and stayed in Adyar), Misha Burlakov and the students implored her to come back home and Louise reluctantly returned to Australia. Soon after her return in early 1938, Lightfoot-Burlakov produced their last joint recital—Louise's own "authentic" (using Manipuri movements recently learned from Rajkumar Priyagopal's father) version of *The Blue God* (about Indian gods and goddesses)—at the NSW Conservatorium of Music. In early twentieth-century Australia, only visiting foreign companies performed full ballets, and Indian dance was virtually unknown and unseen. Prior to this, most of the Australian theatrical and dance works performed in Sydney and Melbourne, such as *The Indian Maid* (1835), *The Sultan's Choice* (1858), *A Moorish Maid* (1905), *The Golden Threshold* (1907), *Cora, the Temptress* (1915) and *The Rajah of Shivapore* (1917), had Indian settings, stories and characters but were "orientalist spectacle ready for consumption."[32] The Oriental peoples and cultures were represented primarily as exotica as most of these earlier Australian representations, on stage, radio and cinema, and engagement with India were underpinned by imperial and colonial influences from European representations.[33] Louise was going to play a major role in changing that.

After *The Blue God*, Louise Lightfoot dissolved her partnership with Burlakov, packed her bags and returned to India—to the Malabar Coast (Kerala)—to find Kathakali.[34] Burlakov continued the First Australian

[32] See Srinivasan, 142. Australians saw Indian curios, art products, colourful clothes, and paintings presenting scenes of grand Indian palaces and bazaars, along with travelling Indian gypsy dancers or *nautch* girls as part of the great Inter-colonial Exhibition of Australia held in Melbourne, 1866-67.

[33] Similarly, much later in Australian music, particularly Jazz works of Bruce Clarke (1963) and Charlie Munro (1967) and rock counterculture music of the group The Twilights (1968) and Terry Britten (1968), there were some Indian influences and rhythms, a result of the universal popularity of the Beatles. See also Broinowski (1996); Walker (1999); Scott-Maxwell (2003); and Bilimoria (2003).

[34] Involving the unfolding of stories in dance or dance-drama, Kathakali originated from *Krishnanattam* (Sanskrit plays in praise of Lord Krishna) and *Ramanattam* or Attakatha (Malayalam plays in praise of Lord Rama) in the coastal state of Kerala during the seventeenth century. Kathakali does not include any onstage dialogue at all and is noted chiefly for being an all-male domain (even female roles are played by men). The variety and range of characters from noble heroes to demons and religious themes and stories concerning the victory of good over evil are drawn from *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, and the *Puranas*. For detailed discussion, see Sarwal and Walker (2015).

Ballet with the assistance of Barbara McDonnell, one of the company dancers and a teacher at the school.[35] During the 1940s Burlakov produced *Lake Of Swans*, a four-scene version of *Swan Lake*, which premiered at the Sydney Conservatorium. The First Australian Ballet disbanded in the 1950s. Burlakov continued to teach at his school until his death in 1965.[36]

In the next half-decade Louise lived in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, learning the different techniques of the sacred dance styles Kathakali and Bharata Natyam.[37] Louise immersed herself first in studying Kathakali, the traditional dance-drama performed in all-night performances in Hindu temples. She soon became a great publicist of Indian dance troupes and soloists by organising tours for troupes in South India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). To support herself and the work she taught classical ballet to children of the British Raj. She also worked with filmmaker K. Subramanyam at Madras (Chennai) and published widely her perspective pieces in the Indian press many of which are reproduced in this book.

Alan Seymour (1948) noted that during her stay in India, the "religious tradition" and the "deep spiritual content of Indian dance" had

> an over-whelming effect upon her, and characteristically, she determined to learn everything she could about this profoundly exciting dance art…Lightfoot…absorbed its technique and emotional content until she was as conversant as possible with the background, traditions, and living spirit of Indian dancing.[38]

According to Moya Beaver (1994), a former student of the Lightfoot-Burlakov School and a principal dancer of the First Australian Ballet company,[39] this was something that no Australian woman had done before. In this Seymour also notes, not at all surprised, that Louise displayed that quintessential Australian trait of "initiative." He writes:

> …unlike many Australians in the theatre world who have gone abroad and forgotten to come back, she has devotedly, and with passionate sincerity, attempted to bring something of culture, enlightenment, and international goodwill to the Australian people.[40]

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[35] See Brissenden and Glennon, 84.
[36] See Brissenden and Glennon, 84.
[37] See Lightfoot and Quartly (2005).
[38] See Seymour, 51.
[39] Beaver also taught at this Sydney-based school and in the 1930s in absence of Lightfoot and Burlakov, when they went to Europe, ran it as the acting principal.
[40] See Seymour, 51.

Louise devoted her considerable talents—experience drawn from promoting ballet in Australia—and energy to promoting Indian classical dance. She was thrilled by the whole experience of learning Kathakali—involving poetry, song, acting and dance—and soon she appealed to both the British in India to appreciate Indian dance, and to Indian parents to allow their sons and daughters to dance. In 1940 she published an "International Appeal of the Ballet" in *The Hindu* (11 February):

> We can help in the cause of art by making a fuss of these artists and their splendid work, which will soon make Indian Ballet a powerful influence on the whole world of Ballet. We are preparing the world—so we hope—for an international understanding, and there is nothing more completely international in its appeal than Ballet.[41]

In 1946 Louise published a piece on Kathakali in an Australian newspaper, *The Argus* (31 July 1946), titled "Two Thousand Years of Rhythm." She writes:

> Educated young women, including the daughter of the first woman member the Legislative Assembly, are studying Kathakali. Even though they haven't much knowledge of it yet, they are enthralling the sophisticated, cinema-loving audiences of India's big cities.[42]

One of the reasons for Louise's remark and explanation of limited interest of Indians, and of only a handful of Western dancers, in Kathakali is the time and dedication needed to be a trained Kathakali artist. She noted of her own time spent studying this art in Kerala:

> Training for Kathakali is a trial of strength…No European dancer would care to rise at 4 every morning to practise two hours of eye movements near a little lamp in the darkness. Or to sit for another two hours clapping out intricate rhythms based on bars of five and seven, and other difficult beats. Or to deliberately submit to the painful oil massages necessary to limber the body. They groan and weep over those massages, and they have to memorise the stanzas of the vocal accompaniment to over a hundred all night ballets. That goes on for eight years, then the real dancing begins.[43]

[41] See Lightfoot, 1940: np.
[42] See Lightfoot, 1946: 16.
[43] See Lightfoot, "Two Thousand Years of Rhythm": 16.

Louise also realised at a very early stage that Kathakali would never be "adopted entirely by Western dancers," and audiences, because it "wouldn't suit them."[44] It was a subject quite new for Australians despite the fact that

> …we are so close to India here, we know comparatively nothing of the art of this great ancient land. It is not our fault exactly. We are not educated to think that there is anything of particular interest for us in this neighbouring country.[45]

So, the best method was to infuse the Indian rhythms of this symbolic art with Western dance and vice versa. Here Louise's knowledge and training in architecture, sculpture and painting helped her in the elaborate planning of costumes, ornaments and stage design.

Louise first met Ananda Shivaram in 1938 at Kerala Kalamandalam where he studied and tutored dance. In a world that was full of distrust, emptiness, and mindless destruction, and moving towards a World War, Louise was mesmerised by Shivaram's excellence in dance, personality and spiritual attachment to his art. Louise thought of him as the very epitome and "embodiment of the Indian spirit of dancing."[46] She noted that for Shivaram, a true Hindu dancer, and others like him:

> …dancing means more than an entertainment. It is considered an approach to God. That does not mean it is a very serious and boring affair. It means that the Hindu understands the real meaning of beauty and the true function of art in life. The Hindu temple was the home of the arts of music, sculpture, painting and dancing, as well as philosophy.[47]

She thought of bringing him to Australia, as "her own country must see Shivaram" and the Indian art and artists triumph over destruction and enjoy Kathakali dance dramas as a cathartic experience. In her interview with Seymour, she notes:

> The World in its present tortured state desperately needs people of goodwill, people who offer enlightenment and a creative way as an answer

[44] See Lightfoot, "Two Thousand Years of Rhythm": 16.
[45] See Lightfoot, "Explanation of Items by Miss Lightfoot's Hindu Dance Group," 1947.
[46] See Seymour, 51. The great god—*Mahadeva*—Lord Shiva, the cosmic dancer or *yogi* who is also the preserver and destroyer in Hindu religion, is considered the Lord of Dance—*Nataraj*. See Coomaraswamy (1974).
[47] See Lightfoot, "Explanation of Items by Miss Lightfoot's Hindu Dance Group," 1947.

> to the contemporary mania for destruction and violence…art and artists can forge strong links between the peoples of all countries, assisting to promote understanding and mutual goodwill, in place of the national distrust which nowadays so largely prevails.[48]

As soon as World War II ended, Louise sailed for Australia, intent on bringing Indian dance to her country. On hearing that she was bringing a Hindu dancer to Australia, her mother sent a message to Louise: "On no account bring a coloured gentleman with you! You would be very much misunderstood."[49] But Louise successfully prepared the public to receive her "treasure" and taught some Australian girls Indian dances to accompany the male artist.

In 1947, Shivaram arrived in Australia and by the end of his visit was a star, liked by everyone. Some ladies noted: "That hair! Those eyes! And those TEETH! Oh!…profound."[50] During his tour, Shivaram was often seen from an orientalist gaze—admired for being an exotic and oriental dancer—and comments such as these, which are orientalist in nature, were made as compliments. Louise became his publicist by painstakingly organising, publicising, explaining the art and life of Kathakali artists to audiences through her well-researched lectures and commentaries, in addition to doing hundreds of other tasks associated with event management single-handedly. In 1948, Shivaram and Louise introduced Kathakali dance to the British stage. In 1949 for the Australian National Theatre, Louise presented Shivaram in a ballet of her own design, *Indra Vijayam*, considered an unusual work for a classical ballet company to present.

In 1950 they again toured successfully and performed in cities and country towns in Australia, New Zealand and Fiji. The next tour with the Manipuri dancers in Australia went on to Japan, and eventually Canada and the USA. Performances would often take the form of lecture demonstrations in universities and art galleries, with Louise providing commentary.

Soon, Louise was interested in learning other traditional dance forms of India, especially the folk culture of Manipur.[51] Here she would discover and help popularise a form older than the Hindu traditions. Louise had met

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[48] See Seymour, 51.
[49] See Lightfoot, "A Few Stories of Shivaram": np.
[50] See Lightfoot, "A Few Stories of Shivaram": np.
[51] Manipur, a small state in the North-Eastern India, is traditionally regarded in the Indian classics and epics such as *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* as the home of *gandharvas* (the celestial dancers).

and seen Priyagopal, an expert Manipuri dancer,[52] perform in Calcutta and taken lessons with his guru/father—though her first love was always Kathakali dance. She notes in her article "In Search of Manipur":

> I could not forget the Manipuri Dance; and while abroad on my various tours, I always planned to return to India again one day and visit that far-distant land of Manipur which, I knew, lay at the extreme East of India adjoining the Burma border.[53]

So, when Shivaram, with whom she toured for almost four years (1947 to 1951) to showcase Kathakali dance, decided to rest for a year, Louise "sailed straight to Bombay" to meet Rajkumar Priyagopal Singh.[54] She visited the remote mountain state of Manipur with him to learn more about Manipuri dance. Lightfoot started recording her own observation on Manipur and Manipuri dance, and to stay in touch with Manipur continued reading about the history and practice of various dance forms including Jagoi (a rhythmical and dramatic dance performed with drums and cymbals).[55] Louise notes:

> Many fine books have been written about the Dances of India both by Indians and Westerners; but invariably the chapters or paragraphs about Manipur have been both inadequate and incorrect. Without waiting for research-subsidy from any Government or Society, I decided to stay at least a couple of years in Manipur and write what I considered more

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[52] Manipuri is one of the eleven dance styles of India that have incorporated various techniques mentioned in such ancient treatises as the *Natya Shastra* and *Bharatarnava*. It has been placed by Sangeet Natak Akademi within 'a common heritage' of Indian classical dance forms (*shastriya nritya*).

[53] Lightfoot (1951).

[54] Lightfoot notes that when the noted Bengali poet and Noble Laureate Rabindranath Tagore saw a Jagoi performance, titled *Vasant Nritya*, by Priyagopal, he was moved to tears. Tagore was so entranced by Manipuri dancing that he requested Surjaboro Singh, Priyagopal's father, to start a dance course in Manipuri Jagoi at Shantiniketan (Tagore's university). When Guru Surjaboro Singh died in 1939, Tagore wrote: "India has lost one of her greatest sons" ("In Search of Manipur": n.pag.).

[55] Louise had in her collection the following books and articles on Manipur and various Manipuri dances—Ethel St Clair Grimwood's *My Three Years in Manipur and Escape from the Recent Mutiny* (1891) Mutua Jhulan Singh's *Bejoy Punchalee: History of Manipur, Parts 1 and 2* (1936); Faubion Bowers' "Dance and Opera in Manipur" (1953); Haobam Kulabidhu Singh's *Manipuri Dances* (1954), *Manipuri Raasas* (1954), and *The Art of Manipuri Dances* (1955); and Jyotirmoy Roy's *History of Manipur* (1958).

> suitable information about the background of Manipuri Dancing—or rather "Meitei Jagoi" as I prefer to call it.[56]

About her stay in Manipur as a foreigner, she wrote in her book *Dance-Rituals of Manipur, India*: *An Introduction to "Meitei Jagoi"* (1958):

> Although my stay in Manipur was a most happy one, it was not without a few difficulties. The Meiteis of Manipur are distrustful of foreigners, and indeed for good reasons! Their fertile valley has been coveted many times and they have struggled hard to keep possession of it. There is a game among the children there called "Kwak Mayang" in which they cling behind each other in line while their leader swerves about protecting them from the attack of the Kwak Mayang (Foreign Crow). There were many times when I was made to feel like a Kwak Mayang. Little boys jeered at me on the road as though I were an outcast. One even spat. Older youths encouraged them by laughing while men condoned this sport in silence. Occasionally older men reproved (sic) them, and I remember once a little chap received a severe smacking for mocking me while I stood watching a Lai Harouba ritual. Once, when passing by a group of young men on the road, the Meitei friend who was accompanying me overheard unsuitable remarks. He continued to walk on a little distance and then decided to go back and explain about my visit instead of scolding them. The group welcomed this idea.[57]

Though Louise "suffered attacks of loneliness in Manipur" along with some other problems such as initial mistrust of Manipuri people, no taxis or hire cars, difficulty in communication and no proper interpreter, she overcame these difficulties by her good-nature and ability to make friends with the locals:

> Yet I was patient and the knowledge I gained was perhaps not so extensive but the Meiteis opened their hearts to me. They were not content till I had danced before the shrines of their ancestors in their own dress at the Lai Harouba (an unheard of event for a European, as far as I know) and boys along the road greeted me with the request not to wear European dress any more. Neighbours' little ones stopped crying at the sight of a woman "too white" and became pals with me at last.[58]

In 1951, Louise was successful in persuading and taking eminent exponents of the Manipuri dance style Jagoi—Rajkumar Priyagopal Singh

[56] See Lightfoot, 1958: 1.
[57] Lightfoot, 1958: 1.
[58] Lightfoot, 1958: 3.

and Lakshman Singh to tour and perform for the public and school students in Australia. Manipuri dances were usually performed in large groups as communal dance rituals and original dance compositions are too lengthy for a modern concert programme. So, the main concern for Louise was to shorten the performances for stage presentation. She, with the help of the artistes, condensed the dances and designed some modern presentations for the Australian stage without uprooting the original Meitei tradition and its spiritual connotations. It was a rare cultural insight for both the Australian audiences and the Manipuri performers.

From Australia they ventured to Japan, where the Manipuris deserted Louise, Shivaram rejoined her and they continued on to Canada and the USA. Louise and Shivaram worked to establish an Indian dance school in San Francisco, USA. By 1956, after several years of continuous touring, with first Priyagopal Singh and Lakshman Singh, then Ananda Shivaram again, Louise felt that she needed some rest.

Apart from a holiday in the serene surroundings of Manipur, she also wanted to complete the research for her book on Manipuri dance. In Imphal, Louise was introduced to a young dancing sensation—Ibetombi Devi. Here, Louise taught English language to Ibetombi and her little dancers and learned the Manipuri dance in return. She also conducted in-depth research about the area's religion, history, folk songs and dances.[59] In Imphal, some leading members of the Meitei community approached her with a request to "select the finest artists and present their culture abroad once more."[60] Uttara Asha Coorlawala has argued that such an act or hunger for international exposures on the part of Indians can be read as something akin to achieving "dignity" or providing a "sense of self" to "a battered nation emerging from centuries of economic and cultural exploitation."[61]

So, for her next cultural tour of Australia in 1957 (January to November), Louise selected Ibetombi Devi, a leading female exponent of Jagoi and Maibee (or Maibi) dance forms (a pre-Hindu ritualistic priestess dance), who has performed for the Indian Prime Minister, Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, and other national and international dignitaries in India. Louise presented Ibetombi Devi, along with Ananada Shivaram, to the keen and delighted Australian public, first in Western Australia and then in the eastern states. Louise made sure that the audiences learned the difference between primitive tribal dance and the cultured Meitei dance performed by Manipuri artists like Ibetombi. For the audiences she

[59] See "Indian Temple Dancer," 32.
[60] See "Louise Lightfoot" (1957).
[61] See Coorlawala, 1992, 147-148.

summarised and shared some chief characteristic features of Manipuri dancing:

1. The place or stage where dance is performed is held very sacred.
2. Dances are mostly devotional or ritualistic in nature rather than entertainment pieces. The artistes never look at the audiences directly as a mark of his/her surrender to the deity.
3. The dancer's face in Manipuri style is serene, meditative and smooth.
4. The dressing is free from any sexual stimulus (for co-artistes and audiences).
5. The dancers and artistes do not show feelings of lust, greed, anger, envy, hatred and pride.
6. The steps of dancing are complex and the dancer uses the rounded rhythmic movements and expressions on the upper part of the body.

In Australia with the help of Louise, Ibetombi developed and presented perfection in her dance technique, which proved "a revelation to Western eyes."[62] Her grace and artistry doubled with the spectacular and authentic costuming provided by Louise Lightfoot captivated the audience. Australian journalists were amazed by Ibetombi's gentle nature, placid charm and controlled emotions that helped in expressing metaphorical use of dance language.

After this tour, back working in San Francisco, Louise published her book *Dance Rituals of Manipur, India,* and her recording of songs and ritual music was released in the American Ethnic Folkways series in 1960 as *Ritual Music of Manipur*.

Some of Louise and Shivaram's main work in USA continued in San Francisco and on tours. They educated the American public to appreciate Indian dance and eventually taught it to hundreds of students.

From 1965, Louise lived and worked at the yoga ashram of Swami Vishnudevananda in Montreal, Canada.[63] Louise never married and retired in 1968. But even in her retirement, Louise stayed actively involved in multicultural dance performances and festivals, especially at Monash University's Department of Music.[64] At Monash, she worked closely with Australia-based Indian dancers, presenting dancers from India, and leading

[62] See "Indian Dance Recital," 2.
[63] Vishnudevananda Saraswati was founder of the International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres and Ashrams. He established the Sivananda Yoga Teachers' Training Course, one of the first yoga teacher training programs in the West.
[64] See M. Lightfoot (2008).

the way for multicultural dance traditions and expressions to find a place in Australian imagination.[65] Thanks to Louise Lightfoot's pioneering spirit and dedication to Indian dance, the Indian subcontinent's classical dance in different styles is now regularly staged in various Australian cities (especially Melbourne and Sydney) by a number of resident companies, along with ballet and contemporary dance. Dance in Australia has been shaped by her influence and groundbreaking work. Louise Lightfoot died on 18 May 1979 at Malvern and was buried in new Cheltenham cemetery. The *Indian Express* (2 July 1979; Cochin) lamented the death of "Kathakali's Australian mother"—a fond title bestowed upon her by Vallathol Narayana Menon, a Great Poet of Malabar, Shivaram's mentor and the founder of Kerala Kalamandalam.

III

Tara Rajkumar, an internationally renowned performer and choreographer, as a research associate of the Monash Asia Institute in 1997 discovered Louise's memorabilia at Monash University. Impressed by what she saw and read, Rajkumar created a dance plus dialogic performance titled *Temple Dreaming*, in Melbourne and Delhi. This was her way to show respect and revive the memory of Louise and her passion for Kathakali. Rajkumar observes that "Louise Lightfoot was a woman far ahead of her time. In addition to taking Kathakali out of India for the first time, she contributed in a major way to popularising Indian dance within India at a critical period in the renaissance of the classical dance styles."[66] In 2014 Mary Louise Lightfoot, niece of Louise, published a comprehensive book on her aunt: *Lightfoot Dancing: An Australian-Indian Affair* (e-book edition). Based on Lightfoot's manuscript this is a "part inter-generational memoir, part biography, and part dance history" that covers Louise's life and career.

Louise Lightfoot, unlike some other Western impresarios, had "no streak of imperialism in her bones" and never exploited her Indian co-dancers.[67] She had only good intentions and through her collaborations she consciously wanted to move away from the stereotypical orientalist framework of her American peers. She urged Australian audiences not to see Indian dance as just an ancient, mysterious, and spiritual art form but

[65] At Monash University, Louise Lightfoot successfully organised shows and workshops for Shivaram (1974 and 1976) and Sonal Mansingh (1976).
[66] See Gibson (1999).
[67] See Bilimoria (2013).

try to truly understand the value of this complex art of Indian dance to "strengthen cultural bonds between Australia and its Asian neighbours."[68]

In conclusion, Louise Lightfoot, who had "the perfect name for a dancer,"[69] contributed significantly to Australia's cultural life. Louise Lightfoot along with Ananda Shivaram, Janaki Devi, Rajkumar Priyagopal Singh, Lakshman Singh, Ibetombi Devi, and supported by a number of Australian dancers including Ruth Bergner, Moya Beaver, Leona Welch, Pat Martin and Elizabeth Russell, successfully promoted a range of Indian classical dance forms, such as Kathakali, Manipuri, Bharata Natyam and Kathak. Some of her tours were made possible by the generous official assistance from state funding bodies such as the Arts Council of Australia, Adult Education Board (Western Australia and Tasmania), and the Council of Adult Education (Victoria). These dance tours had "great cultural significance" as her lectures and demonstrations "considerably enhanced the respect of Whites of Australia for the intellectual heritage of India."[70] Louise Lightfoot, as an early image-maker, paved the way for dancers and groups such as Tilakavati, Indrani, Bhaskar, Chitrasena Ballet, Song and Dance Theatre, Kalakshetra, Kathakali Kerala Kalamandalam, Balagopalam, Masked Dancers of Bengal, V. Gayatri, Krishnaveni Lakshmanan, Yamini Krishnamurti, Vyajayanthimala, Daksha Sheth, Jyotikana Ray, Mallika Sarabhai, Sonal Mansingh, Birju Maharaj, Sanjukta Panigrahi and others who continue to add to the expansion of dance in Australia. Today, Indian dance in Australia is represented by professional dance artists, companies, schools, and amateur community groups who have over the years performed traditional classical to Bhangra and Bollywood and participated in various dance and cultural festivals organised throughout Australia.

[68] It is a pity that her hard work has gone unnoticed both in Australia and India. Prof. Purushottama Bilimoria in his presentation, "Of Dance & Theory: History of Indian Dance in Australia, from Lightfoot-Shivaram to Chandrabhanu," at the Melbourne University South Asian Students Group (6 October 2013) has strongly argued for a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) and also a Padmashree Award for Louise Lightfoot for her role in promoting Indian dance in Australia. See also Gibson (1999).

[69] See M. Lightfoot (2008).

[70] See Artlover Madras, 3.