# Chapter 14
# Chandini (A Bride for the Moon)


**Rachel Davies and Daniel Saul**

**Abstract** *Chandini (A Bride For The Moon)* is an art/science project led by R&D Studio which explores the dream of India's ambition to be the fourth nation to make a soft landing on the moon. In collaboration with a dancer, musician and scientists, poetic visual and performative metaphors are developed that represent the progress of Indian society in the technological age. This chapter describes the ongoing project from the authors' perspective; how they collaborated, in response to different opportunities and changing circumstances, the obstacles they encountered and how the public engaged with their artworks at events and festivals between 2017 and 2019 in the UK and India.

**Keywords** Filmmaking · Choreography · Art/science · Collaboration · Documentary · Projection mapping · Outdoor arts · Space · Lunar landing · Moon · India

## 14.1 Introduction

*Chandini (A Bride For The Moon)* is an art/science project led by R&D Studio [1] that explores the hopes and dreams of India's ambition to be the fourth nation to make a soft landing on the moon. Working in collaboration with artists and scientists they develop poetic visual metaphors to consider notions of progress to Indian society in the technological age.

R&D Studio is a coming together of two artist filmmakers; Rachel Davies and Daniel Saul. They describe here how their artistic responses to a subject have evolved creating various iterations of the project over a two-year period.

Both artists have experience of working with Indian documentary subjects and dancers. Rachel with short Channel 4 dance films, collaborations with Mavin Khoo

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(*Khooyile*) [2] and Akram Khan (*Loose in Flight*) [3] which toured internationally with the British Council [4]; and Daniel's film *The Morris Jelly House of Fashion* (Channel 4) [5] which drew on his personal experience of being from an Anglo-Indian family originating from Calcutta.

The artists remember when India was characterised in the UK as an indigent recipient of foreign aid. However recently India has positioned itself on the global stage with a symbolic ascendency to become a self-proclaimed leader in space technology. This project reflects on these contrasting contemporary global perceptions of an India which has been transformed by technology yet in many ways whose traditions have stayed the same.

For *Chandini (A Bride For The Moon)* R&D Studio worked with Hemabharathy Palani a dancer/choreographer [6] and *TeamIndus* [7] a private aerospace company, both based in Bangalore, to produce short films, choreography, performances, projection mapping and installations that engaged audiences through broadcast and performances in the UK and India.

The wider project began as a response to an open call from the British Council/Big Dance Shorts in 2017 [8]. The commissions were seeking dance and film collaborations between the UK and India to mark 70 years of Indian Independence from Britain, a complex relationship from the outset. It was then that R&D Studio decided to focus on a small private company of mainly young people who were late entrants to the Google's 2007 Lunar X-Prize; a $30 million international competition open to non-governmental agencies to land a robot on the Moon, have it travel 500 m, and broadcast high resolution captured images back to Earth [9].

*TeamIndus* [10] presented themselves in a markedly different way from more grandiose national Space agencies. They cast themselves as young dreamers working to creatively inspire other young minds in India. When we initially contacted them we said, "*We want to make a film about your rover, but using contemporary dance.*" They replied "*So cool*!"

Simultaneously we began a search for an Indian dancer who could translate a science story into a personalised performance. Emma Gladstone (Artistic Director Dance Umbrella) [11] recommended Hemabharathy (Hema) Palani. Hema was based in Bangalore, as were TeamIndus. From this point our themes developed. We discovered that TeamIndus' robot, as often with ships or craft, was referred to as 'she' by the team who made her. TeamIndus co-founder Sheelika Ravishankar told us "*When I received your proposal the first thing I asked was, is your dancer female?*" Hema told us that the one-way nature of the robotic moon mission reminded her of a common Indian female experience; when a young woman moves from her birth family's home to the new home of her husband, it is sometimes said that "*She will only ever return as ashes.*" A parallel story began to emerge. We would track the journey of an Indian robot on the moon echoed by an Indian woman's journey on Earth. Our filmic mise-en-scène became Bangalore; once a small colonial outpost, now rapidly transforming into an Asian information technology-driven megalopolis. A city containing both ancient tradition and a world-beating aerospace industry. Our project became a container for exploring a dialogue between these two ideas. Figure 14.1

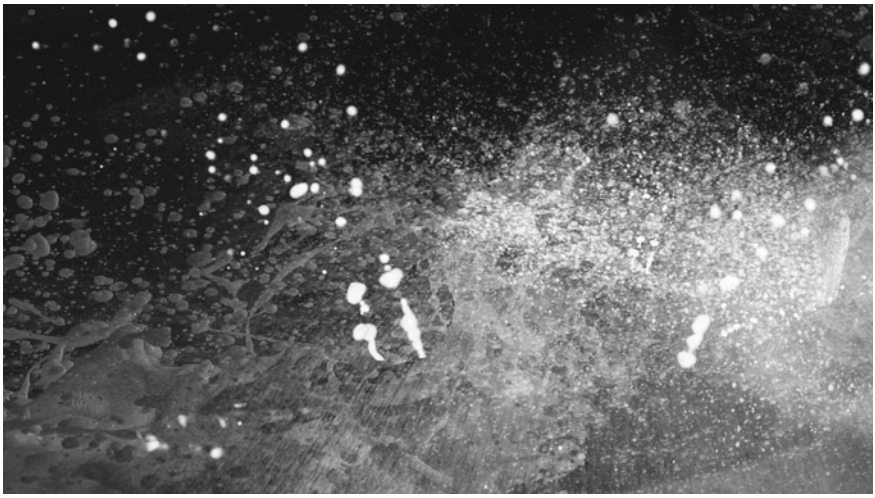

**Fig. 14.1** R&D Studio 2018. Evocation of the cosmos created in milk droplets

shows a frame of an animation rendered in development workshops, and eventually used in large-scale projection within live performances in Bangalore and Dorset.

## 14.2 A Changing Real-World Context

One of the challenges of documentary-making is access. The subject matter of the Indian Space programme could have presented us with several obstacles. ISRO [12], the governmental space agency responsible for nearly all of India's activities in space, are not known for being an open access organisation and we had heard rumours that they were very unlikely to allow foreigners to visit them. We made several attempts to contact ISRO and received no response.

Finding TeamIndus was a blessing as they were wonderfully open and generous and once in India facilitated our visits thoroughly and gracefully. However, we did not know if we would be able to find empathy between our very different professional disciplines. We spent a lot of time preparing our questions and equally allowed our interviews to unfold in a relaxed and unhurried atmosphere. When we first met TeamIndus in 2017 many teams from other countries had dropped out of the Lunar X-Prize and TeamIndus were ranked as favourites among the surviving four. It had been a white-knuckle ride with many delays and last minute deadline extensions. In January 2018, TeamIndus announced that they were scheduled to launch their spaceship in March–April that year. However, it was not to be. TeamIndus had to cancel their contract with ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation), their launch provider [13]. It was a heart-breaking moment for the team. Google announced the closure of the Lunar X-Prize without a winner. However, it was clear that the idea

had been timely and had stimulated imagination in the private sector. A slew of new international missions to the moon were announced during this time, by national agencies such as NASA and ISRO and also many private companies around the world.

In March 2019 the 'new space race' dramatically intensified. In a speech at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama Vice-President Mike Pence announced, in the most nationalistic terms, the U.S. government's challenge to NASA to "return astronauts to the moon within the next 5 years." Also saying, "The United States must remain first in space in this century as in the last. Not just to propel our economy and secure our nation, but above all because the rules and values of space, like every great frontier, will be written by those who have the courage to get there first" [14]. Also in March, Narendra Modi declared India to be the 'Fourth Space Superpower' after ISRO successfully destroyed one of its own satellites with a missile launched in space. Creating an estimated 6,500 pieces of space debris (in an exact echo of the opening sequence from the film 'Gravity') Modi announced a day of national celebration and called the action something that would "impress India's rivals" [15]. In this year too the Trump administration announced the creation of a 5th branch of the United States armed forces called the 'space force' [16]. In April 2019, Israel's Space IL, also a competitor in Google's Lunar X-Prize, successfully launched the world's first private moon mission on an unusual orbital trajectory. They proved just how challenging lunar expeditions could be as the craft unexpectedly crash-landed on the moon's surface [17].

On 31 May 2019, TeamIndus tweeted that they had successfully partnered with American company Orbit Beyond and were once gain hoping to launch in 2020 as part of NASA's CPLS programme [18]. On 15 July 2019, ISRO was set to launch its most complex lunar mission and hoping to make India only the 4th nation to soft-land on the moon. They cancelled due to technical difficulties only 56 min before launch [19]. The mission successfully launched 2 weeks later, but tragically communication with the lander was lost just before touch down when the craft was reported to be just 2.1 km from the lunar surface [20]. As of writing the craft is presumed to have crash-landed, demonstrating perhaps, together with the Israeli attempt, the scale of the technological challenge involved in reaching earth's closest neighbour.

The dramatic twists and turns of the story have meant that our project also has had to be fleet of foot, able to respond quickly to an ever-changing back-story. Within each development, and beside the grandiose and gung-ho statements of some players, we feel that our story offers up an Indian female human perspective, the 'small dream' of hope, set against the backdrop of an escalating international space race.

## 14.3 Short Film

***Ek Choti si Asha (A Small Dream)*** Dance film, 4 min, Channel 4 Television 2017

The overall project had to meet considerable challenges: creative, technical and organisational, with many aspects that we had not tried before. The collaborations, though exciting, presented us with potentially difficult paths to negotiate. We first met Hema in Verbania north Italy, to watch her perform her own choreographic pieces in a dance festival. We were hugely impressed by her work, delicate and edgy at the same time.

The first iteration of the project was a short film commissioned for Channel 4 television; ***Ek Choti si Asha (A Small Dream)*** [21]. Our collaboration, including costume design, was developed across continents and time zones via Skype and WhatsApp. It was necessarily quick as we had limited time to develop the work. We designed a container for Hema to contribute to, sending video storyboards to her whilst she sent rehearsal clips of ideas and movements. Decisions were made quickly and the planning was precise. We attempted to present the audience with a deliberate conceit—that the inclusion of one narrative thread would be appropriated to explore another. In this case, the voices of young Indian space engineers would be featured describing how their robot would cope with physical challenges and obstacles on her perilous journey. This audio would be set against imagery of an Indian female traveller negotiating the busy streets of Bangalore; people, animals, traffic and the male gaze; the combination of voice and choreography allowed us to explore parallels between the Earth and Moon stories without literal space or moonscape being shown.

Further to this idea, we decided to incorporate TeamIndus' use of the feminine pronoun and request that they always refer to the robot as 'she'. Interestingly at this point the two young male engineers warned us "You won't get an emotional response from us. We are engineers and technicians." They then proceeded to make recordings that were infused with obvious emotion as they described the robot that they had been creating for the past six years.

We continued our remote video dialogue with Hema, sending her animatics (edited voice-over with improvised visuals) with Hema responding with small sections of dance recorded in her studio. In this way the ideas and the interplay between words, dance and imagery evolved and a larger narrative emerged.

The specific aspects of the mission meant that the robot rover, named 'Ek Choti si Asha' (E.C.A. for short), meaning 'a small dream' in Hindi, would only survive whilst her solar panels could be in direct sunlight. One lunar day is equivalent to 14 earth days. ECA would travel from Earth to Moon with her batteries switched off. She is only powered on when her wheels touch lunar soil. From this moment the engineers would be able to control her movements on the Moon from the Earth for a fortnight [22].

For us it meant we could give Hema a structure for her choreography. The young character ECA would begin asleep in a black space then wake and start her journey outdoors (Fig. 14.2). A dawn to dusk framework in the 4-min film would inform the remaining narrative that also included the entire lifespan of the character. At the end

**Fig. 14.2** R&D Studio 2017. *Ek Choti si Asha.* Opening shot in Bangalore residential street, where Hema starts her walk. https://vimeo.com/240144999

of the day, she faces the future with the knowledge that her end is imminent. Hema introduced tropes from marriage rituals [23] and developed her female character's narrative, conceived of her as a contemporary Indian woman, yet bound by tradition and family. Simply told, she would leave home, full of hope as a young woman embarking on married life, yet she faces anxiety when she realises that her freedoms must change forever and she can't go back.

The storyboard and animatic followed this format, building mini-scenes or chapters based on different technical challenges that the engineers described in detail. Individuated sections were based on how to move the robot in low gravity, how to negotiate obstacles such as rocks and gradients, and how to remain safe from very fine electro-static moon dust. These factors meant that the engineers estimated they would be able to move ECA no faster than 5 cm/min. In response Hema's first task was technical too—how to choreograph a walk so slow it resembled time-lapse. It was pleasing when we filmed tests and rehearsals outdoors that Hema's choreography appeared to resemble slow motion, nicely belied by the figures around moving at normal speed.

This first iteration enabled us to start building a film language that blended documentary interviews with choreography and interwove a journalistic story with a fictional character. Ground rules were established and a simple narrative framework was conceived. For all the constraints of time and distance the simple structure worked very well and all three artists were satisfied with the result.

For Hema the project also became expansive. During 2018 we began working in the context of a larger framework beyond the short film and a departure into live performance.

## 14.4 Outdoor Performance

***A Little Big Dream***. National Gallery of Modern Art, Bengaluru January 2018

In January 2018 the British Council in India was in the process of concluding a year of cultural events marking 70 years of Indian independence. Luke Jerram's Museum of the Moon sculpture [24] was brought to Bangalore; a 7-m diameter spherical sculpture printed with high-resolution NASA photographs of the Moon's surface.

Hemabharathy Palani and R&D Studio were invited to make a performance beneath this artwork on the night of the 'super moon' on the 31 January 2018 outside the National Gallery of Modern Art [25].

The performance outdoors under the enormous moon sculpture immediately gave a sense of scale and suggested a duality of strength and fragility: a hardy robot built to withstand other worldly forces and yet tiny against the vastness of space. Hema's choreography included a team of about 20 dancers who made a chorus surrounding her. She, however, was still alone, marooned on an island in the centre of an artificial pond, visually separated from the other performers. The audience were given an image of a lone explorer supported by a big team who were nevertheless separated from her and less and less able to control her as she journeyed further away.

Luke Jerram's Moon and the central performance were both reflected perfectly in the still water around her, a material existing in a non-solid state; an ethereal inverted echo transposed within another atmosphere and space. Pre-recorded video close ups of Hema's movements projected into the decorative masonry and structure of the museum echoed her live performance, yet were strangely remote and disconnected too. The engineering team growing ever distant echoed a fading connection with birth parents. These key images expanded our metaphorical lexicon and represented several ideas at once (Fig. 14.3).

## 14.5 Objects and Projections

**Residencies: Leverhulme & 101 Outdoor Creation Space** Spring/Summer 2018

Hema was invited by Ballet Rambert to develop new work during a residency sponsored by Leverhulme [26]. Together with theatre producers Fuel [27], we started to develop ideas for a larger outdoor show, both in Rambert Studios London, and by securing a further 'Seedbed' residency at 101 Outdoor Arts Creation Space near Newbury [28], a large rehearsal space intended for artists to develop outdoor work at scale.

In order to expand the film story into a live performance; narratively, choreographically and visually, this more open-ended collaboration presented more challenges in terms of balancing our creative voices with our different cultural backgrounds, artistic training and preferred methodologies.

We wanted to further develop the work as site-specific location-based, working outside to enable extreme contrasts in scale, the tiny robot in amongst the vast cosmos.

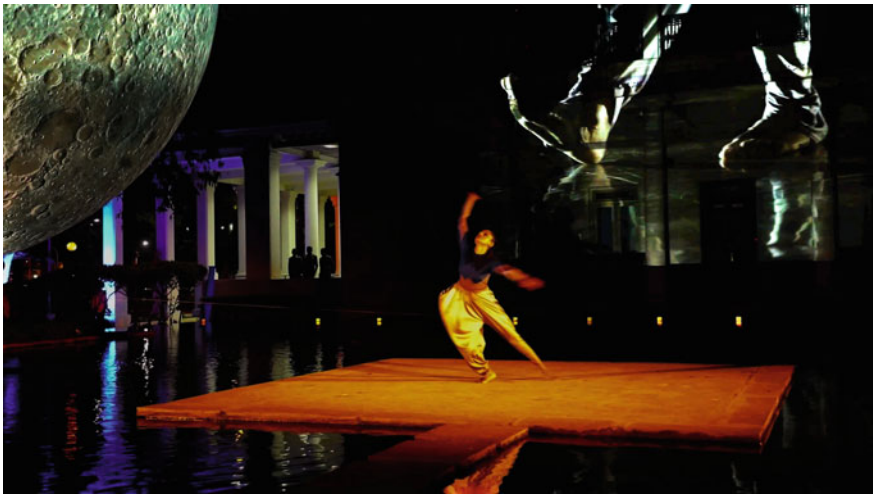

**Fig. 14.3** R&D Studio 2018. *A Little Big Dream.* https://vimeo.com/256314451

During these residencies, we conceived of making a wordless visual theatre show that would bring an Indian dimension to 2019, the year of the fiftieth anniversary of Apollo 11.

During the Leverhulme residency we made a series of physical experiments, inventing mechanisms to create a sequence of images to carry a basic narrative. If we were aiming to tell a parallel story between a robot travelling from Earth to Moon and a woman moving between houses on Earth then perhaps simple contrasts could serve as starting points. We experienced a break-through when we began to play with objects and projectors in a darkened space. Choreography could be very small, just hands and small objects, while projections could be huge and immersive suggesting space or other worlds. We imagined how to combine content made with high technology with other images made with domestic objects, playing with large and tiny projections, with the body and with objects on a table-top (Fig. 14.4).

During the 101 Residency, to increase our emotional range we invented a second character, a 'mission controller' who would appear on stage both as a live musician and a kind of director, tracking Hema's character (who we called 'Chandini'—translating as 'a bride for the moon'), and arranging small domestic objects on a table-top. For example, a cup of tea would become a surface for small focused projections that would be re-filmed and re-projected on a large scale thus suggesting immense objects or vast landscapes. Technical and visual experiments such as this were combined with narratives, expanded to take place on three stages: 'Earth', 'Mission Control' and 'Moon'. The action would take place live in an outdoor setting in front of an audience but also filmed and projected on three large screens. The Earth and Moon stages would also have cameras directly above looking down, and the Moon stage would be covered with water.

**Fig. 14.4** R&D Studio 2018. *Table Top Moon.* Leverhulme residency film. https://vimeo.com/266294389

We considered the potential use of a drone above the performer and audience, used to stream live images of Chandini's journey to a large-scale outdoor audience. We took drone footage above Greenham Common around 101 Creation Space which, when treated, appeared like an alien landscape. (This footage was later used for subsequent stage iterations.)

Via digital interactive tools a nuanced relationship between Chandini and her maker/controller/family became a further theme explored. Chandini arrives with a live camera attached to her head, whose feed is received and augmented by the mission controller and streamed onto the big screen for the audience.

Interactive sensors attached to the dancers' wrists created a cascade of ceremonial floating flowers symbolising marriage vows (Fig. 14.5).

We mapped out a partially visualised narrative for a full-length outdoor piece in the form of a diagramatic triptych film incorporating spoken and labelled description with footage gathered from both residencies. *Chandini Animatic* (Fig. 14.6).

## 14.6 Choreography

***Chandini—Work in Progress*** Ranga Shankara Auditorium Bangalore, Attakkalari Interim Festival, 2 February 2019

Having focussed on technical possibilities the previous year, it was now time to develop the choreography. Hema worked on the identity and story of the character 'Chandini' with several days of devising alone before our arrival in Bangalore. The

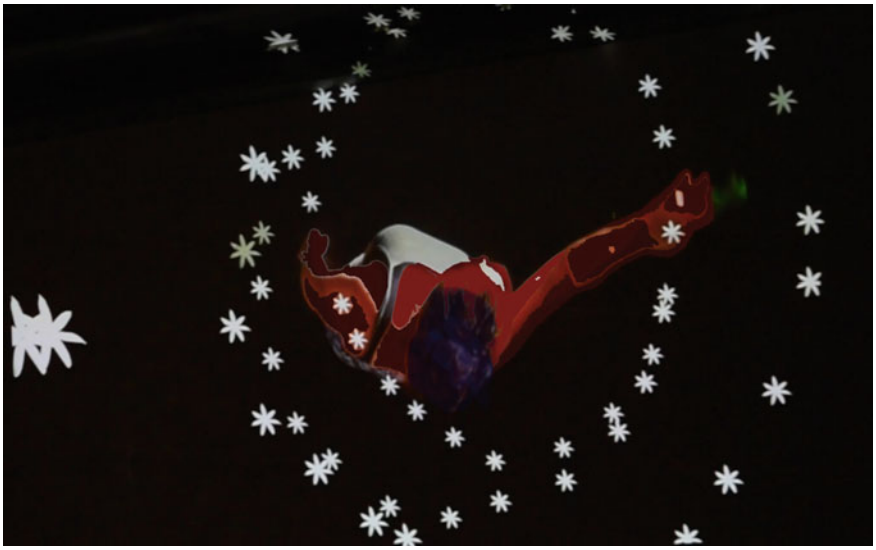

**Fig. 14.5** R&D Studio 2018. Overhead image of Hema with augmented animated flowers

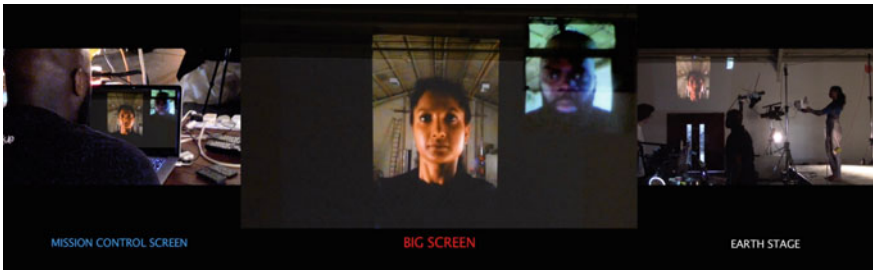


**Fig. 14.6** R&D Studio 2018. *Chandini Animatic*. Triptych diagramatic film. https://vimeo.com/297342932

approaching public showing focused our energies and brought together the choreographic and visual aspects of the piece. Hema's choreography comes from working closely with music and we collaborated with PK a young Bangalore-based musician who formed a series of digital soundscapes. In rehearsal sessions we mapped a story of Chandini's journey on the moon; from the dream of her landing, adapting to her unforgiving environment physically and psychologically, her fears and struggles with a perceived feminine role, and her ultimate realisation that she is facing her new world alone.

In the theatre film, animation sequences (e.g. Fig. 14.1) were projected onto dark surfaces and in ultra-wide-angle, bathing the whole auditorium and extending beyond the stage, exploring the impact of moving images as a vast spatial environment into which the small Chandini struggles to find her place (Fig. 14.7).

**Fig. 14.7** R&D Studio 2019. *Chandini—Work in progress.* 20 min dance performance. https://vimeo.com/320478323

## 14.7 Festival

**A Small Dream at Dorset Moon** Festival June/July 2019

R&D Studio was invited to propose 'Under The Moon' ideas for 'Dorset Moon' Festival in summer 2019, a special one-off festival to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing. Dorset Moon was curated by three partners in Dorset; Activate, producers of the Inside Out Festival, Dorset, Bournemouth Arts by the Sea, and b-side [29].

Using three spectacular settings we created *A Small Dream* [30] to showcase the story of 'Chandini' in three chapters: *Launch, Journey* and *Arrival,* comprising two outdoor performances and a video installation across 3 consecutive weekends in July 2019.

Each show was different and each was intended to work alone. By viewing all three the audience were able to track the story of a tiny female robot on a perilous 400,000-km journey. Families, walkers, beach lovers and culture vultures encountered a perambulatory dance through seaside gardens, films projected to look like stained glass windows and a final performance in a fort built out into the sea. The festival was the project's most ambitious outing so far and once again we diversified our approach, developing and extending our metaphors.

Hearing that ISRO's Chandrayaan robot mission was planned for the same summer we also updated Chandini to embody her perspective within this current bullish and intensifying commercial race.

## 14.8 Live Art

***Launch*** Bournemouth beach and St. Peter's Church 28–30 June 2019

Chandini's Dorset journey began on Bournemouth beach. It was the first sunny weekend of the season and the hottest day of the year thus far. People thronged to the beach. In amongst them squatting close to the pier Chandini gazed out to sea, a Go-Pro camera strapped to her head, recording her view. She gathered sand in her hands and made a ritual offering, a puja, to the sea. Slowly standing up Chandini began to pick her way across the sand, her slow cautious progress echoing that which might be taken on an alien surface. The imagery of the packed beach, as seen from Chandini's headcam, is extraordinary. The camera picks up a strange world in which people are gingerly adapting everyday movements to an unfamiliar environment. Both staring and pretending not to look, the pleasure-seeking beachgoers are strangely unclothed and vulnerable. Chandini slowly passes through crowds, up close and intimate, provoking curiosity with a slow and mysterious approach towards Luke Jerram's moon installed in St. Peter's Church nearby [31].

After performing another puja at the door and taking off her shoes and headcam, Chandini enters the church to make a ten-minute performance under the moon including drawing the orbital path of ECA's journey to the moon in a blue sand rangoli on the floor of the nave.

After the performance audience members were asked, why do you think she is going to the moon? Echoing the question, why are 'we' as a species heading back to the moon after 50 years?

The main form of this piece was not drawn from dance or theatre but from Live Art. Durational, interactive and placed in the real world this medium situated our character again in a new context and with a new relationship to an audience who may not even know they are witnessing an artwork (Figs. 14.8 and 14.9).

## 14.9 Video Installation

***Journey*** Sherborne Abbey [32] 5–7 July 2019

We next encounter Chandini's journey installed in the magnificent eighth century Sherborne Abbey [32] in video projections in the shape of stained glass windows.

In the quiet devotion of the ancient space, film imagery (such as a turmeric hand clap in slow motion and the cosmos as suspended milk droplets) was combined with the beach point of view scenes from Chandini's Bournemouth headcam, and embedded into the crenulations of a 'blind window'.

Headphones played a musical score peppered with audience responses captured during the week, with the aim of subtly drawing viewers into current conversations about space exploration.

The technique used here was projection mapping. Two projectors carried synced video imagery mapped into eleven complicatedly shaped windows. The venue echoed


**Fig. 14.8** R&D Studio 2019. *A Small Dream: Launch.* Hema's slow walk

**Fig. 14.9** R&D Studio 2019. *A Small Dream: Launch.* Hema's headcam POV

**Fig. 14.10** R&D Studio 2019. *A Small Dream: Journey*

Hema's ritualistic and ceremonial interpretation of the scientific narrative. We almost literally created a window onto another world (Figs. 14.10 and 14.11).

## 14.10 Outdoor Dance Theatre

***Arrival*** Nothe Fort, Weymouth [33] 12–14 July 2019

The final part of the Dorset Moon trilogy was the largest and most ambitious chapter. The setting of Nothe Forte, a nineteenth century military fort built on a promontory with sea on three sides gave a grandeur to our performance and we consciously wanted to provide a spectacle for the 300+ audience.

**Fig. 14.11** R&D Studio 2019. *A Small Dream: Journey (seen through arch)*

We placed the audience up on the ramparts looking down into the fort where Luke Jerram's Museum of the Moon was suspended from a crane. A stage was built just off centre beside the moon and we immersed Hema's live performance in a huge projection extending 27 m across the circular floor of the fort (Fig. 14.12).

Finally arriving on the moon Chandini appears, small and fragile, in the centre of a cosmos projected at scale over the sunken grounds of the amphitheatre-like fort. The audience looks down on her as she wakes in an alien world surrounded by danger. Chandini confronts and struggles with her new environment whilst we realise she is ultimately abandoned.

Being the grand finale to our constructed story developed over the three weekends this piece was more akin to theatre. Using rehearsed choreography, projection mapping onto a square stage and within a larger elliptical surface, lighting and a live camera effect, the techniques were interwoven into the narrative. In addition to combat the prevailing sound of a windy environment, the audience wore wireless headphones so they could hear the soundtrack including its subtleties and speech.

This performance presented large challenges as we moved from the medium of film to large-scale outdoor site-specific theatre and a variety of technical difficulties had to be overcome. The greatest challenge, however, was narrative; how to convey our emotional story also based on the current real lunar Indian mission, in the context of a family-based festival marking the 50th anniversary of Apollo 11. We tackled this with soundtrack; the performance begins with a cacophony of sounds and voices

**Fig. 14.12** R&D Studio 2019. *A Small Dream: Arrival.* View of Nothe Forte performance from ramparts

including current bold statements of ambition from national agencies, contrasting this later with the voice of TeamIndus' Sheelika Ravishankar describing the diurnal cycle on the moon alluding to the emotional journey of the character Chandini.

## 14.11 Documentary

**The Vyomanaut** 30 min film October 2019

Figure 14.13 shows a frame from the film Vyomanaut.

Whilst making the choreography in India we began to record and document our process behind the scenes (Fig. 14.14). We also interviewed Hema about her feelings towards the work and also about her life in general. We felt as if we had an extraordinary resource in her. Fiercely independent and fearless, she did not have an academic background and doesn't consider herself an intellectual. Not from an artistic family her first love was sports. Yet we found her to be a gifted creative and naturally articulate. She talked about her parents, how her father was supportive of everything she did but how her mother approved of her traditional performances but had refused to see any of her contemporary work. Almost constantly on tour, travelling the world and performing extraordinary edgy works that she had created herself, Hema is a cultural warrior steeped in Indian tradition and mythology. It was apparent that Hema herself embodied the same layers and complexities that the Indian space programme itself contained: simultaneously ground-breaking at the leading edge of innovation and entirely shaped by ancient culture.

**Fig. 14.13** R&D Studio 2019. *The Vyomanaut.* Hema creating soundtrack. https://vimeo.com/327502293

**Fig. 14.14** R&D Studio. *The Vyomanaut.* Super slow-motion shot of Hema's feet landing in milk (the moon). https://vimeo.com/327502293

The original conceit, the parallel story of a robot on the moon and an Indian woman journeying on earth, remained intact even though the film subtly shifts attention to our choreographer herself. In fact the metaphors deepened. Our documentation film became a portrait of Hema interwoven with a further exploration of the space mission. We visited TeamIndus again, with Hema, and gaining more insights into their evolving story, explored with them the parallels between their endeavours and

Hema's creative world. Also, being appreciative of Hema's love for speed, we made another visual encapsulation for the film: in contrast to her slow-motion walk, we filmed her dynamically running through Bangalore's streets.

The film allowed us to develop themes of speed, freedom for women in India, family, nature and science, wrapped up in a human portrait. It also exists as a document of our entire collaborative process from beginning to end, a video accompaniment to this chapter and a creative documentary film in its own right, incorporating different textures of fly-on-the-wall documentary to highly rendered visual images (Fig. 14.14). It is currently being completed and will be pitched to dance film/science festivals in 2020/21.

## 14.12 Conclusions

When we began making the Chandini project it was already a hybrid creature, mixing the worlds of contemporary dance, documentary film and animation. But we hadn't planned for it to diversify into so many different forms. All three of our individual practices are predicated on a playful intermingling of ideas and techniques and what we hope is healthy disregard for the traditional silos that some art forms find themselves constrained within. It is therefore unsurprising that our collaboration has become a multi-headed creature.

We would argue that this process has not been schismatic but rather the opposite. The original playful conceit of the parallel story remains a constant, as does the overarching narrative of a one-way journey.

Observing the engineers at TeamIndus search for innovative solutions to technical problems made us consider how adopting an expansive and exploratory approach could push our work forward in unexpected ways [34] and furthermore to ask—what is the purpose of creative research?

By responding to layers within a story in the real world our iterations were driven by form following content, through deliberate meanderings across genre, form and technique, enabling us to examine the facets of our diamond in different lights, a challenging and illuminating process.

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