

ACADEMY OF INDIAN DANCE

CHIPKO PROJECT EDUCATION PACK

“A tree is not there simply to be cut. The tree is connected to our whole existence”
Chandi Prasad Bhatt

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INTRODUCTION

The Academy of Indian Dance and the Chipko Project



The Academy of Indian Dance is a charitable trust which aims to promote the appreciation and practice of the dance styles of the Indian sub continent, particularly in an educational context. The dance heritage of this area is infinitely rich and varied, encompassing ancient classical traditions, vibrant folk dances and contemporary styles inspired by Uday Shankar and Rabindranath Tagore. Characterised by rhythmic footwork, stylised hand gestures and facial expression, Indian Dance* offers a wealth of dance activities to be enjoyed by people of all ages and backgrounds.

As part of its educational programme, the Academy offers workshop projects and in-service training sessions to schools throughout the Greater London area. Its new school project CHIPKO is inspired by the forest conservation movement of northern India. A Hindustani word, 'chipko' means to hug, and local people from the Himalayan foothills literally embraced the trees to protect them from destruction! The story of the Chipko Movement wonderfully illustrates both the devastating effect of the misuse of forests and how the action of local people can be successful in protecting the trees. The story and associated material also provide an exciting resource for environmental education and creative activities through dance, movement, music and art. The Academy of Indian Dance offers workshops with South Asian performers (a visual artist can also be provided at additional cost) interpreting the story through the art forms of the culture from which the Chipko Movement sprung, and which are appealing and relevant to young people of all ages and backgrounds.

The aim of this Education Pack is to provide information, ideas and support to teachers hosting the Academy of Indian Dance's CHIPKO project. Workshops from this project can help pupils become aware of both the richness of the dance tradition from the sub continent and world ecological issues, relating to several of the Science Attainment Targets from the National Curriculum. Workshops can expand pupils' movement skills, encourage the development of concentration, confidence and creative expression. They also provide an exciting resource for cross curricular activities exploring trees and forest conservation as well as performing arts themes. It is hoped that teachers will take the opportunity to develop the workshops into a wider school topic on ecology and the environment.

A school project consists of a minimum of 4 workshops led by a professional dancer and a musician. The project is usually spread over two weeks and each workshop is from 11/2 to 2 hours in duration. A school may select a project from the following options:

1) DANCE DRAMA based on either the events of the Chipko protest or drawn from the legend of Amrita Devi. Workshops incorporate dance, dramatic expression, working actions and folk dance to interpret the story of the people who hugged trees.

Note:

* Indian Dance - this term is used synonymously with 'South Asian Dance' which encompasses the dance styles originating from Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.



2) WORDS, DANCE & MUSIC workshops inspired by Chipko songs and the myths associated with the native trees of the sub continent. Rhythm, words and music are explored as a resource for dance.

3) CREATIVE DANCE using the basic elements of Indian Dance to explore some of the themes inspired by the Chipko Movement. e.g. harmony/loss/protest/empowerment/relating to Nature.

4) GENDER AND DANCE. Chipko began as a women's protest and workshops will look at male and female roles as depicted in dance. In Indian Dance both men and women perform the 'tandava' (masculine) and 'lasya' (feminine) elements. These are explored as a basis for dance work interpreting the Chipko story.

Prior to the project the Academy's Education Officer will visit the school to make arrangements and discuss the content and suitability of the workshops. A copy of the Education Pack and other resources are available to teachers and an informal introductory session for staff and/or pupils can be arranged. Teachers are strongly urged to attend one of the Academy's in-service training sessions before the project commences. These two hour sessions are usually held termly in Central London or can be borough based by arrangement. The sessions use videos to introduce the background information on the Chipko Movement, provide the opportunity for teachers to experience some of the basic elements of South Asian Dance, and discuss ways in which the project can be developed in the school.

Requirements

- Dance floor or similar clean space (preferably wood sprung) suitable for work in bare feet.
- Comfortable loose fitting clothes - track suits, P.E. or dance kit.
- All participants will be asked to work in BARE FEET.
- Space for a musician to accompany the sessions.
- A cassette recorder.
- Changing facilities for the dancer.
- The class teacher MUST be present throughout all the sessions.
- A workshop will last 1 1/2 to 2 hours and is for a maximum of 20 pupils.
- All projects will be monitored and assessed by the Academy and teachers are requested to complete an evaluation questionnaire at the end of the project.

INDIAN DANCE

A brief description of the dance styles of the Indian sub continent

The huge geographical area of the Indian sub continent covers a tremendous diversity of land, climate, peoples, culture and language and this rich variety is reflected in its many dance styles from classical to folk and contemporary.

The classical tradition is an ancient and sophisticated art form stretching back over two thousand years, with its roots in the *Natya Shastra*, the earliest known written text on dance, drama and music. All classical styles share the basic elements of *nritta* (pure dance), *nritya* (expression) and *natya* (dramatic element). They also share performance in bare feet with some styles wearing bells (*ghunghroos*) around the ankles to enhance the rhythmic footwork. Hand gestures (*mudras*), stylised movements of the face and eyes, and complex rhythmic patterns are all characteristics of the dance styles. However all the styles have evolved their own movements, gestures and expressions which reflect the traditions and cultures of the regions from which they come.

The main classical styles:



Bharata Natyam from Tamil Nadu has a driving percussive energy flow. Space and movements are perceived along geometric lines accompanied by crisp footwork.



Odissi is the style of eastern India and was nurtured in the great temples of Orissa. Its fluid and lyrical lines are punctuated by freezes in sculptured poses, which can still be seen on the temple walls.



Kathakali comes from Kerala in south west India. This vigorous, dramatic, and demanding style owes much to the marital arts tradition. It uses highly stylised mime, makeup and costume to depict the characters from Hindu myths and legends.



Mohini Attam comes from Kerala in south west India. It is performed by women in white and gold costumes. It has the flavour of both Bharata Natyam and Kathakali with an overlay of local folk dances, in particular Kaikottikali and Kumini.



Kathak originated from the storytelling tradition of northern India. It later flourished at the courts of the Moghul emperors where it developed into the subtle and sophisticated style of today. The dance is marked by its complex footwork, rapid spins and sudden still poses.



Manipuri is the very graceful and soft style from Manipur in north east India. The dancers use small steps and low leaps, and women dancers dress in long stiff skirts. The legends of Krishna form important themes in the dance.

Folk Dance

There is an immense wealth of folk dance incorporating social dances to celebrate festivals and other occasions such as marriage, work dances, marital dances, dances for men and dances for women. The dancers often sing as they dance, and the accompaniment of drums is indispensable. Probably the dances most well known in Britain are the vigorous and energetic **Bhangra** from the Punjab, the **Garba** and **Dandia Ras** (stick dance) from Gujarat. In the region of Garhwal in Uttar Pradesh, where the Chipko Movement originated, an important folk dance is the **Chauphala Kedar**, in which men and women dance together waving coloured scarves.

Contemporary Dance

The names of Rabindranath Tagore and Uday Shankar are linked with the development of an Indian contemporary dance style. They created their own particular style of creative dance based on classical traditions and these styles are still taught in their centres in Calcutta and Bengal. These pioneers did much to raise the profile of dance in India in the earlier part of this century. Today dancers and choreographers such as Mrinalini Sarabhai, Manjusri Chaki-Sircar, Chandralekha and Kumundini Lakhia carry on this tradition creating new works in the contemporary context, exploring and developing the language of Indian Dance from a firm classical base.

THE STORY OF THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT

North of Delhi, the capital of India, in Uttar Pradesh lie the foothills of the Himalayas, the great mountain range often known as the 'roof of the world', which stretches from China through Tibet, Nepal and India and Pakistan to Afghanistan. The foothills consist of steep river valleys covered by thick forests of sal with their big shiny leaves, graceful deodar, chir pine and evergreen oaks with their knobby bark.



The forests are very important to the villagers who live in the foothills as they depend on the trees for firewood for cooking food, fodder for their animals and local timber needs for building etc. The trees are also a source of natural medicines. However the hardwood of the slow growing sal, deodar and oak is also highly prized commercially and many acres of forest have been felled for the production of furniture, sports equipment and for export. As the tree felling by timber companies reduces the numbers of locally available trees, the village women have to walk further and further every day to collect wood, fodder and medicines for their families, increasing the burden of their already heavy workload.

The fast growing chir pine is prized for resin and its use as railway sleepers. Land was cleared for commercial chir plantations, but the pines do not provide suitable fodder or fuel for the villagers. Neither do their needles create the rich forest floor of humus, which acts as a sponge for the monsoon rains. The rains quickly run off a floor of pine needles, causing floods which wash away the top soil. Floods also occur where the trees have been

cleared. The oaks and broadleaf species retain the monsoon rains, and without them earth and rock is washed away causing landslides and more floods. As the rains do not have a chance to percolate down into the water table, the floods ultimately result in the water sources drying up. Villagers are forced to move higher and higher up into the mountains, resulting in more trees being felled to clear the land for agriculture and more forest areas being opened up for commercial logging.

Though many people had noticed the connection between deforestation and flooding, the commercial logging companies continued to fell forests unabated despite sporadic, isolated protests. However 1970 was a turning point and saw the Chipko Movement growing out of local people's realisation that the various ecological disasters which were occurring, were directly linked with tree felling in the area. That year the monsoon was particularly heavy in the Garhwal region of the Himalayas, north east of Hardwar. On 20 July a fierce storm struck the Alaknanda valley. The flood which followed swept away bridges and fields adjacent to the river at Reni. Hundreds of people and animals died. So

much soil was washed down that over three hundred miles away, the Upper Ganges canal was choked with silt for thirty miles.

Relief workers saw the drastic effects of deforestation and made a report requesting a Government enquiry. This was ignored and relief workers along with local people organised marches in Gopeshwar, following the Gandhian tradition of non violent protest. They demanded the cessation of commercial logging and the return of forest control to local people.

Predicably nothing happened, but 1972 saw more widespread protests. These gradually became organised into the Chipko Movement which spread throughout the Garhwal region by the efforts of local women and through the songs of Ghaneshyam and the work of a small team of 'runners' who set out on foot to spread the word to the hill people. Sundarlal Bahuguna, a Gandhian activist and philosopher, and Chandi Prasad Bhatt were among those who carried the message from one village to the next, from one region to another. For the hill women it was a message of survival. For them food production begins with the forest. Disappearing forests and water threaten the ability of these women to feed and care for their families. This is why thousands of Garhwal women joined the protest against the commercial interests which had destroyed their forests and water resources.

The monsoon of 1973 brought further devastation to the area. In November when the lists of the forests to be auctioned for commercial felling were published the people, with horror, realised this included the Reni forests in the Alaknanda valley, the source of the 1970 flood disaster.

The Chipko Movement organised meetings and voiced their opposition at the auction in January 1974. The contractors withdrew and decided to change their tactics. In late March the men of Reni and neighbouring villages left to travel to Chamoli to collect long overdue compensation for land appropriated by the army after the Indo-Chinese conflict. The contractors took the opportunity of the men's absence to move in. But they had reckoned without the local women who were determined to save the trees.

One of the women grazing cows became suspicious when she spotted several men with axes; she whistled and collected all her companions who surrounded the men and urged them not to fell the trees. In the confusion that followed, one man threatened the women's leader with a gun. This middle aged mother, Gaura Devi, told him to shoot saying only then "can you cut the forest which is like a mother to us". This episode un-nerved the contractors who then left the forest.

Over the next few days vigilante parties were formed to keep watch for any return of the axemen, and the Chipko organisers moved onto the offensive. It was during this time that Chandi Prasad Bhatt declared " Let them know they will not fell a single tree without felling one of us first. When the men raise their axes, we will embrace the trees to protect them".

The protests continued and when the loggers tried to begin felling at Rampur Phata some fifty miles north of Gopeshwar, the villagers marched there. Their march accompanied with its attendant songs and drums, gathered supporters on the way. On reaching the village they asked the loggers to leave the forests alone and threatened to hug the trees marked for felling. Once again the contractors were foiled.



1977 saw the protests spread westward to the forests around Adwani. During the tree auctions women broke through the protective cordon and disrupted the proceedings. They were arrested and gaoled at Tehri. Meanwhile other villagers declared they would hug the trees in order to protest and the contractor threatened to cut them down along with the forests. In December a few days before the felling was due to begin, the women entered the forests to protect the threatened trees. They tied silken threads around the tree trunks, as sisters do to the wrists of their brothers during the festival of Raksha Bandhan, thus showing that the trees were their respected brothers. Hundreds of women took a pledge to save the trees at the cost of their lives.

The climax of the protest was in February of the following year, when two truckloads of armed police arrived to make sure the contractors could start the felling. But whenever an axeman approached, villagers embraced the trees. This tree hugging protest was inspired by the actions of the Bishnoi tribespeople, who in 1731 embraced their sacred trees in an attempt to save them from the axemen of a local Maharaja. In the 1970's despite the arrival of more police, the Chipko protest continued sometimes with up to four people linking hands around the trees. Finally the auctions had to be cancelled and the forests were saved.

During that year the protests continued at the forests near Tehri and Srinagar until the government declared a ban on all felling until "such time Mr Bahuguna meet the Chief Minister and discusses the matter." Following Sundarlal Bahuguna's discussions with ministers, the government made a complete ban in Uttar Pradesh on the felling of trees for commercial purposes above 1000 metres for 15 years and recommended the planting of native trees in co-operation with local people. The Chipko Movement had grown from an isolated local protest to a national campaign which managed to influence India's forestry policy, and return the control of the forests to the local people.

Gradually the movement took the next logical step - the restoration of the hills by afforestation with native trees. The first ecodevelopment camp planted 9000 trees on eroded slopes in 1976. Each camp involved local people, college students and school children along with Chipko workers. It combined education in ecology with tree planting, stressing "the right use of the forest". This was followed by the setting up of the Chipko Information Centre and gradually the movement has blossomed into a massive community based tree planting exercise. Any tree planting does not begin in a village until a women's group and a youth group has been formed in order to support the programme. The women's group is often resisted by men who are not used to the women taking a leading role in village affairs. In some cases men have tried to take over the Chipko activities for their own personal advantage. However once the women are able to get over these obstacles, they then find the strength to resist government intervention, local village politicians and logging contractors. The women's central role in the Chipko Movement has built up their confidence, and they say the trees have 'given them a voice' to discuss many important issues facing their ecologically sensitive area.

Since 1981 the Chipko movement has spread to other parts of India - Himachal Pradesh in the North, Karnataka in the South, Rajasthan in the West, Bihar in the East and the Vindhyas in western Madhya Pradesh. Sundarlal Bahuguna has continued to be active in the movement travelling to Europe, Africa and Mexico. He has also undertaken a footmarch along the entire length of the Himalayas from Kashmir in the west to Kohmina in the east. He took the Chipko message to all the villages along the way, a journey which took him one and a half years.



However it is not only India which has ecological problems - this situation is a global one, and one which effects Britain as much as any other part of the world. Trees are indispensable to our existence, yet acid rain, air pollution, neglect and vandalism are effecting British trees in both rural and urban areas. So there is a great need for everyone's support and active involvement in the protection, care and planting of trees.

The example of the Chipko Movement offers us a solution through local action, a solution which came about through local people striving to manage their own local resources through their understanding of the delicate balance of their relationship with the environment. Trees are vital to our survival on this planet - they provide us with clean air, water and rich soil. By looking after and protecting our trees, we are looking after our own future and that of the Earth's. This is the Chipko message.



SONGS OF THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT

**"Ban Jaagey
Ban wasi Jaagey"
The forests are awake
The forest people are awake!**

The creation of folk songs by the Chipko movement was an effective way of taking their message to the people and helping them to understand the ecological issues facing their area. The songs were mostly spread by schoolchildren and contributed greatly to the success and popularity of the movement.

One of the most well known songs, which became the movement's slogan, was created by Bachni Devi when she led a resistance against the forest officials at Adwani in 1977. The officials arrived to browbeat and intimidate the women and Chipko activists, but found the women holding up lighted lanterns in broad daylight. Puzzled, a forester asked them their intention. The women replied "We have come to teach you forestry". He retorted "You foolish women, how can you who prevent felling know the value of the forest? Do you know what forests bear? They produce profit, resin and timber". And the women immediately sang back in chorus:

**"What do the forests bear?
Soil, water and pure air.
Soil water and pure air
Sustain the earth and all she bears"**

During widespread protests in Garhwal against commercial exploitation of forests in December 1972, Raturi composed his poem which was the first one to contain the now famous word 'Chipko' (embrace) which became synonymous with the movement.

**" Embrace our trees
Save them from being felled
The property of our hills
Save them from being looted "**

A decade later the events at Chamundeyi in the Doon Valley, inspired the Chipko poet, Ghanshyam Shailani to write a new song:

**" Sister, it is a fight to protect
Our mountains and forests.
They give us life
Embrace the life of the living tree and streams
Clasp them to your hearts
Resist the digging of mountains
That brings death to our forest and streams
A fight for life has begun
At Sinsyaru Khala"**

Note:

Songs from Vandana Shiva's book 'Staying Alive' (London 1989) and reproduced by kind permission of the publishers, Zed Books

SONGS OF THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT

Ghaneshyam Shailani, folksinger and Chipko activist, wrote many other songs about the importance of trees. "Appeal by a Tree" is one of his most well known and conveys the Chipko message by describing the gifts of a tree and the consequences of its destruction.

APPEAL BY A TREE

I who have stood for ages
Offer myself to you
Do not cut me, I am yours.
My gifts give you a good future.
Milk and water
Thick shade and showers
Rich soil and many crops.
Do not cut me - save me.

Some of my kind bear sweet fruits
And fragrant flowers.
Our leaves dance for you in the wind
And we stand gently on the Earth
I am the pleasant season
I am the spring, I am the rains.
Do not cut me - save me.

We stand on slopes and below is the village.
Remember, rolling logs will create landslides.
Where we are destroyed
Dust is flying there.
The hill tops
are barren.
All the water sources have dried up.
Do not cut us - save us.

Plant our seedlings for your children
Watch them grow to decorate the Earth
What is ours, is yours also
Do not cut us - save us
Remember Chipko and embrace the trees!

THE LEGEND OF AMRITA DEVI



Many years ago there was a tribe in Rajasthan called the Bishnoi. These people cherished and worshipped their Khejare trees and no one was allowed to fell them. Children were taught to respect nature and to refrain from killing any living thing. Each child in the tribe had their own special tree which they would regularly talk to and hug. And these khejare trees, which are drought resistant, provided shade and fodder to the Bishnoi villagers.

In 1731 the Maharaja of Jodhpur, Abhay Singh, decided to build a new palace and needed more timber to burn in the lime kilns. So he sent his axeman to fetch wood from the forests surrounding the Bishnoi villages. Amrita Devi was inside her house churning butter when she heard the sound of the axes in the forest. She knew no one must harm the trees, and so without hesitation she ran outside and threw her arms around them, only to be cut down by the axemen. She was quickly followed by her daughters and others inspired by her example.

The ensuing slaughter was dreadful, over three hundred and sixty men, women and children were massacred before the horrified Maharaja called a halt. And these rich forests still stand to this day surrounded by the treeless desert of Rajasthan, a testament to the resolution of the Bishnoi to protect their sacred trees.

Recently the Indian Government has commemorated their sacrifice by naming Amrita Devi's village, Khejarli, as Indian's first National Environment Memorial. In the village there is a tower and marble waterpool on the supposed spot of the massacre. Hundreds of young khejare trees have been planted and there is a nursery supplying tree seedlings to the area. Local people hold an annual fair in Amrita's memory. Thousands of Bishnoi men in white clothes and brightly-dressed Bishnoi women gather to pay their respects to their brave forebears and to reaffirm their beliefs. Many Chipko activists also come to the fair regarding it as an important place of pilgrimage.

Note:

For teachers wishing to use a less violent version of the legend, "The People Who Hugged The Trees" by Deborah Lee Rose and published by Roberts Rinehart INC (price £6.95) is a delightful and suitable version for younger children. The illustrations by Birgitta Saflund are particularly evocative of the region and the rural life of Rajasthan.

