

Professional Leave Report Cover Sheet

Name: Devendra Sharma

Department: Communication

College: Arts & Humanities

Leave taken: ☐ Sabbatical ☒ Difference in Pay ☐ Professional Leave without Pay

Time Period: ☐ Fall
☐ Spring
☒ Academic Year 2022-2023
☐ Other

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Workshops/ Seminars/ Speaking Engagements conducted during the DIP-Fulbright grant 2022-23

Name of the Institution, Location, Participants details etc.	Title the talk	Date of the Talk	Virtual or In-person
Institute of Home Economics, University of Delhi	Innovative Approaches in Development Communication	Sept 28, 2022	In-Person
Ashoka University, Sonapat	Narrativizing Nautanki: Staging a theatre form of north India	Nov 12, 2022	In-Person
Janaki Devi Memorial College, University of Delhi	Traditional Theatre Forms	Nov 16, 2022	In-Person
Bharatpur MSJ College Grounds	Swang-Nautanki Live Performance: <i>Bharatpur Ki Gatha</i>	Dec 24 th , 2022	In-Person
Bharti College, University of Delhi	Colonial and Post-Colonial Impact on the Judgement of Culture in India	Jan 30 th , 2023	In-Person
Dept. of History, Janki Devi Memorial College, University of Delhi	<i>Tathastu</i> : International Seminar on <i>Sufis, Saints and Poets</i> : Performance Dimension	Feb 15 th , 2023	In-Person
Dept. of History and Culture, Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi	Keynote Address of the Mushirul Hasan Memorial Seminar. Title: History of Health Consciousness in Indian Culture	Feb 23 rd , 2023	In-Person
Janki Devi Memorial College, Student Research Society: <i>Khoj</i>	How to Do Research on Theatre and Culture, and Planning an Actual Research Trip	March 20 th , 2023	In-Person
Jawaharlal Nehru	The History of Nautanki and	April 17 th , 2023	In-Person

Name of the Institution, Location, Participants details etc.	Title the talk	Date of the Talk	Virtual or In-person
University School of Arts and Aesthetics	Svang Theatres of North India		
Jawaharlal Nehru University School of Arts and Aesthetics	Melody, Meters, and Staging of Svang and Nautanki	April 19 th , 2023	In-Person
Janki Devi Memorial College, University of Delhi	Judge Panelist at <i>Point of View: The Student Research Conference</i>	April 26 th , 2023	In-Person
Shri Ram Centre for Arts and Culture Theatre Repertory	Mentor/Co-Director of the Performance of Nautanki ' <i>Sultana Daku</i> '	May 27 th , 28 th , 2023	In-Person
Shri Ram Centre for Arts and Culture Theatre Repertory	Mentor/Co-Director of the Performance of Nautanki ' <i>Sultana Daku</i> '	June 17 th , 2023	In-Person
Education America, USIEF	Panelist and Mentor: American Academic Life at Pre-Departure Orientation at American Center, Delhi	June 24 th , 2023	In-Person

FULBRIGHT RESEARCH REPORT SUMMARY, IN NOT MORE THAN 500 WORDS:

I had three goals for my Fulbright research: (1) To achieve the urgently-needed documentation and research on the fast-disappearing Svang-Nautanki akhārās, hand-written and published scripts, performances, and the aging master-performers, (2) to understand how svang-nautanki is functioning as a communication medium for north Indian villagers in the 21st century, and (3) to collaborate with the local community in north India to encourage a local troupe to create a svang-nautanki performance piece on a contemporary issue of their choice. I am happy to report that I could fulfil all these three goals during my time in my Fulbright research fellowship in India. I did extensive documentation of

svang-nautanki artists and their living conditions, recording more than 20 detailed interviews. I was able to collect 4 rare published nautanki performance texts from 1940s onward, which are out of print for decades, from personal collections of svang-nautanki connoisseurs in Mathura and Bharatpur. For the 2nd and 3rd goals of my research project, I collaborated with the local artists and community members to create two new svang-nautanki performances that highlighted community issues. The first one was done in December 2022. After 2 months of collaboration in script writing, music composition and performance, we created nautanki “Bharatpur ki Veer Gatha” on the demand of Braj region village and town communities. The collector of Bharatpur district invited us to present this show on the occasion of “Raja Surajmal Smriti Samaroh” (local festival) on December 24th, 2022, in which around 5000 village and town people watched our performance. After the show, many local community members got eager to create more svang-nautanki on community topics. In addition to local nautanki artists, I also involved University of Delhi’s undergraduate students to act and help backstage in the show. The second svang-nautanki show was done in May-June 2023, in which I co-directed with my father Pandit Ram Dayal Sharma, the Shri Ram Centre for Performing Arts (SRC)’s theatre repertory. This show was important to involve urban Indian audiences in Delhi with svang-nautanki to pave the way for traditional artists to be successful in the cities. In both of these shows I involved both urban artists as well as traditional artists so that they can collaborate and learn from each other to make nautanki successful as a global art and communication medium.

In addition to these two big shows, I conducted numerous talks, keynote lectures, seminars, and workshops. They included the keynote address at the Mushirul Hasan Memorial Seminar at Jamia Millia Islamia University, public lectures at Ashoka University and Jawahar Lal University, and invited lectures and mentorships at Janki Devi Memorial College (JDMC), Bharti College, and Institute of Home Economics of university of Delhi, among others. I served as speaker and mentor at Education-America pre-departure orientation at American Center New Delhi. I also enjoyed participating in, and attending, two Fulbright conferences. During these, I made many professional contacts. Thus, my experience during Fulbright fellowship has been rewarding, successful, and outstanding. I want to thank Fulbright and USIEF for this amazing opportunity. I hope to remain

involved with Fulbright in the future also.

Detailed DIP Report

1st Phase (First semester):

Research and documentation of rare performance scripts, akhārās, performance traditions, veteran artists' interviews, and audiences and community exploration and research (August 2022 -December 2023).

I travelled throughout my sabbatical and spent time with different akhārās, in Mathura, Vrindavan, Deeg and Samai to explore and find rare manuscripts and scripts that are unknown to the present generation, and are in possession of old writers. These akharas were *Chowk Bazar Akhara*, *Bhuteshwar Alhara*, *Lal Darwaza Akahra*, *Jaharmal Akhara*, and *Vishrant Ghat Akhara*. I was able to acquire four rare published nautanki performance texts from 1940s onward, which are out of print for decades, from personal collections of svang-nautanki connoisseurs. I did more than 30 hours of video and audio documentation of veteran performers/audiences/community members. I have also edited a video out of this documentation.

Sub-phases:

1. August- September 2022: I did akhārā research, travel to towns and villages listed above to find and document rare Nautanki manuscripts/ scripts.
2. October- December 2022: Detailed video-audio documentation of veteran performers/audiences/community members, and detailed interviews

2nd Phase (First and Second Semesters):

Rehearsals, performances of two specifically community organized Nautankis on new issues relevant to the changing times and younger audiences. Qualitative research on these new issue Nautankis' communicative impact.

The rehearsals and performances of two community-organized Nautankis based on new issues were done in Bharatpur town of Rajasthan in the first semester (December 2022) of research, and two colleges of university of Delhi involving young performers and audiences in the second semester (Feb -May 2023). Qualitative data on the performances' communicative impact was collected. Also, audiences' interviews/conversations about the general situation of Nautankis based on social issues was carried out.

Sub-phases:

1. January-February/ March 2023: The rehearsals and performance of first community-organized nautanki based on new issues were conducted in Bharatpur.
2. Feb-May, 2023: Performances with youth in Janki Devi Memorial College as well as Bharti Mahila College, University of Delhi.
3. Qualitative research on the performances' communicative impact. Also, audiences' interviews/conversations were done about the general situation of Nautankis based on social issues in the Bharatpur District and in Delhi University Colleges.

Total Time for both phases: 9 months.

Collaboration with akhārās

I was successful in collaborating with Swang-Nautanki akhārās, in the areas of Mathura, Vrindavan, and Samai that have been existing for more than 150 years. I enjoyed great relationship with several of these community akhārās. I was able to acquire multiple rare published swang-nautanki scripts going back to at least one century. I worked closely with local artists and troupes and reached out to very old master-artists.

Benefits for the Nautanki community, me as a researcher, and the university

My DIP research coming out of this project proved to be beneficial for the host akhārās, Swang-Nautanki performers, and their audience communities. This project as envisioned, proved to be an important step in gaining strength for the akhārās and nautanki artists. There were multiple conversations about how these institutions can survive in today's media landscape, and to understand the communication dimension of their nautanki performances. The project connected akhārās and today's nautanki artists and young university students to know more about their history and performances through the old manuscripts and published scripts research, and old master artists' interviews.

For me as a researcher, it was like a dream come true. I was able to understand my performance tradition's history more deeply. Through hours of conversations with other artists I was able to understand how to help nautanki tradition to thrive in a new age. Now, I have a much broader knowledge of nautanki's rare scripts, content, artists, and audiences' community. Academically, the knowledge I gained from this research is already enabling me to bring new ideas to my performance classes. I taught one in the Fall 2023 semester after coming back from my DIP sabbatical. This class was COMM 275- *Performance for Social Change*. Based on my research, I am also writing a book with a Bloomsbury publishing company in England. This will be the first book of its kind throwing light on yet unknown aspects of nautanki. In addition, in the near future, I will disseminate my research, scholarly experiences, lessons, and insights gained from this project by publishing peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters and presenting at regional, national, and international communication and performance conventions.

The proposed research project has enhanced Fresno State's international visibility and reputation and is already leading to research publications and collaborations that will add to its prestige. I have already made numerous connections with other Fulbright scholars in the US universities as well as in the host country India. The collaborations coming out of this project are strengthening Fresno State's connection with many local cultural institutions in India such as my host performance akhārās, and also local Indian universities such as the University of Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and Jamia Millia University that are located in the region where my research was based. I delivered numerous keynote lectures and performances and conducted many students workshops during my sabbatical (the list is attached with this document). My research project on community performance traditions and their communication dimension will benefit Fresno State students by enhancing my pedagogy in the various courses I teach at the university in the field of communication. I look forward to introducing more courses as a result of the present DIP sabbatical. Specifically, my DIP project is helping me to convert two special-topic performance and health graduate courses that I teach presently into permanent courses. These courses are going to be interdisciplinary courses involving a discussion of indigenous performances, politics of "high vs. low art," communication, health, community, and social change. Finally, this research is strengthening my theoretical base to design a similar research

project in the central valley of California, where my university—California State University, is situated. It will help the university to explore central valley's cultural indigenous performance traditions and their communication dimensions.

Researching the History and Communication Potential of North India's Endangered *Nautanki* Folk-Indigenous Opera Tradition, and its Akhārās

My childhood was filled with Nautanki (north India's folk/indigenous opera sometimes also referred to as Swang-Nautanki) performances found in towns and villages across northern India, especially in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. The populace would gather around large landlords' verandahs, in temple courtyards, or other open spaces to see and hear stories of gods, local heroes, and past or current events. As the son of a leading performer and director, these were my life. But 45 years later, Swang-Nautanki is dying due to the dominance of television and cinema. Along with it are dying the community connections that fed the akhārās (community-based competitive Nautanki groups) where performers were trained and art created. The loss of Nautanki means the loss of content and imaginings hundreds of years old as well as the loss of community, community created through the akhārās that produced and performed Nautanki. This project is to document the akhārās left and to actively seek to revitalize this tradition that is so vital to our knowledge of the workings of 'popular culture' 50 and 100 years ago.

The Project- A summary

The present proposal builds upon the work done during my previous DIP research leave in 2015-16 (report attached). It continues my in-depth research and praxis on the Indian Indian folk indigenous opera Nautanki. As a result of the intervention in 2015-16, which I did in collaboration with the Central University of Jharkhand and Saakar Foundation in India, new performances were created to connect Nautanki to the younger generation audiences by creating new scripts on contemporary issues. In the last 5-6 years after my intervention, many new Nautanki performances on issues such as dowry, women's empowerment, girls' education, unemployment, and the environment are happening in north Indian villages. These new performances hold a promise for community cohesion around new issues in the present atmosphere of increasing alienation due to Indian villagers' weak economic situation, increasing population, migration to cities, and poverty. However, a research project is now needed to understand if these new Nautanki performances are being successful in bringing back some of Nautanki's lost glory as well as communicate some positive social change messages in the communities where they are being performed. The history of Nautanki also needs to be documented in more depth.

Thus, the present research project (1) strives to understand if the new Nautanki performances created as a result of my previous DIP research have been able to recreate and encourage the fast disappearing feeling of community and identity that had been an important function of folk theatrical traditions like Nautanki. North Indian villagers desperately long for this community. (2) will achieve the urgently-needed documentation and research on the fast-disappearing Swang-Nautanki akhārās. Akhārās (literally, "competitive arenas") are community-based theatrical groups existing in many Indian towns and villages. The project will document

Akhārās' hand-written manuscripts and published Nautanki scripts from the last more than 100 years, their performances, and the experiences of akhārās' aging master-performers. Nautanki is an extremely important tradition of hundreds of years of community-produced folk-indigenous opera. Losing it means the loss of an important part of Indian culture. Unfortunately, no research exists on Nautanki Akhārās, which have been the backbone of the north Indian performance culture whether it is poetry, opera, or music. (3) will understand whether the Nautankis on new issues created in my previous DIP are effectively communicating positive social change messages to the local communities. (4) will try to understand if the new Nautanki performances have led to more shows for Nautanki artists and if that has led to an improvement in their financial situation.

I will collaborate with the local community akhārās in the north Indian towns of Mathura, Vrindavan, and the nearby areas to interview the aging masters and document old performance scripts. I will participate-observe new Nautanki performances on contemporary issues that are being performed by Nautanki troupes as a result of my previous DIP leave research.

Note: I have applied for a US Scholars Fulbright award for this proposal for 2022-23.

Importance of the project (*Why the project should be done*)

Nautanki tradition represents performance and communication genres that may be soon lost to the world. Given the current dominance of audio albums, cinema, and television in South Asia (Manuel, 1993), indigenous performance traditions and rural performing artists are getting less and less patronage, especially from those in the power centers (Sharma, 2006). This project is an important step in re-understanding and gaining support for indigenous performing artists in northern India, and their art forms, by examining how Swang-Nautankis are still relevant and engaging for rural communities. This is a critical moment in history for this project and the related research because the audience for indigenous performance traditions still exists in India's rural villages (Sharma, 2020). If efforts to create new nautankis with contemporary content, and to improve the artistic abilities of the new generation of Nautanki artists, are not made now, the ability to revitalize these art forms will be lost forever. Soon, the next generation of artists (the children of the existing artists) will not pursue their own performance traditions because they cannot earn a living from doing so. As both a practicing performer and a communication and performance scholar, I am in a unique position to undertake this project. As a performing artist, I understand the nuances of indigenous performance forms. As a communication scholar, I see the value and importance of focusing on the connection between community formation around folk and indigenous theatrical forms and social change.

My position as a researcher-practitioner in the project

I am at least a fifth-generation performer, writer, and director of Swang-Nautanki. I was trained in the famous Samai-Khera Akhārā by my father guru Pandit Ram Dayal Sharma who has been awarded the "Sangeet Natak Akademi Award" by the President of India (the highest award given

to a performing artist in India). I have been performing since I was 4 years old, and have given more than 1500 performances in my more than 45 years of Swang-Nautanki career. As an indigenous *Swang-Nautanki* performing artist, I have an insider's advantage in understanding folk performance traditions. However, in addition to India where I grew up, I have established a Swang-Nautanki performance troupe in the US with American and Indian-American performers, which regularly perform shows in the U.S., especially California. Thus, as an actor-writer-director of Swang Nautanki in America, and as a professor-scholar with a Ph.D. in communication research methods, I also have an outsider's perspective in Nautanki.

Nautanki: Some Background

Nautanki is the popular indigenous folk opera of Northern India (Agrawal, 1976). Till about 50 years ago, Nautanki was the most popular medium of entertainment in northern Indian towns and villages. However, in the last 50 years, due to the coming of new media and Nautanki failing to change with the times, it is on the verge of extinction. The history of Nautanki goes back five hundred years or more, but Nautanki has not been much documented, particularly its artistic and communication dimensions such as singing styles and community's participation in the performance are yet to be properly researched (Sharma, 2006; Jain, 1967). During Nautanki's heyday in the early twentieth century, hundreds of new plays were constantly produced to meet demand (Hansen, 1992; Sharma, 2006). The sources of these plots range from mythology and folklore to history and contemporary social problems. Nautanki plays such as *Satya Hariścandra* (Truthful Harishchandra) and *Bhakt Mordhvaj* (Devotee Mordhwaj) are based on mythology, while others like *Indal-haraṇ* (The Abduction of Indal) and *Puraṇmal* originate from folklore. Still others, like *Amar Siṃh Raṭhaur* (Amar Singh Rathore), are loosely based on historical personages. Representative of social Nautankis, *Sultānā Dākūe* (Bandit Sultana) depicts a Robinhood-like character who leads a rebellion against exploitative Indian feudal landlords and the British, and *Jaliāmṡālā Bāgh* (Jallianwala Bagh), the cold brutality of the British and landlords in colonial times.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the towns of Hathras and Mathura in western Uttar Pradesh; Kanpur and Lucknow in central Uttar Pradesh; and Samai Khera in Rajasthan became the main centers of Nautanki performances. Gurus of Samai-Khera in today's Bharatpur district of Rajasthan were also influential in incorporating a variety of melodious musical styles into Nautanki. During the early years of talkies, Bollywood (Indian Hindi film industry) borrowed a lot from Nautanki such as its style, and especially its music. The format of Bollywood in which there is an abundance of songs and dances (usually not related to the main storyline of the film) originally comes from Nautanki (Sharma, 2017, 2006).

Akhārā Culture

In the late nineteenth century when Nautanki was very popular, it mostly operated through community-based theatrical groups called *akhārās* (literally, "competitive arenas"). In those days, every neighborhood or village seemed to have its own *akhārā*. The term "*akhārā*" was

well suited to these groups due to the friendly rivalry between them, with each group trying to outdo the next (Agrawal, 1976). Nautanki actor-singers vied with each other to see who could display the most virtuosity and power in their singing. As was common in Indian theatre at the time, all performers were male, and female gender performances by men were the norm (Jain, 1967). For almost half a century—from around the 1930s to the beginning of the decline of Nautanki in the 1980s—both men and women played female roles. Yet my father's performance as Rukmini (wife of Krishna) in the devotional Nautanki *Krishna-Sudama* (Krishna and Sudama) in the late 1960s, for instance, was very successful. Women now regularly perform in Nautanki. I also grew as being part of the akhārā culture, and have performed many lead roles in Nautankis. I was born in a village where we had no roads, electricity, or even running water. I grew up performing with my father from the age of four. I loved the community ambiance of akhārās where everyone contributed from writing a Nautanki to organizing it. I am sad that this culture is disappearing now and feel it is up to scholar-practitioners like me to document it and make efforts to revitalize it before it disappears.

Project in more detail, with the theoretical grounding

The project will have the following three components:

1. Achieve the urgently-needed documentation and research on the fast-disappearing Swang-Nautanki akhārās, hand-written and published scripts, performances, and the aging master-performers. Nautanki is an extremely important tradition of hundreds of years of community-produced folk-indigenous opera. Losing it means the loss of an important part of Indian culture. Unfortunately, no research exists on Nautanki Akhārās, which have been the backbone of the north Indian performance culture whether it is poetry, opera, or music. Akhārās were instrumental in forming an intense community bond and enhanced communication between its members which sustained the identity of a community. Even though many akharas still exist, their performances are now far separated, and their aging *ustāds* (master poets), *khalifā* (opera directors), and artists may disappear in a few years due to the onslaught of new media and lack of patronage. It is urgent to deeply understand this community-supported "akhārā" culture of Swang-Nautanki, where local poets, artists, and artisans get together to create Swang-Nautanki performances, watched by the people of the town. This project will help to understand in detail whether Swang-Nautanki through their akhārās is still helping to strengthen community cohesion in present times (even if on a much lower scale) and whether the community members are making efforts to save their "akhārās." There is a fear that if the akhārās and their performances go, the sense of community will also go. This project will help to understand the mechanisms of community akhārā culture. This understanding could lead to help support the revival of Swang-Nautanki performances, akhārās, and the sense of community.
2. The second important goal of the project will be to build upon my 2015-16 DIP research to understand in more detail how Swang-Nautanki is functioning as a communication

medium for north Indian villagers in the 21st century. The communication role of Swang-Nautanki is connected to its staging, performance ambiance, and its content. For Nautanki to survive as a community and entertainment medium, it is important to examine how Nautanki communicates messages to the younger generation these days. Stuart Hall, a cultural studies scholar, says that to be integrated into the social relations of the communication process, a message form should be carefully encoded—keeping in mind the socio-cultural semiotics of a particular culture—so that it can be easily accepted and understood by audiences of that culture (Hall, 1991). Performance traditions such as *Swang-Nautanki* provide the socio-cultural semiotics specific to rural local communities in northern India and for that reason can serve as an effective communication medium. Also, as Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of *carnival* tells us, indigenous performance sites function as the communicative vehicle of dialogue on serious social issues in a fun way (Bakhtin, 1984). Understanding the communicative dimensions of Nautanki will involve research on whether new scripts with contemporary content that were created during my sabbatical in 2015-16 in collaboration with the local troupes are connecting effectively with the younger generation audiences. Many new Nautankis are being performed these days on issues such as dowry, women's empowerment, girls' education, unemployment, and the environment. These new performances hold a promise for community cohesion around in the present atmosphere of increasing alienation due to Indian villagers' weak economic situation, increasing population, migration to cities, and poverty. North Indian villagers desperately long for the lost feeling of togetherness brought by theatrical traditions like Nautanki, and lament the loss of community in the present atmosphere. The project will examine these factors that underly the success or failure of a performance tradition even if it is hundreds of years old such as Nautanki.

3. As a practical implementation of the second goal above, I will collaborate with a local troupe to participate-perform-observe and research the impact of a specific Nautanki performance piece on a contemporary issue created by the community's choice. The participant performance and research will allow me to understand whether the new Nautanki performance scripts are motivating artists to revitalize their form. It will also help to understand whether new Nautankis are effectively communicating new issues such as dowry, girls' education, unemployment, environment, etc., important to the local community. According to Dwight Conquergood, today's society puts too much value on the written *text*, while devaluing other forms of communication such as oral performative traditions (Conquergood, 2002). Driven by indigenous traditions that favor orality, community performance events such as Nautanki present opportunities to initiate reflection, debate, and dialogue on community topics. Observing and participating in a new Nautanki performance created by a local troupe will also help me understand whether audiences enjoy these new performances more than the classic old Swang-Nautanki performances and whether the new performances are increasing the audience

base of this tradition and make it popular again. So, the understanding of the communication dynamics and their impact in revitalizing and popularizing Nautanki would be carefully understood by examining a specifically organized performance on an issue chosen by the community and artists together.

Research Methods

Qualitative research methods such as open-ended conversations, auto-ethnography and ethnography, narrative research, audio-video recordings, and participant observations and participant-performance will be used for documentation as well as to understand the impact of the organized performance on Swang-Nautanki artists, writers, organizers, and audiences.

Timeline

The timeline for the project can be divided broadly into two phases.

1st Phase (First semester):

Research and documentation of rare performance scripts, akhārās, performance traditions, veteran artists' interviews, and audiences and community exploration and research (August-December 2022, approximately).

I would need at least 4-5 months to get in touch with different akhārās, travel to different towns and villages to explore and find rare manuscripts and scripts that are unknown to the present generation, and are in possession of old writers. I will also need to find and get in touch with veteran performers/audiences/community members, and interview and document their experiences.

Sub-phases:

1. August- September 2022: Akhārā research, travel to different towns and villages to find and document rare Nautanki manuscripts/ scripts.
2. October- December 2022: finding and getting in touch with veteran performers/audiences/community members, and interview and document their experiences.

2nd Phase (Second Semester):

Rehearsals, performances of two specifically community organized Nautankis on new issues relevant to the changing times and younger audiences. Qualitative research on these new issue Nautankis' communicative impact.

The rehearsals and performances of two community-organized Nautankis based on new issues will take around a couple of months, which will be followed by qualitative research on the performances' communicative impact. Also, audiences' interviews/conversations about the general situation of Nautankis based on social issues will be carried out. This will take around 4-5 months (January-May 2023, approximately).

Sub-phases:

1. January-February/ March 2023: The rehearsals and performances of two community-organized Nautankis based on new issues.

2. March-May, 2023: Qualitative research on the performances' communicative impact. Also, audiences' interviews/conversations about the general situation of Nautankis based on social issues

Total Time for both phases: 9 months.

Considering the time required for the successful completion of my research. I need a full year DIP leave for this project. I am also applying for a one-year Fulbright scholarship for the next year for effective fulfillment of this project.

Collaboration with akhārās (*How it will be done*)

The project will involve a collaboration with Swang-Nautanki akhārās, in the areas of Mathura, Vrindavan, and Samai that have been existing for more than 150 years, and still produce Swang-Nautanki performances. As a Swang-Nautanki artist, I have a great relationship with several of these community akhārās. My father, a living legend of Swang-Nautanki, will help to facilitate my connection with these akhārās. These akhārās are the repositories of hand-written and published Swang-Nautanki scripts going back to at least one century. I also worked closely with local artists and troupes during my 2015-16 DIP sabbatical. Through them, I can reach out to very old master-artists, some of whom are living in remote villages. Working with the local artists and akhārās closely on this project will provide me invaluable logistical support and connections, which will help me engage with the local artists, community members, and elders. Please see the accompanying letters of support from two of these akhārās (please see after the bibliography). One letter is in Hindi, for which I have provided a translation in Appendix 1.

Benefits for the Nautanki community, me as a researcher, and the university

As mentioned elsewhere in the proposal, the research coming out of this project will be extremely beneficial for the host akhārās, Swang-Nautanki performers, and their audience communities. This project would be an important step in gaining strength for the akhārās and Nautanki artists by helping them to understand how they can survive in today's media landscape, and to understand the communication dimension of their tradition by understanding the communicative impact of new Nautanki performances. The project will also connect the akhārās and today's Nautanki artists to know more about their history and performances through the old manuscripts and published scripts research, and old master artists' interviews.

For me as a researcher, it will be a life-long dream coming true as a Swang-Nautanki artist to understand my own performance tradition's history and present it more deeply and help it to thrive in a new age. After this research project, I will have a much more in-depth and broader knowledge of Nautanki's rare scripts, content, artists, and audiences' community. Academically, since I specialize in the area of performance and communication, the materials and knowledge I gain from this work will impact my research greatly and will enable me to bring new ideas to my performance classes. I plan to get a book contract with a reputed publishing company in England based on the research produced in this project. This will be the first book of its kind throwing

light on yet unknown aspects of Nautanki. In addition, I will disseminate the research, scholarly experiences, lessons, and insights gained from doing this project by publishing peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters and presenting at regional, national, and international communication and performance conventions.

The proposed research project will enhance Fresno State's international visibility and reputation and will lead to research publications and collaborations that will add to its prestige. As a result of my previous DIP Sabbatical, I had three publications: two peer-reviewed journal articles in a top journal on performances in Asia-- *Asian Theatre Journal* of the University of Hawaii (in 2020), and a book chapter in an edited book on Indian theatre in 2017 (please see the bibliography attached with the proposal). As a result of this proposed project, I am looking forward to a book contract with a reputed publisher in England. The collaborations coming out of this project would strengthen the university's connection with many local cultural institutions in India such as my host akhārās, and also local Indian universities such as the University of Delhi and Jawaharlal Nehru University that are located in the region where Nautanki is performed, and are interested in my Nautanki research. This research project on community performance traditions and their communication dimension will benefit my university by enhancing my pedagogy in the various courses I teach at the university in the field of communication. I introduced two new courses (one undergraduate and one graduate) coming out of my previous DIP-Sabbatical and look forward to introducing more courses as a result of the present DIP - sabbatical. Specifically, this project could serve as a basis for a new special-topic graduate course in performance and communication, which could be an interdisciplinary course involving a discussion of indigenous performances, politics of "high vs. low art," communication, community, and social change. Finally, this research will strengthen my theoretical base to design a similar research project in the central valley of California, where my university—California State University, is situated. It will help the university to explore central valley's cultural indigenous performance traditions and their communication dimensions.

Appendix 1**Translation of the support letter in Hindi from Akhārā Braj Lok Kala Mandal of Mathura, India (attached after the bibliography)**

I, Hotilal Pandey, am the guru and the main artist-performer of Braj Lok Kala Mandal. I am very pleased that Dr. Devendra Sharma is planning to come to do research on Nautanki's old Akhārās and artists. Our akhārā's and troupe's all artists and our community members are eager to support him in any way we can. We know Devendra Sharma from his childhood. His father and he himself are renowned artists of Nautanki. Devendra has made many efforts to take Nautanki forward, and we will be extremely happy to help him in this endeavor. It will give us immense satisfaction to aid him in researching the information on old akhārās and the old manuscripts and published scripts. I invite Dr. Devendra Sharma to come to Mathura with my full heart.

With my best wishes
Hoti Lal Pandey
Shri Krishna Lok Kala Mandal
Mathura, India

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