

**Joseph C. Miller Memorial Lecture:**  
**Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS) in Kooperation mit**  
**der Abteilung für Asiatische und Islamische Kunstgeschichte SoSe 2026:**

**Vortrag von Prof. Dr. Indranil Acharya**  
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**“Sexual Slavery and Economic Dependency:  
A Critical Study of the Nachni Performers of Eastern India in the  
context of the Devadasi Tradition.”**

**Montag, 08.06.2026, Beginn: 16.15 Uhr**

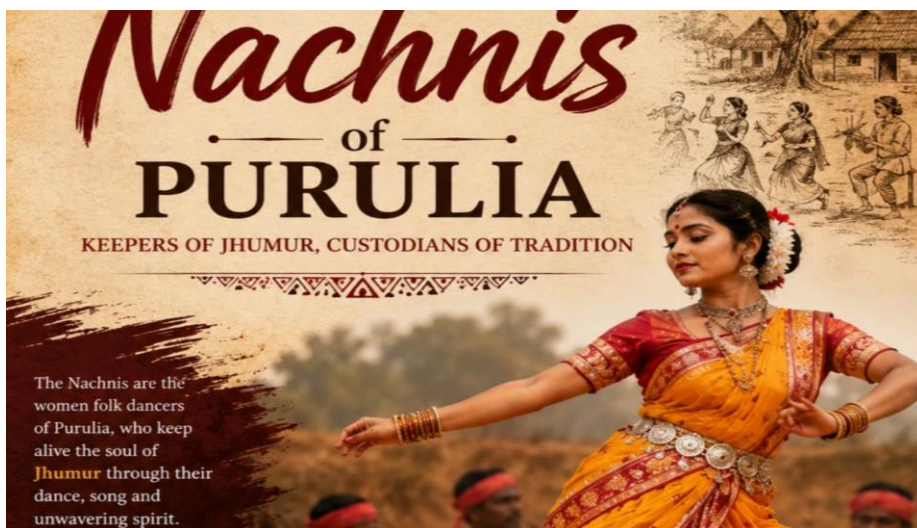
Niebuhrstraße 5, Seminarraum 0.018 (Erdgeschoss)

**Zoom-Link auf Anfrage: [events@dependency.uni-bonn.de](mailto:events@dependency.uni-bonn.de)**

Despite being declared an illegal practice, the Devadasi tradition (of female artists dedicated to the worship and service of a deity or temple) remains active in certain states of India. This lecture proposes to explore the inescapable dependency of the Devadasis on the temple priests, patrons or the influential members of their own community. It also attempts to focus on this victimological perspective in the existing legislations, policies and literary representations with reference to the Nachni tradition prevalent in three major states of Eastern India.

Nachnis of Purulia district in West Bengal and some other regions of Jharkhand and Odisha are traditional Dalit performers, often compared to Devadasis due to their long, semi-religious devotion to art. Conventionally, they have to partner with a male musician, the ‘Rasik,’ to perform Khemta Nach and Jhumur songs. This relationship is central to their survival, offering a form of protection but also culminating in complex, often exploitative social engineering.

Despite being committed rural artistes, Nachnis are often humiliated as social outcasts, similar to the historical treatment of courtesans, although their plight is more marginalized in the contemporary contexts. The economic dependency, aggravated by the social stigma, would accentuate the experience of humiliation typical to the state of slavery.



Slide by Prof. Dr. Indranil Acharya