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*to Joanna de Souza,
who teaches me to move*

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Abstract

Indian contemporary dance is a field, genre, and strategic term, in which practitioners design and stage choreographies that are high art, avant-garde, experimental, abstract, and a-formal. Many practitioners are trained in Indian classical dance forms, and innovate from these by drawing on an amalgam of abstract movement vocabulary to produce work that is socially and politically engaged. Choreographers emphasize essentially “Indian” experiences of inhabiting modernity and interacting with the world. This dissertation makes three main arguments: that bodies move—on, off, and between the dance floor; practitioners must demonstrate multiple mobilities to remain active and working; and these mobilities are rendered clearest in dialogue with each other, to form a larger politics of mobility in Indian contemporary dance. I present five mobilities in the five chapters that construct this dissertation. In Chapter 1, I present an analogy and lineage for studying mobility in Indian contemporary dance, through a photograph album of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century courtesans, as historically immobile practitioners of modern classical dance. Chapter 2 explores the codes for becoming contemporary on the dance floor, in which I investigate the kinesthetic mobility of the dancing body. In Chapter 3, I discuss how dancers move through systems of patronage, and corporate patronage in particular. In the fourth chapter, I move off the dance floor, to study how dancers collaborate with other creative professionals to produce work. The last chapter discusses the mobilities of performers in transnational contexts, which include the mobilization of “Indian contemporary” among transnationally dispersed bodies. It is in this context that I also parse between politically charged interpretations of the terms “Indian” and “South Asian.” I place these case studies of embodied, social, economic, and political mobilities in parallel, as conflicting realities that collide, co-exist,

and co-negotiate. My methods hail from the disciplines of ethnomusicology, dance studies, performance studies, and South Asian studies, and are premised in ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted mostly in Bangalore among dancers, musicians, designers, artists, curators, and arts organizers. I draw heavily from my own experience as a transnational Indian and kathak dancer, from which I construct this project as a scholar-practitioner. I examine my own mobilities in relation to the multiple ways other bodies move in processes of navigating Indian contemporary dance.

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Introduction

It is worth remembering that we speak of dance in a time when movement is under particular duress. We cannot think of movement in India and across the world but in terms of violence, the prohibition of it and of assembly through curfew, and of (forced) migration and the search for refuge.

——— Anita Cheria, *tilt, pause, shift* (2016: 19)

The term “contemporary” implies paradigms that are “of today.” In dance, this currency takes shape in work that is exploratory, pushing philosophical and kinesthetic boundaries wherein the dancing body becomes a canvas for the expression of more than form. Indian contemporary dance takes on these projects, as a genre, strategic term, ethos, and stance in approaching the design of movement. Its practitioners and public define Indian contemporary dance as high art, avant-garde, experimental, abstract, and a-formal. It is not “popular” and its most recognized practitioners construct their movement vocabularies in ways that are determinedly not commercial and *filmi*. Indian contemporary dance is neither folk nor classical, but draws on the vocabulary of Indian classical and folk traditions, along with a variety of movement and aesthetic practices, in very specific ways.

Practitioners and other stakeholders (scholars, critics, and patrons) debate the history and current practice of Indian contemporary dance, which in these few introductory paragraphs, I refer to as a “field.” These actors produce lively dialogue on evaluating the state of the field, the work of their peers, and who can claim contemporaneity in Indian dance. Dance critic and historian Leela Venkataraman (2017) traces a history of the field among its twentieth-century

practitioners. The field absorbs the nuanced approaches of figures like Uday Shankar (1900–1977), considered by many to have pioneered Indian modern dance. Others, like Mrinalini Sarabhai (1918–2016) and Chandralekha (1928–2006) represent cases of practitioners who innovated from their classically trained backgrounds to produce contemporary work. From Venkataraman’s perspective, “In India, the contemporary dance impulse has been prompted by several factors—by a search for newness and originality, and the need to be more responsive to social, historical, and scientific developments. The strong conscience of young dancers in the mid-20th century was combined with their rediscovery of the past, and in the process tradition underwent changes” (2017: 19–20).

Indian contemporary dancers continue this impulse today. In general, many are trained in Indian classical dance forms, which share common ground in the percussive use of the feet, and practices of mimetic storytelling, where dancers move the hands, eyes, and eyebrows to embody characters, personas, and create affective environments with their audiences.¹ This is true of leading exponents like Madhu Nataraj, Astad Deboo, and Daksha Sheth, who continue to perform in and between their classical grammars, while innovating to produce contemporary work. Others have begun to replace this classical training, but continue to emphasize the importance of curricular training in a form. Jayachandran Palazhy, Mandeep Raikhy, and Ashley Lobo, for example, trained in Euro-American styles of contemporary dance outside of India, and have since developed work that draws from essentially Indian experiences in formal collaboration, philosophy, and sociopolitical commentary in dance.

Practitioners are multi-idiomatic, cosmopolitan, and elite dancers, who use a diverse amalgam of abstract movement vocabulary to construct concert choreographies in and outside of

¹ Today, the Indian classical dance forms include *bharatanatyam*, *kathak*, *kathakali*, *kuchipudi*,

concert spaces. These choreographies represent how practitioners engage socially and politically with the world. They combine movement sequences, music, and other production elements, such as lighting and multimedia design, to produce danced commentaries on themes that are socially topical. Examples of such productions include: Madhu Nataraj's *Khoriya* on feminism, femininity, and sexuality (see Nataraj 2017); Mandeep Raikhy's *Queen-size* in response to Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code; and Jayachandran Palazhy's *Meidhwani* on the urban experience in India. Many others produce choreographies that engage similarly with social inequality, religious tenets, politics, and cosmology.

This dissertation studies some of the mobilities that are afforded or required of practitioners as they navigate the field of Indian contemporary dance to produce work. I interpret “mobility” broadly, as the ability to move. In the opening epigraph, Anita Cherian implores scholars to consider how dance can be understood in the context of restricted movement in the world today. I respond by exploring the field of Indian contemporary dance. I arrive at not just movement, but mobility, wherein participation in the field is mediated by the extent to which practitioners *can* move. The resources that mediate the field of Indian contemporary dance require movement abilities—mobilities of practitioners to remain active, working, and relevant.²

Practitioners continue to expand and construct the codes that enable sustained membership in the field of Indian contemporary dance. I posit that these codes are defined, in part, among a series of plural mobilities, which are required of practitioners to be able to remain active and working. Examples of these plural mobilities include: kinesthetic mobility, in which dancers embody multiple movement vocabularies and approaches to making dance; collaborative

² I draw loosely from economist Amartya Sen (1999 [1985]), whose concept of “The Capability Approach” outlines that an individual’s achievement of a good life is dependent on their ability to access required resources.

mobility with creative professionals outside of dance; and mobility through systems of patronage. In this dissertation, I place these case studies of embodied, social, economic, and political mobilities in parallel, as conflicting realities that collide, co-exist, and co-negotiate. I argue that this plurality of mobilities enables a continued subsistence in the larger field and art world that is Indian contemporary dance.

Music as Dance | Dance as Music

I love native instruments—Native American, African and South American—and while in New York I often wandered into stores selling these unusual pieces just to listen to someone playing them. Although none of the sounds were traditionally attached to urban dance traditions in their own cultures, I was drawn to their unfettered, uninhibited resonances. Ocean drums, Tibetan bowls, castanets, darbuka—I collected them all. I would bring them to the sound studio where my engineer and I would play for hours, record samples and store them digitally for future use. There was also my magnetic attraction for temple sounds—conch blowing, metal bells ringing, choric chanting, Sanskrit shlokas, the rustle of silk saris and silver spoons tinkling against bowls filled with camphor-infused sacred water.

——— Anita Ratnam, “Neo Dance in India” (2017: 65)

This project is rooted in the discipline of ethnomusicology, which studies music in its social and cultural contexts. Many ethnomusicologists point to the inseparability of music and dance in the expressive practices of communities across the world, and in ritual ceremony in particular. Their resulting ethnographies demonstrate varied proximities—some none at all—to a systematic analysis of the moving body that also produces sound (see Browner 2002, 2009; Feld 2012 [1982]; McAlister 2002; Meintjes 2017; Seeger 2004 [1987]).

As a practitioner of kathak dance, I have come to know the Indian classical model,

wherein the production of music and dance is located in one body. Dancers use their feet to tap out rhythms on the floor, such that the floor becomes like the head of a musician's drum. The nomenclature for music is reflected in the Hindi and Sanskrit term *sangeet*, which implies music-dance. The Sangeet Natak Akademi, the Government of India's centralized institution for the state patronage of music, dance, and theater, conforms to this signification: music and dance are contained in the term "sangeet," while *natak* refers to drama. Even in Indian wedding celebrations, the sangeet event is a "music night," at which family members perform prior to a marriage ceremony. In Indian-North American contexts, the sangeet event has become focused on a series of dance performances to studio-produced music tracks.

Many ethnomusicologists who study South Asian expressive forms have acknowledged the dual nature of music-dance, and have presented dance and dancers as the nuclei of their research. While some discuss the contested histories of dance traditions (see Morcom 2013; Putcha 2011; Walker 2014), others have sought to center the importance of movement in movement-based gestures that mediate practitioners' and audiences' engagement with musical practices (see Clayton, Dueck, and Leante 2013; Rahaim 2012). The Sanskrit text *Natya Shastra* is ever-present in discourse on the Indian performing arts. Attributed to the sage Bharata Muni between 500 BCE – 500 CE, the text theorizes music, dance, and theater as one continuous category for aesthetic praxis.

This project posits dance as music, such that it is the object of ethnomusicological focus. As an idiom that is so tied to the movement of bodies, a study of dance enables a scholarly attention to movement in ethnography and analysis, which produces larger sociocultural dialogues, consequences, and connections. In the field of Indian contemporary dance, I locate movement not just on the dance floor, but in a linking thread of movement capacities off the

dance floor. These movement capacities are the various mobilities performed among the practitioners who navigate the field.

My approach to movement in music-dance practice is inherently interdisciplinary. I ground my methods in those that hail from ethnomusicology, dance studies, performance studies, and South Asian studies. Performance studies scholar—and arguably founder—Richard Schechner defines the object in the discipline to be human behavior, which is performed and repeated (2013 [2002]: 1–2). While this behavior can be located in expressive practices, it does not have to. Performance studies and ethnomusicology share much in common, especially in emphases on ethnographic fieldwork, participant-observation, and doing the behavior studied. As a dancer, I dance to gain insight into the movement practices that are inherent in the ethnographic field. My interdisciplinary approach in the study of South Asia allows me to construct parallels between movement on, off, and between the dance floor, as I encounter issues like class, modernity, and citizenship.

Indian contemporary dancer Anita Ratnam (2017) recounts her processes for collecting and sourcing musical material in the epigraph that opens this section. I locate her plural mobilities as a practitioner in her brief account. She sifts between multiple, cross-cultural music vocabularies, synthesizing them into tracks with her audio engineer in the production studio. This process echoes discourse on the ethics of world music sampling (see Stokes 2004; Taylor 2012). She communicates her translocality (see Appadurai 1996), in relating to different networks of people and media to produce Indian dance while in New York. The mobilities she represents here are but a few of those that circulate in the field of Indian contemporary dance. I present this Ratnam's excerpt as a lens into the kinds of mobilities performed not just in the music studio, but in proximity to the dance floor.

I offer a method in representing the experience of dance as an embodied one in my approach to movement and mobility. As is characteristic in the disciplines of ethnomusicology and anthropology, I present ethnographic vignettes throughout the dissertation in italics, allowing readers a way into my process of doing fieldwork. As a practitioner of dance, doing fieldwork means grasping in my body the movement vocabularies that allows me to construct connections with other inhabited mobilities. I draw from Susan Foster's (2011) theorization of "kinesthetic empathy," in which she describes how audiences respond kinesthetically to performances of dance by moving their own bodies. I seek for readers to connect kinesthetically with my own movement and mobility in these vignettes.

In some cases, I describe processes of "becoming contemporary" in Indian contemporary dance classes (see Chapter 2). In others, I provide vignettes that describe me watching dance, and connecting with the bodies of performers. What results is an attempt to express not only what movement looks like, but *feels* like. In Chapters 3 and 4 in particular, I communicate what movement feels like in relation to musical cues, as a dancer would in the moment of learning or performing sequences. I insert these cues into the vignettes themselves, simulating the process of creating mnemonic notes as a dancer, to remember choreography and compositions. In kathak dance, I often "transcribe" dance by writing the *bols* (onomatopoeic vocables) that indicate the rhythms of how the feet hit the floor. Years later, I return to these notes, and recite these bols to activate the movement that resides in my body's memory.

Bols are musical cues in a continuum of sound that orients the movement of a dancer's body. Others, like the addition or removal of instrumentation, become internalized in the case of dance performed to fixed studio-produced tracks. This continuum also includes the larger musical framework that organizes movement, such as the system of *taal* (rhythm) in Indian

classical dance, into which dancers descend and remain during performances. When dance is performed in taal, movement cannot happen outside of taal, and dancers demonstrate a musical command of this positionality (see Chapter 4). In all these cases, it is unfathomable to think of movement without relation to music, or an overarching musical organization. Dancers are music practitioners.

Methods and Situating “The Field”

This dissertation is based primarily on ethnographic fieldwork, which I conducted in India between 2017 and 2018, mostly in Bangalore. The idea for a dissertation on Indian contemporary dance, however, came about much earlier. I began my study of kathak dance in 2007 in Toronto with Joanna de Souza (Joanna-ji).³ I began to study the form with her while pursuing my BM in classical piano and music theory at the University of Toronto. During my degree, alongside a passionate commitment to the piano works of Ravel, Liszt, and Bach, I had begun to develop a growing interest in *Hindustani* (North Indian classical) music culture.

I was born and raised in a suburb of Toronto, as a child of South Asian immigrants from parts of East and South Africa. My story was similar to many others’ in the Shia Ismaili Muslim community in Canada, in which I remain an active member. As a first-generation Canadian, I had perfected the art of separating my public and private lives during my childhood. In “public,”

³ The appendage “-ji” is a term of respect in relating socially, and to elders especially, in South Asian contexts. The same is true of “-didi,” which refers to “older sister” in many South Asian languages. “Aunty” functions similarly as a term of respect. All three are kin-based terms to relate to teachers and senior students in the performing arts, with “Aunty” featuring more in practices of learning southern Indian dance forms. The terms “-ji,” “-didi,” and “Aunty” are three among several kin-based terms to refer to elders, teachers, and seniors, and the resulting nomenclature is determined according to their preference.

I went to school, and excelled in piano, while in “private,” I attended our *jamaatkhana* (center for congregation), participating in ritual practice, and the many community-based activities that contour religious life. As I grew up, I began to develop a consciousness of my own Indian identity in and as public, which resulted in a desire to explore the expressive traditions that echoed those I heard, practiced, and embodied in the previously private arena of my South Asian, Muslim life.

Following my second year as an undergraduate, I sought a summer job next door to the University of Toronto’s Faculty of Music, at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), where I was hired to work in visitor relations. Each week, I served thousands of tourists and Toronto residents who explored the rotating exhibitions and permanent collections of the country’s largest museum. At the same time, I began to work in the ROM’s South Asian collection. Under the supervision of Deepali Dewan, the ROM’s Curator of South Asian Art and Culture, I began my first project as a research assistant by cataloguing a series of British Raj-era photograph albums from India.⁴ One in particular—the courtesan album—serves as the basis for the first chapter of this dissertation.

Joanna-ji, Deepali, and my other mentors nurtured my study of not just South Asian culture, but my own South Asian identity, praxis, and sense of transnational citizenship. I was an enthusiastic student of kathak dance, Indian music, and museum research and programming, which I continued during my MA in ethnomusicology. I first traveled to India with Joanna-ji in 2009, in a bi-annual retreat to study intensively for a few weeks. Just a couple years later, in 2011, I applied to PhD programs in ethnomusicology while in Jaipur, on a fellowship to study

⁴ The British Raj was the official period of colonialism in India, from 1857–1947. British officials, however, had been present and powerful in India prior to 1857, along with other European tradesmen (see Robins 2012; Roy 2012; Stern 2011).

Hindi at the American Institute for Indian Studies. I began my PhD in ethnomusicology at the University of Chicago in 2012, eager to construct a larger research project on kathak dance, visual cultures, and South Asian communities in the diaspora.

In 2013, I met Chicago-based bharatanatyam dancer, choreographer, and arts organizer Pranita Nayar (Pranita Aunty), during the first year of my PhD program. Pranita Aunty worked in a model for programming Indian dance that I had not encountered before.⁵ I was used to Indian dancers being tied to their teachers' institutions, performing as ensemble members only in the dance companies that their teachers directed. In contrast, Pranita Aunty constantly gathered dancers of all backgrounds for gigs, while also choreographing self-produced shows and overseeing an academy. I began to work with Pranita Aunty, through which I was given a lens into the mobilities required of an Indian dancer in Chicago. I performed in the Goodman Theater's community outreach programming planned alongside its 2013 production of *The Jungle Book*; a meeting of the International Press Association for the Indian Consulate of Chicago's *Incredible India!* tourism campaign; and the opening production to Fulcrum Point New Music Project's "East-West" collaborative performance, among an assortment of eclectic gigs. I performed among a group of women, in several combinations of smaller duos, trios, and quartets, and continue these professional and personal relationships today.⁶ While we all considered Pranita Aunty a mentor and leader, I was still very much Joanna-ji's student. I attended Joanna-ji's classes anytime I visited Toronto, and consulted her to open my own kathak dance class for beginners in Chicago.

⁵ Pranita Nayar, then Pranita Jain, served as Artistic Director of Kalapriya Center for Indian Performing Arts from 1994 to 2014. From 2014 onward, Pranita Nayar has been Executive Director of Mandala Arts, a similar institution for South Asian arts programming in Chicago.

⁶ Chicago-based dancers Preeti Veerlapati and Kinnari Vora are among these women, whose voices underscore Chapter 5.

This dissertation is the result of the many lived experiences that focus my attention in practice and scholarship on Indian dance. I began to encounter the term “contemporary” in Joanna-ji’s studio, and in press reviews of her choreographies, which were always thought to be in a style of “contemporary kathak.” In Chicago, I revisited the term “Indian contemporary” in gig contracts, wherein “contemporary” meant a fresh take on “classical.” This could mean the use of “unconventional” music in performances, or even the illusion of an alternative costume, all the while retaining classical movement vocabulary. I was introduced to the field of Indian contemporary dance by Komal Shah in 2014. Komal was an Indian classical and contemporary dancer in Mumbai, with whom I danced briefly in Chicago while she resided temporarily in the city. She explained that the term “Indian contemporary” meant avant-garde experimentations in dance and choreography that were much more “serious” and “interesting” than the work that passed as Indian contemporary in the US.

I traveled to Mumbai and Delhi in 2014 to conduct exploratory fieldwork. I saw my first full-length production that was billed as Indian contemporary—Astad Deboo’s *Rhythm Divine II*, as part of December’s contemporary dance season at the National Centre for the Performing Arts. I was taken by the form, its vocabulary, and was curious about the codes that mediated an understanding of what was going on, especially in relation to contemporary dance in Euro-American contexts. As a kathak dancer, I was interested in the choreographed visibility of Indian classical in Indian contemporary work. While in Mumbai and Delhi, I met curators, producers, dancers, musicians, and arts organizers. Though I had sought to establish connection with these individuals as long-term collaborators in Mumbai and possibly Delhi, the city of Bangalore kept cropping up in our meetings. “Have you heard of so and so? Yeah, she’s in Bangalore, and doing interesting things.” “What about Bangalore? Have you been?”

In 2015, Joanna-ji was honored with the Dr. Maya Rao award for (kathak) choreography. Guru Maya Rao (Maya-didi; 1928–2014) was a revered kathak dancer and choreographer in India, between the 1960s and 2010s. Her Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography in Bangalore remains under the artistic leadership of her daughter, Madhu Nataraj (Madhu-didi), who presented Joanna-ji with the award. Maya-didi was among the first wave of young women to receive scholarships to study kathak in New Delhi in the 1950s. She studied under the renowned Pandit Shambhu Maharaj, who was relocated to Delhi from Lucknow following the establishment of the Sangeet Natak Akademi’s newly minted Bharatiya Kala Kendra. Maya-didi was a member of a new generation of “respectable” young women in the mid-twentieth century who studied kathak with transplanted gurus from Lucknow, Jaipur, and (then) Calcutta at the Sangeet Natak Akademi (see Rao 2013; Chapter 1). Maya-didi founded the Natya Institute in 1964 in New Delhi, which she relocated to Bangalore in 1987, following her desire to return to her home in southern India.

Maya-didi pioneered an ecosystem for kathak in Bangalore, and South India at large. She formalized a program in dance choreography, with which she began to experiment very early on in her discipleship with Pandit Maharaj. Maya-didi is credited famously with traveling to the USSR to study and consult in the making of dance ballets with its national companies, which she channeled into the Natya Institute’s own curricular offerings in India. Following Maya-didi’s passing in 2014, Madhu-didi assumed leadership of the Natya Institute and its many pedagogical, performing, and programming activities. Madhu-didi studied in kathak and choreography at the Natya Institute, and trained in modern-contemporary dance at the José Limón Dance Foundation in New York City. Following her training in New York, Madhu-didi returned to India to establish Bangalore’s first Indian contemporary dance company—STEM Dance Kampni, which

draws from a variety of thematic and movement vocabulary. Today, the Natya Institute continues to educate young dancers, through its academy classes in kathak and Indian contemporary dance; diploma programs in choreography; community outreach and engagement in an active events calendar; and the activities of its performing unit, STEM Dance Kampni.⁷

In 2015, Joanna-ji and Madhu-didi began a collaborative relationship that continues today, garnering each other's participation in festivals, special workshops, and panels. I sought to conduct research and study with Madhu-didi in part because of this relationship. I had perused videos of STEM's work on YouTube, and was eager to understand Madhu-didi's contemporary paradigm. I was drawn to questions about her avant-garde approaches alongside the company's performance of kathak, and the formation of an Indian contemporary that continues the imprint that Maya-didi began in the 1950s.

Following a few chats via Facebook and WhatsApp, I arrived in Bangalore in January 2017 hoping to establish relationships with Madhu-didi and her team at Natya/STEM. They welcomed me warmly, folding me into the many overlapping programs at the Institute, which always seemed to be bustling with activity. I remained in residence at Natya/STEM from February to June, 2017. While there, I was a student in contemporary and kathak classes; led workshops and classes of my own, advised the students of the Institute's BA and Diploma programs in choreography; performed with the dance company; and volunteered as a documenter, archivist, photographer, program facilitator, usher, lights and sound operator; and

⁷ STEM is an acronym formed from "Space Energy Time Movement." I use the abbreviations "Natya" or "the Institute" to refer to the Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography, and "STEM" for STEM Dance Kampni. I use "Natya/STEM" to refer to activities, events, or processes that originate from both, per the conventions of their community members. Natya functions as the larger institution for teaching, performance, and programming. STEM is Natya's resident dance company.

gear hauler. I was given a coveted and privileged lens into the ins and outs of the institution, a “view from backstage” that I consider with the utmost respect and gratitude (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: A view from backstage at a performance by STEM Dance Kampni at Ravindra Kalakshetra. Madhu Nataraj is pictured most clearly, in the center of the image. Photo taken by the author (February 2017).

I conducted most of my fieldwork in English, Hindi, and between the two languages. At the Natya Institute, Madhu-didi and I conversed mostly in English, and sometimes in Hindi—as she did with the members of STEM, the other administrators and teachers at the Institute, and the students of its Diploma and community classes. The Institute’s community members spoke to each other much more in Kannada, and to me, in English. While I never learned Kannada, I also

observed a practice of linguistic acrobatics among the Institute's community members, whose diverse backgrounds as combinations of Kannada-, Telugu-, Malayalam-, Tamil-, Hindi-, and English-speaking were presented in fluid mixes of these languages during classes, rehearsals, and other events. I learned that this was quite typical in Bangalore, a cosmopolitan city of transplants from across the country.

While in residence at Natya/STEM, I lived within walking distance, in the Bangalore neighborhood of Malleshwaram. I traveled almost daily to the Institute, spending my weekends in other parts of the city, which gave me my weekly dose of its infamous traffic. I met with musicians, theater practitioners, and artists, and began to create relationships with creative professionals across the city, whose work was focused at local design firms and art collectives, such as Twenty Nine Design, 1Shanthiroad, and the Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology. I attended sporadic performances and workshops at Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts, Shoonya Centre for Art and Somatic Practices, and Alliance Française, and attended as many festivals I could in the areas of dance, art, and design. I followed the intricate networks of individuals that seemed to move fluidly between these institutions. I never turned down the opportunity to connect with individuals who showed an interest in or connection with my evolving project on Indian contemporary dance.

Following a brief trip outside of India in June 2017, I returned in October to continue my fieldwork. I did not return to Natya/STEM in a resident capacity, but visited to attend a few events, while continuing to participate in city-wide workshops, watch performances, and prepare for my own participation as a dancer in an upcoming touring production, *BARDO*. Directed by Joanna-ji and choreographed with Canadian contemporary dancer Misty Wensel, I was one of nine dancers in the production. *BARDO* premiered at the National Centre for the Performing Arts

in Mumbai, and toured in Delhi, Bangalore, Panaji, and Kolkata between December 2018 and January 2019. Keeping Bangalore as my “home base” from October 2017, I collected perspectives on contemporary dance from dancers and other creative professionals in Mumbai, Delhi, and in many conversations with my peers on *BARDO*’s tour. I left India at the end of February 2019 and returned to Chicago, where I continued to keep up with the activities of my friends and collaborators, via WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube.

This dissertation is but a checkpoint in my theorization of mobilities in Indian contemporary dance. I draw heavily from the ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted between 2017 and 2018 in Bangalore, as well as interactions with media that circulates online. Furthermore, I mine the experiences of my own intersectional subjectivity as a transnational Indian dancer, whose ties are current as a scholar-practitioner in shifting economies for dance. I am not separate from the ethnographic field. In many ways, this project is demonstrative of Lila Abu-Lughod’s “ethnographies of the particular” (1991: 149–57). I do not seek to make generalizations about Indian contemporary dance, but rather, locate meaning and scholarly interpretation in the very specific inhabitation of my place as an ethnographer with the collaborators that define my ethnographic network.

What follows comes from my experience, and can only come from my specific experience of approaching the project this way, as a dance researcher/researching dancer, with a particular subjectivity. The term “scholar-practitioner” is often touted as an unequivocal advantage in the field, whereby the field experience is multi-modal in relating to collaborators—on and off the dance floor. This is mostly true. At times, however, my dance training, aesthetic focus, background, movement vocabulary, and even concept of my own Indian identity conflicted with those of my collaborators. These were productive frictions that allowed me an

interpretative lens. In the moment of such fieldwork, though, it was difficult to step back and sift through scholarly interpretations of the very mobilities that I inhabited while in the field. These frictions create my multi-textual accounts of not just the ethnographic field, but Indian contemporary dance.

Scholarly Literatures

This project contributes to a burgeoning scholarship on Indian contemporary dance that begins, more or less, in the 1990s. While some of this literature represents an appraisal of the field and summary of its practitioners (see Banerjee 2010; Chatterjea 2013; Coorlawala 1994; Katrak 2011; Kedhar 2014; Kothari 2003), other literature is focused on evaluating the work of a particular choreographer, or set of choreographers (see Bharucha 1995; Chatterjea 2004; Grau 2007; Mitra 2014, 2015; Norridge 2010). Many have devoted attention to the study of Indian modern dance, with particular reference to Uday Shankar and his contemporaries (see Brenscheidt gen. Jost 2011; Erdman 1987, 1996; Mukhopadhyaya 2004; Purkayastha 2012, 2014).

Stakeholders in the field of Indian contemporary dance have articulated to me on several occasions that Uday Shankar and his “modern” Indian dance during the 1930s and 1940s are “contemporary.” His lineage of students, such as Bharat Sharma in New Delhi, continues to stage and reinterpret Shankar’s ideas. This brings about a collision of the terms “contemporary” and “modern” in Indian dance, which have multiple valences. Scholars of Indian expressive forms cite postcolonial South Asian studies to locate theories that resist the center-periphery model of modernity. Pallabi Chakravorty (2017) and Prarthana Purkayastha (2014) study two

very different Indian “moderns” in reality television dance shows and practitioners like Uday Shankar and Rabindranath Tagore, respectively. Both cite Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000), whose concept of the “waiting room of modernity” captures some of the issues faced by Indian practitioners who claim “modernity.” Drawing on Chakrabarty’s metaphor, these practitioners are interpreted to “receive” modernity in the residual reality of the first-world, third-world colonial order (see Chapter 2).

Indian contemporary dancers resist Chakrabarty’s waiting room, in part, as producers of not just choreographic works, but scholarly discourse that circulates between the field and its academic study. Uttara Asha Coorlawala (1993); Deepti Gupta (1993); Sunil Kothari (2003); Maya Rao (2013); Anita Cherian (2016), and Deboo and Katrak (2017) represent anthologies of the field’s many stakeholders, which include practitioners, scholars, critics, public historians, and patrons. These actors contribute images, media, links, and articles to these layered, poly-vocal collections, which in some cases arise from the many festivals, panels, and symposia that mediate the field of Indian contemporary dance. Gati Dance Forum’s *IGNITE!* (New Delhi), which works in association with Sangeet Natak Akademi, joins Attakkalari Center for Movement Arts’ Biennial (Bangalore) and the National Center for the Performing Arts’ contemporary dance season (Mumbai) as large and well-resourced festivals that gather many of the field’s practitioners. Others continue to crop up in India and transnational contexts, calling for artists who move between the presentation of choreographies and production of new discourse to evaluate the field.

Literature in the area of mobility studies is vast and interdisciplinary. Mimi Sheller and John Urry (2006, 2016) respond to the “mobility turn” in the areas of the social sciences, anthropology, and cultural studies. The mobility turn sought to focus on how experiences of

social, political, and economic life are framed in movement, and more so, capacities for movement—mobilities. Urry (2007) further develops his “new mobilities paradigm,” to argue that not only is mobility central to understanding the world, but multiple mobilities work together to do so. Examples of these include forms of transport and the circulation of media, which “need to be examined in their fluid interdependence and not their separate spheres” (Sheller and Urry 2006: 212). Scholars have responded to Urry’s new mobilities paradigm, especially in edited collections that place case studies of multiple mobilities in larger dialogues (see Grieco and Urry 2011; Jensen, Kesselring, and Sheller 2019).

Scholars on the fringes of social sciences respond to and build on the mobility turn. In the case of anthropological fieldwork, Salazar and Smart (2011) argue that mobility is neither a new paradigm, nor equally produced for people. Rather, mobility and movement must be framed widely, to render transparent issues faced by those who cannot move (see Frello 2008). The discipline of migration studies addresses issues of precarity, especially among vulnerable citizens, refugees, and forced migrants (see Gill, Caletrío and Mason 2014; Silvey 2004; Thimm and Chaudhuri 2019). Feminist and postcolonial scholars of transnationalism attend to issues of restricted mobility, which I summarize in Chapter 5. Kaufman, Bergman, and Joye (2004) explain the concept of motility, formed from both social and spatial mobility. They go so far to say that motility is a form of capital, which they add to Pierre Bourdieu’s social, economic, and cultural capital (see Bourdieu 1986).

In the study of culture, Stephen Greenblatt (2010) refers to “cultural mobility” as an open-ended framework to understand how people make meaning of the world around them. He extends his reference to the expansions of Christianity and Islam, for example, which comprised the movement of people, text, and ideology through history. He explains “theatrical mobility” in

the case of staging dramatic texts, moving from the written word to an enacted version of a work that exists between imagination and reality. Kaley Mason (2018) uses mobility to outline access to social resources among Indian musicians in Chicago. Documents, work authorizations, visas, and other civic identifiers limit the movement of musical laborers in attaining work, as non-citizens in the US. Performance studies scholars Ramón Rivera-Servera (2012) and SanSan Kwan (2013) move as a mode for entering conversations on mobility, while walking, cycling, and transporting themselves through neighborhoods and cities.

This dissertation builds on the work of many scholars represented here. Similar to Rivera-Servera and Kwan, I move—dance—and observe other practitioners to contour a larger dialogue on the politics of mobility in Indian contemporary dance. I present multiple mobilities (Sheller and Urry 2006; Urry 2007) as continuing from the body's movement on the dance floor. I draw from among scholars of diaspora and migration studies to present transnational mobility as one in a plurality of mobilities that are at issue in the field. I enter larger dialogues on modernity, neoliberalism, cosmopolitanism, caste, and class, coalescing literatures in attending to historical, fiscal, and collaborative mobilities in the chapters that follow.

Outline of Chapters

The chapters in this dissertation present five mobilities that I posit are relevant in a discussion of the politics of mobility in Indian contemporary dance. In each chapter, I contextualize mobility by situating what or who moves. While I evaluate the movement of the bodies of practitioners of Indian contemporary dance (Chapter 2), I also explore the mobility of the terms “Indian” and “contemporary” among citizens who move between borders (Chapter 5). I argue that these

mobilities are inherently related, and moreover, are more clearly understood when placed in a larger frame for understanding mobilities in their plurality.

In Chapter 1 I demonstrate that mobility is political in an historical case study. The figure of the courtesan has been a focus among interdisciplinary scholarship on expressive forms (see Feldman and Gordon 2006). In South Asian studies, the courtesan, or “dancing girl” entertained the various strata of men in Indian society, with the alluring figure of the *tawaif* representing the wealthiest, and highest-class of these women. I begin this chapter by reprising the archival work I first conducted as a curatorial research assistant at the Royal Ontario Museum. I study a photograph album of Indian courtesans, who were professional entertainers as musicians and dancers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in India. The courtesan album depicts these women as dancers of forms that are maintained as “classical” today. Their histories, however, have been severed from modern and popular narratives of classical dance that render them historically immobile practitioners in relation to the upper-class bodies that began to perform classical dance in the 1930s. I make connections between this historical case of mobility and Indian contemporary dancers today, in reference to the continued staging of classical aesthetics and similar practices of recontextualizing sourced repertoire.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are based on the ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted in Bangalore between 2017 and 2018. Chapter 2 explores kinesthetic mobility in contemporary dance, wherein practitioners negotiate how to train and perform the body on the dance floor. I explore some of the codes that contour becoming contemporary in Indian dance, which include: staging multiple movement vocabularies; entering institutional pedagogical systems that draw from modern and “traditional” modes of apprenticeship; and approaches to choreography, wherein contemporary dancers are in fact dance-makers. I explore the intertwined discourses of

“modernity” and “contemporaneity” to show that practitioners in the field of Indian contemporary dance resist the center-periphery model of modernity by staging “contemporary” in the way that they do. I argue that dancers, while mobile and flexible bodies on the dance floor, also move through global discourses of “contemporary dance,” to pose Indian contemporary as a viable model.

Chapter 3 discusses the corporate patronage of Indian contemporary dance, by multinational companies and “corporate houses.” I explore how technological and telecommunications companies such as Nokia, NASSCOM, and IBM negotiate contracts with contemporary dancers to perform at events, product launches, and through media platforms, all under the larger heading of the “corporate show.” These companies are born of neoliberal economic reform in India, and are premised in systems of late capitalism. I focus on how Indian contemporary dancers are contracted laborers, beholden to the boundaries of their corporate contracts. While these contracts enable their mobility through private and lucrative systems of patronage, they simultaneously limit certain artistic freedoms. I place the phenomenon of the corporate show into a larger dialogue on the corporate patronage for the performing arts, among Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and the inimitable *Coke Studio* global franchise.

In Chapter 4, I explore mobility through processes of collaboration, inspiration, and exchange among creative professionals that include dancers, musicians, architects, visual artists, and designers. As Bangalore has come to be understood as an epicenter for technological innovation, its creative professionals have responded to this shifting terrain by collaborating to produce tech-based aesthetic products; widen the possibilities for performing in “non-traditional” spaces; and create partnerships for continued artistic support. These creative professionals, or

“creatives,” engender a community of laborers who believe that their productive output is creatively inclined. The voices that I represent in this chapter come from dancers (and mostly contemporary dancers), curators, arts organizers, visual artists, and designers. They emphasize the importance of Bangalore and its particular brand of urbanity to facilitate pathways for exchange. I argue that these pathways demonstrate how Indian contemporary dancers are mobile, working off the dance floor to remain compelling, malleable producers of culture.

Chapter 5 investigates the valences of the terms “Indian,” and “contemporary” in transnational contexts, among dispersed practitioners who produce Indian contemporary dance. The practitioners with whom I worked in Bangalore are transnationally mobile, in accessing media and goods that circulate in and out of India. While they also travel transnationally to produce work, today’s political climate has resulted in restrictions on the mobility of bodies worldwide. I argue that transnational Indian dancers, who live and work in the diaspora, produce “Indian contemporary” from various vantage points. I present this chapter as an annotated series of excerpts from a conversation with Chicago-based dancers Preeti Veerlapati and Kinnari Vora, whose voices join mine in representing the everyday experiences of being “Indian” and “contemporary” in dance. I invoke the manifestos of postcolonial feminist anthropology to construct a poly-vocal, and self-implicating account of representing the ethnographic field. I organize the chapter around four issues in particular, in which I argue that transnational Indian dancers encounter and negotiate transnational Indian citizenship. I parse between issues of multicultural “expectations,” immigrant narratives, and slippages between “Indian” and “South Asian,” with a general focus on discourses that take shape in Canada and the United States.

Throughout the chapters, I refer to my field collaborators by their first names, and in some cases, nicknames using kin-based terms of respect. I refer unequivocally to Madhu-didi

and Joanna-ji, in the chapters that follow. While in the field, however, I oscillated between referring to members of STEM Dance Kampni, appending “Sir” and “-didi” in pedagogical contexts, such as “Jana Sir” and “Ramya-didi.” In general, I refer to the gender-neutral pronoun “their” or “them” when I refer to an unspecific person, or group of people. I do so in the spirit of not presuming the gender identities of practitioners, stakeholders, and participants in the field of Indian contemporary dance, and in my ethnographic field in particular.

I use international orthographies rather than codified transliterations to refer to non-English words. I include a glossary at the end of the dissertation for a comprehensive list of these words, as well as prominent figures, institutions, and productions. In all cases but “Bangalore,” I refer to Indian cities by their officially changed, postcolonial names. It was my experience that in most conversations with its residents, people referred to the city as “Bangalore” while speaking to me in English or Hindi. This is perhaps due to its more recent name change in 2007. I encountered references to “Bengaluru” in Kannada contexts, and in institutional presentations of awards, introductions to performances, and titles of events.

Moving Bodies

Indian contemporary dancers are not just movers, artists, and choreographers, but thinkers. They are enlightened dancers, writers, and philosophers, who ponder paradigms, issues, topics, and provide movement-based responses to these topics in their productions. They are active users of technology, and broaden understandings of what it means to dance in collaborative contexts. They enact modernities that are premised in Indian experiences and citizenship.

Cherian (2016) emphasizes in the opening epigraph that dance must be understood within the context of restricted movement in the world today. The majority of the research and writing of this dissertation has taken shape during a period of political change. Of course, every period is one of political change. During this time, however, right-wing movements have assumed political leadership in many countries, including India and the United States, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Donald Trump, respectively. A major effect of their nationalisms has been restrictions on the mobility of both national and transnational citizens. In India, as in other parts of the world, sectarian violence continues among especially vulnerable classed, caste, and religious communities. A post-liberalization understanding of the Indian economy remains relevant, as policies continue to be drawn to tax and moderate the activity of multinational companies in and with the country. This is also true of the dispersal of Indian bodies across the world—commonly held as Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), who shape and define what is meant by (trans)national Indian citizenship.

In certain contexts, Indian contemporary dancers are among the categorical elite as Indian creatives, whose labor is based in critical thought, artistic experimentation, and the circulation of media. They are not among the systemically disenfranchised in today's India, and are mobile citizens whose civic experiences are in many ways privileged. At the same time, they must constantly perform a balancing act of revenue sources, and attend to what gives them a market edge in a precarious economy in which they compete fiscally and productively to remain working. They do this not only to dance, but to produce choreographies that are sources of activism, commentary, and social dialogue. They engage in politically polarizing issues as bodies that move in privileged ways, shedding light on things that demand our attention. In doing so, they articulate a modernity that is determinedly Indian in the twenty-first century. They bring

into relief a discussion on a kind of Indian modernity that is a collision of hyper-mobility in certain contexts, and restricted mobility in others, as hegemonic constructions of modernity compete with policies on the kinds of bodies that can move in and out of borders.

This is a dissertation about mobilities through the lens of Indian contemporary dance. I show that practitioners in the field work within constrained circumstances to stage movement—a process that implies a series of mobilities to navigate the field. I present these plural mobilities to show that the ability to move is a thread that weaves itself throughout. There is no better topic to do this than in a study of dance, wherein movement, and its potential, expectation, and anticipation, defines the thing itself.

Chapter 1

The Courtesan Album:

Contextualizing Mobility in Indian Dance

Then suddenly I come to the front page for the week of January 22, 1881, and I see a sari. My hands shake a little from excitement and tension, and I lose the page. I force myself to steady my hand and return to the page. I feel tears welling up in my eyes. I do not know why I am so moved. I see Saheb, Bhoori, and Oomdah leaning on each other, tightly gripping one another. A photograph of three brown women dressed in saris. Their eyes look at me, and I look back at them. They are black and white, yet there is such clarity and depth to this photograph. It speaks volumes. I think I sit for many minutes just staring at this picture. I emerge from my reverie in fear of losing it or afraid that I merely imagined them. I quickly insert my card and take as many copies as I possibly can. I have the paper in my hand. The dancers are supposed to be remembered, not forgotten. I decide now that these women are meant to be preserved, and in the printing of these pages in the library from microfilm to paper, I am effectively preserving them in an archive I will create for them.

—— Priya Srinivasan, *Sweating Saris* (2012: 49)

Into the Archive

The epigraph in this chapter is an account of Priya Srinivasan's discovery of a photograph of dancers—dancers she had been trying to locate in the archive for years. Her resulting *Sweating Saris* is an ethnography that studies various kinds of labor performed by female Indian dancers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Concealed and ignored, Srinivasan makes particular reference here to the work done by late nineteenth-century “nautch girls,” professional dancing girls who entertained various strata of male patrons in India's social hierarchy. Srinivasan follows the lives of Saheb, Bhoori, and Oomdah, three nautch girls who traveled to

the United States from India in the early 1880s as part of an operatic production commissioned by impresario Augustin Daly at Coney Island. They performed in traditions of Indian dance that were later reinvented into the classical forms we know today as kathak, bharatanatyam, and kuchipudi, among others.

Srinivasan recounts her trembling excitement at having retrieved a review of these women as performers at Coney Island, who had been otherwise obscured from press and other historical accounts. Following their performance, she traces bits of their histories while they stayed on in the United States, as unrecognized citizens. She argues that they stayed in part to tour with American dancers, and with modern dance pioneer Ruth St. Denis in particular, to whom they undoubtedly taught Indian dance vocabulary during the early twentieth century. St. Denis's "Oriental dance" was one among early grammars for modern dance in the United States, and drew from the labor of these Indian women (see Erdman 1996). Srinivasan's analysis of the hidden labor performed among Indian dancers underscores her provocative suggestion that the nautch girls were responsible, though uncredited, for the beginnings of American modern dance.

I resonate with Srinivasan's epigraph for three overlapping reasons. First, the figure of "the courtesan" caught my imagination early on in my study of kathak.⁸ Prior to the formation of modern India in 1947, she contributed to the creation of Hindustani music culture and kathak dance today. Second, while it is generally accepted that nineteenth-century courtesans had some affiliation with Indian classical dance forms, rarely have they been mobilized in connection with contemporary and modern dance, whether in India or abroad. Srinivasan's provocative statement, that Indian courtesans somehow precipitated American modern dance, corroborates my own

⁸ The term "courtesan" is a gloss for a diverse set of professional entertainers in South Asian history. A similar categorical diversity can be found in Feldman and Gordon's (2006) collection of cross-cultural courtesan practices.

research interests in the inextricable connections between courtesans, their histories, and practices of Indian contemporary dance—the subject of this chapter. Finally, Srinivasan’s arrival at the photographs of Saheb, Bhoori, and Oomdah, as she describes in the epigraph, is somewhat analogous to my own encounter with visual representations of Indian courtesans, in the form of an album of photographs that I was tasked to catalogue as a curatorial research assistant to Dr. Deepali Dewan, Curator of South Asian Visual Cultures at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM). The album was acquired among many others in the Cyrus Jhabvala Collection of Photography. I reflect on my first encounter with visual representations of courtesans in the following ethnographic vignette.

It was sometime in 2008. I don’t remember the day, week, month, or even season, but I remember very clearly the moment I opened the first few pages of “the courtesan album.” It didn’t have a name other than its accession number—2007.17.1, reflecting the year and serial order that it entered the South Asian Collection. I was in an office next-door to the heavily humidified “wood room” in the sixth-floor storage facilities, housing some of the ROM’s collections of Chinese paintings, Buddhist sculptures, and Tibetan manuscript covers, among its many world artifacts. It was my first large project as Deepali’s assistant. She asked me to print, and in some cases, erase and reprint the accession numbers on all the photographs contained in the Cyrus Jhabvala Collection of Photography. This included the leather-bound albums and loose photographs depicting colonial India in tiger hunts, durbars (visits with dignitaries), and views of architecture in sepia and black and white.

I opened the second album in the collection—red and paper-bound with a metal lattice border framing what seemed to have been a photograph or title card that had since been ripped off. The first image in the album was a cabinet card albumen print, featuring two girls standing, facing the camera. They hold each other's hands in the air, with their free hands resting on their respective hips (see Figure 2). They wear cholis (blouses) under fabric that is draped in sari-for-dance fashion. Churidar pajama⁹ peek



Figure 2: The first photograph in the courtesan album. Image courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM 2007.17.1.2).

⁹ Churidar pajama refer to a set of trousers that stretch tightly from the calves to the ankles, and gather in folds around the ankles.

out from under their skirts, fastened at the ankles with none other than ghungroo—the ankle bells that I had tied around my own ankles so many times before class, rehearsal, and performances. There was no mistaking it; they were dancers! I eagerly turned the pages to find more women, some wearing ghungroo, most wearing elaborate fabric and jewelry, and some even pictured among hookahs, paan daans, and holding sitars. Who were these women? Why were they featured in an album all to themselves? And how did this album land up at the ROM?

This first chapter in my dissertation contextualizes the larger connections I make between mobility and Indian dance. I study the ROM's courtesan album to show that issues of mobility and immobility among practitioners impact their political, social, and cultural mobilities at large. I locate connections between mobility and dance in a historical case, among courtesans, who represent the collision of feudal and modern culture-making in twentieth-century India. The courtesan album is an object that images, imagines, and documents the contributions of courtesans to practices of Indian music and dance that are considered "classical" today. While their movement vocabularies continue to be staged, courtesans' bodies have been erased from popular, modern histories of classical music and dance forms. In their place, other higher-class, higher-caste, and more mobile bodies drew from courtesan vocabularies to create classical dance in the twentieth century. I posit that this process is analogous to how Indian contemporary dancers today travel through forms of movement and assimilate aesthetic and embodied knowledge that "become contemporary" along the way, by virtue of the subjective mobilities

afforded to its practitioners. The courtesan album offers a lens into studying the bodies that are immobile in the continued practice of Indian dance today.

This chapter begins with a visual and historical analysis of the ROM's courtesan album, in which I draw on the perspectives of curators, technicians, as well as other visual objects and secondary source material, gathered during my four years as a curatorial research assistant at the ROM. I contextualize this analysis in a history of courtesans as entertainers in India during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The section illustrates some of the markers of immobility that continue to accompany Indian courtesans as dancers, both historically and today. I follow this with a discussion of the particularities of Indian studio photographs, and how I invoke them as objects and indices for historical ethnography in my dissertation. I end this chapter with conclusions on how my analysis and reading of the courtesan album are pertinent to the study of Indian contemporary dance in the twenty-first century. I make gestures toward theorizing dance as a visual medium that continues from the media of paintings, sculptures, photographs, and films to consider a larger category of visual representation. I conceptualize the courtesan album as one of ethnographic and contemporary potential, wherein the photographic encounter and album's compilation were acts that were choreographed in particular ways. The women in the images offer visual continuities with Indian contemporary dancers today, and provide a historical case study for the analysis of mobility in dance. This chapter becomes a point of departure for the following chapters in my dissertation, which frame other mobilities that enable the movement of Indian contemporary dancers.

The Courtesan Album

The “courtesan album,” to which the album has become referred, entered the ROM’s Jhabvala Collection of Photography in 2007. Indian architect and art collector Cyrus Jhabvala acquired the album in Rajasthan prior to its donation into the ROM’s permanent collection. It features 146 photographic studio portraits, in the forms of 138 *cartes-de-visite* and eight cabinet cards that slide into the album’s pre-cut slots (see Figure 3). Cartes-de-visite are photographic studio portraits, which were printed en masse, traded, and consumed during their “craze” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see Kunard 2006; Siegel 2009). This craze saw the rise of the circulation of photographic cards worldwide, in which families collected cards and created albums of relatives, celebrities, and other figures.



Figure 3: A representative page of four cartes-de-visite in the courtesan album. Image courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM 2007.17.1.51-54).

The photographs in the ROM's courtesan album are mostly albumen prints mounted on cardboard, and feature photographs taken between 1870 and 1910. Discussion and conclusions about dating and contextualizing the courtesan album come from conversations with ROM curator Deepali Dewan, as well as other specialists in the areas of South Asian art, photography, and even the study of furniture and decorative arts, which feature in the photographs' props and backdrops.¹⁰ The term "albumen" indicates a particular kind of approach to producing an image from its photographic negative that was popular from the mid- to late nineteenth century. In addition to albumen prints, the album contains three photographs that are products of the gelatin silver, and one the collodion printing out processes (POPs), which were production processes most common during the first part of the twentieth century. The evidence of these mixed POPs help to date the album's compilation as later than when some of the photographs were taken. In three cases, the prints themselves are treated with paint, a tradition of image-making that continued into the later twentieth century in advertising (see Allana 2008; Dewan 2012; Pinney 1997).

Some photographs have inscriptions on their versos, which include the names and locations of their sitters in Hindi and Urdu (see, e.g., Figure 4). In some cases, these appear in addition to ink and embossed photographic studio stamps. It is an accepted convention that inscriptions in handwritten vernaculars indicate identification information for the objects depicted, while a stamped imprint points to the place and origin of a photograph's publication. Figure 4, for example, depicts an image of a seated woman with the pipe of a hookah to her lips. The words "Ilahi Jaan" are written on the back in the Devanagari script. The woman's name or

¹⁰ I refer to informal and frequent conversations with Olga Zotova, Peter Kaellgren, Afshaan Kizilbash, Jordan Bear, and James Kippen.



Figure 4: An image from the courtesan album with its verso depicting the sitter's name "Ilahi Jaan." Image courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM 2007.17.1.87).

nickname was likely "Ilahi," with the appendage "jaan" implying that she was a northern Indian courtesan who sang and danced to entertain. Most of the album's photographs look similar to Figure 4, featuring elegantly dressed courtesans adorned with jewelry, and accompanied by studio props that suggest their public occupations as professional entertainers. These include hookahs, paan boxes, and musical instruments—the accoutrements that would have accompanied intimate evenings of entertainment at court, or *kothas* (courtesan quarters and salons).

The order of the images in the courtesan album follows certain conventions of Indian album compilation, produced by Indian studios for indigenous audiences. Following this format,

the album contains images of Indian rulers of princely states at the beginning, commemorating the famous Begum of Bhopal and Maharaja Sajjan Singh of Udaipur, among many others. Figure 5 shows the twentieth image in the album, a well-known and widely reproduced print of Queen



Figure 5: Portrait of Queen Victoria in the courtesan album, attributed to the photographic company Cundall Downes & Co. in the nineteenth century. Image courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM 2007.17.1.20).

Victoria, taken and published by London-based Cundall Downes & Co. in 1861. Other prints of the same image are housed in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum and National Portrait Gallery, London.¹¹

¹¹ See <https://www.vam.ac.uk> and <https://www.npg.org.uk>, accessed October 24, 2017.

Considering the technologies for photographic printing in the album, and commemorating both Queen Victoria as the colonial Empress of India and contemporaneous rulers of its mostly northern princely states, the album was likely compiled around 1910 in northern India. Its photographs were already in mass circulation, collected by its compiler and curated to be read by an elite audience who was well versed in consuming court culture and entertainment. The album's compiler was likely a male member of an elite household who would have been a patron of courtesan culture.

The musical instruments and other accoutrements of intimate salon practices in the images point to what we consider today to be Hindustani musical culture, which rests on discursive distinctions between North India and South India in South Asian expressive practices. Many of the women are depicted to be wearing the kind of ghungroo that kathak dancers continue to adorn today, which ornament the percussive slaps and taps of the feet on the floor that persist in performances. Genres of fiction, memoirs, and travelogues describe similar forms of dance and music that were performed in salons by Indian courtesans (see Mookherji 1883; Seth 1993). These women were professional entertainers, who performed in *mehfil* settings (intimate gatherings) in the courts, temples, and kothas of nineteenth-century India. They performed in genres of vernacular and even ritual forms of music and dance to entertain men (see Chakravorty 2008; Meduri 1996; Morcom 2013; Qureshi 2006; Soneji 2012; Walker 2013, 2014). I describe courtesan repertoire and its recontextualization as classical in the proceeding sections.

Indian Courtesans and Expressive Practices

Moti Chandra (1973) shows that the courtesan figure has permeated Indian sociocultural and religious life for centuries. In North India, especially during and following Mughal rule, she was a secular entertainer. *Tawaifs* were courtesans of the highest class in North India. They were highly knowledgeable, refined, and skilled women in music, dance, poetry, and etiquette (Oldenburg 1990). Most of the women depicted in the ROM's courtesan album were likely part of the tawaif category. In South India, *devadasis* were "temple courtesans" who married Hindu deities but maintained their secular occupations as professional entertainers in both ritual and non-ritual settings. This is a simplistic understanding of the role of these women, which Davesh Soneji (2012) expands in his monograph. Among several issues, he argues that devadasis traveled between spaces, courts, and locales to perform (see Soneji 2012: 42-7). The advent of Indian rail systems during the middle of the nineteenth century led courtesans to travel as entertainers across what was soon to become British India. Their roles were fluid among those who danced, sang, played instruments, and participated as ritual and secular social figures. This in turn blurred the boundary between "North" and "South" musical cultures.

Tawaifs and devadasis were among the most skilled musicians and dancers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and dedicated their time to the practice of several vocal musical and dance forms, learning these traditions from the male teachers who often accompanied them as musicians in performance. Veena Oldenburg (1984) and Amelia Maciszewski (2007) explore an archeology of the diverse strata and classes of women who are categorized and glossed as "courtesans." Despite the nuanced differences between these groups and how they functioned in their occupations as entertainers, they all had in common their socially stigmatized affiliation to sex work. While some were thought to be prostitutes, others,

like tawaifs, were wealthy, landowning women who entertained as musicians and dancers, engaging in sexual relationships with one male patron during their careers.

Upon the annexation of Lucknow by the British in 1856, the roles and fates of these women changed. The “official” period of British colonialism began in 1857, even though British territorial power had been building in India for over a century (see Roy 2012; Stern 2011). Several of India’s courts were dismantled in 1857, during the period of the British Raj. Others persisted within the colonial institution of princely states, in which Indian leaders continued to preside over their courts while reporting to the leadership of colonial officials. The Raj marked the beginning of the end of courtly culture and its associated traditions. The “anti-nautch movement” of the 1890s resulted in laws and codes against practices of professional entertainment by women (see Oldenburg 1984).

Tawaifs in Lucknow were systematically relegated to the peripheries of society, considered mere prostitutes towards the end of the nineteenth, and the twentieth centuries.

As the anti-nautch movement progressed, courtesans traveled to seek new forms of work and patronage. Veena Oldenburg (1984) explains that while some became prostitutes at urban centers and even British army cantonments, others sought residence in princely states, which continued to host earlier forms of entertainment in indigenous courtly environments. The first decade of the twentieth century marked the arrival of the gramophone in India, and the establishment of the recording industry. Courtesans’ voices were the first to be captured on record in 1903, and they sought work as recording artists in a new form of modern and industrialized patronage (see Chandvankar 2007; Sampath 2010). Their performance as recording artists was highly stigmatized, especially in the context of anti-nautch legislations. Paradoxically, the transition of courtesans into recorded artists was made possible by their skill

and public status, but they were further stigmatized as immoral women for subsisting as public performers.

It was during this early part of the twentieth century that the leaders of India's nationalist movement began to mobilize. British-educated Indian intellectuals attempted to market and publicize markers of Indian culture that were truly Indian—and in other words, pre-Imperial. The idea of a classical culture in India became synonymous with traditions that represented this umbrella of a modern Indian identity. This was realized in taking forms of vernacular dance and music that were already in practice and creating ties with Indian antiquity by making associations with texts, legends, and myths to construct new histories.¹² The birth of politically modern Indian nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century was built on a turn to re-invent ties between culture and a specifically Hindu history, which differentiated modern India from its Mughal (Muslim) and British empires past. The events of 1947 that resulted in both the independence of India and Partition into India and Pakistan are founded on creating distinctions between Hindu Indian and Muslim Pakistani culture. In the arts, what were previously amalgams of vernacular expressive cultures became divided, newly injected with ancient ties. Women in particular were tasked with protecting and inhabiting this culture, protecting Indian modernity by preserving its essentially non-Western spirituality (see Chatterjee 1989, 1993a, 1993b).

The eight classical dance forms of India today were products of the twentieth-century nation-building project. Classical dance especially was re-invented to represent a new India.

¹² Coincidentally, American modern dance pioneer Isadora Duncan constructed similar ties with Greek antiquity in defining her choreographic break from classical ballet. See Dorf (2012) for a systematic explanation on Duncan's edification of her modernity in dance and Preston (2011) for how "modernism" in dance continued from rather than ruptured tradition. Both American modern dance and Indian classical dance exemplify Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1992) "invention of tradition."

Histories of dance were newly constructed by reinvigorating movement and theater traditions that were located in Sanskrit treatises. Many exponent-scholars of kathak have perpetuated popular narratives of the history of the form. In these narratives, “kathak,” meaning “story” in Sanskrit, is directly linked to the Kathakas—traveling bards and sages who told the stories of Hindu mythology in ancient India. In this version of its history, the practice and repertoire as it persists today owes itself to a movement aesthetic created by these bards, who used the form’s movement vocabulary to express themselves as storytellers. Their gestures, which rely on contortions of the hands into *mudras*, poses, stances, and classifications of “pure” (*nrtta*), “symbolic” (*nritya*), and “signifying” (*natya*) dance, are cross-referenced in the classical text, the *Natya Shastra*, authorship of which is attributed to the sage Bharata Muni between 500 BCE – 500 CE (see Rangacharya 1996 [1986]). This text is part of the curricula of classical dance schools across the world that teach and refer to the *Natya Shastra* as a manual for understanding kathak and other classical dance forms.

Margaret Walker (2013), Anna Morcom (2013), and Pallabi Chakravorty (2008) demonstrate that the movement vocabularies and gestural material of kathak in particular hail from the courtesans of North India—the tawaifs. These women performed what was likely very similar to the aesthetic traditions of what we today term kathak, featuring rhythmic footwork performed alongside musicians, and the expression of mime in *gatbhav* while singing *thumris* (a Hindustani song genre) about love and seduction to entertain male patrons and clientele. Today, kathak dancers continue to prioritize these grammars for movement. The tradition of *abhinaya*, in which kathak dancers express stories through mime, is one that relies upon moving the eyes, eyebrows, and inhabiting emotions that result in the subtlest of facial gestures. Kathak dancers draw from the *Natya Shastra* as a manual to guide the embodiment of *abhinaya* (see Chapter 2),

but it is undeniable that courtesan gatbhav offers striking parallels. Instead of love songs and poetry, however, mimetic storytelling in kathak is focused on the performance of stories from Hindu mythology.¹³

In another aesthetic of the kathak tradition, dancers improvise rhythms along with musicians in performance. They slap and tap the feet on the ground in response to similar aural strokes, played by a musician on the heads of the tabla. In this tradition, dancers and musicians perform not just repertoire, but a relationship onstage. Audiences are knowledgeable witnesses in this process, who contribute to an improvisatory atmosphere. This recalls the intimate spaces of courtesan salons in which this aesthetic would have been staged (see Nimjee 2018).

Scholars have located modern processes of reinventing classical dance in institutions, teachers, and newly signified practitioners during the middle of the twentieth century. These processes involved the restaging of courtesan repertoires, environments, and aesthetics to become classical. The Indian government created the Sangeet Natak Akademi as a centralized institution for the study of dance in the 1950s. The institution was formed from a series of national seminars and conference, in which Rumya Putcha (2013) argues that some of the historical codification of classical dance as Hindu took place. The Akademi's centralized curricula sought to teach modern classical dance through the staging of Hindu mythological dance-dramas and characters, locating movement vocabulary in texts like the *Natya Shastra*.

Janaki Bakhle (2005) and Amanda Weidman (2006) argue that the loss of patronage for

¹³ Many transnational kathak practitioners address the courtly and courtesan histories of the form, and its place in Hindustani music culture. Philadelphia-based Courtyard Dancers' production *Metiabruz*, Maya-didi's choreography on the figure Amir Khusrau performed by STEM Dance Kampni today, and San Francisco-based Farah Yasmeen Shaikh's *The Forgotten Empress* are examples. My own kathak teacher, Joanna-ji, choreographs this history into her engagement with Muslim contributions to the form, through vocabulary that builds from *salaam* (a gesture of respect and greeting in many Muslim civilizations), among others.

courtly systems at the end of the nineteenth century saw the establishment of conservatories and standardized curricula for the study of expressive traditions. Respectable and upper-caste, upper-class Hindu women like Rukmini Devi studied the devadasi tradition-in-transition, and opened the infamous academy Kalakshetra in 1936 to train respectable women in bharatanatyam (see O'Shea 2007). Madame Menaka, who occupied a similar subjectivity, studied what became codified as kathak with a teacher who also taught courtesan women (see Chakravorty 2008). Respectable Indian women continued to study in newly classical traditions during the next several decades, through the establishment of the modern Indian nation in 1947.

More generations of women began to study dance in modern-era conservatories, a far cry from the intimate and immorally associated spaces of courtesans' kothas. In kathak, upper-caste Hindu men became the form's unequivocal doyens and gurus, assuming leadership of a lineage of Kathakas, and establishing a lexical thread between dance today and their bard ancestors. These men, upper-class women, and the institutional representatives that helped to centralize and codify kathak were the mobile bodies that assimilated repertoire from among North Indian courtesans. Courtesans symbolized immorality in dance, wherein their bodies performed a connection between dance and seductive entertainment in the traditions of gatbhav, thumri, and improvisation with musicians (see Kouwenhoven and Kippen 2013). Respectable bodies, in performing similar movement vocabulary, produced the public, danced culture of India's political modernity, restaging courtesan repertoire in mythological dance-dramas and poetry, with premises in texts.

The figure of the immoral courtesan has been written out of normative histories of classical dance forms. As a kathak dancer, I posit that the courtesan remains alive, in intimate practices of mimetic storytelling and improvisation with musicians—the performance practices

that would have resounded during Mughal and colonial courtly life. The tawaif is tacitly present when today's kathak dancer performs the courtesan's choreography, improvising rhythmic compositions with musicians and performing delicate mime to convey any story. Visually, the conventional costume of a kathak dancer *is* the courtesan's dress. This is nowhere more evident than in Hindi-language (Bollywood) films, which continue to portray courtesans as tragic heroines. The films *Pakeezah* (1972), *Umrao Jaan* (1981), *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960), and *Devdas* (2002) feature the ever-told story of the courtesan who is unable to meet a happy fate on account of her immoral occupation (see Ansari 2008; Booth 2007).

The musical performance of “Dil Cheez Kya Hai?” in *Umrao Jaan* (1981),¹⁴ for example, depicts a diegetic musical scene in which the actress Rekha “sings” (lip-syncs) and dances to a song that is accompanied by onscreen tabla and *sarangi* musicians (see Figure 6). The scene shows that her patrons watch her perform, while we hear a studio-produced song, led vocally by playback singer Asha Bhosle. Rekha's movements are part of the gestural vocabulary of kathak, inscribed by the film's choreographers Gopi Krishna (1935–1994) and Kumudini Lakhia (b. 1930)—both renowned and accredited classical kathak dancers. Rekha is the character Umrao Jaan in the film's narrative, a tawaif who dances in the kathak style. She is dressed as a courtesan, wearing jewelry, clothing, and ghungroo that similarly adorn the women in the ROM's courtesan album. She is shown in Figure 6 at the end of a characteristic kathak *chakkar* (pirouette), where her skirt billows momentarily, following her return to face her patrons. The courtesan's movement vocabulary, imagined in the choreographic sequence, is in the style of

¹⁴ The film title *Umrao Jaan* refers to the name of the protagonist in her courtesan persona. Umrao is the protagonist's nickname, while “Jaan” is appended to her nickname, to refer to occupation as a dancing girl. See Figure 4.



Figure 6: Still from the film *Umrao Jaan* (1981) in which Rekha dances in a diegetic performance.¹⁵

modern kathak, with slippages between an imagined, historical courtesan body that performs in kathak and the mobile practitioners that are the form's modern choreographers.

Rachel Dwyer writes that the courtesan film, which she considers a Bollywood film genre in its own right, is known most notably for expressing memory, loss, and nostalgia for a bygone and opulent era of India's past (2006: 20). In this way, the film scene in this diegetic performance of "Dil Cheez Kya Hai?" is a moving and living studio photograph, where the studio props that mark intimacy—the hookah and paan box, among pillows strewn about in the salon—set the stage for an intimate performance in which the protagonist's patrons connect with

¹⁵ See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=60O11sF9_-o, accessed May 1, 2019.

her body in the close quarters that imitate a salon or courtly performance. Images like these feature throughout such Bollywood-produced courtesan films. Strung together with narrative, dialogue, and other cinematic techniques, such films can be read like the courtesan album—as objects that memorialize intimate practices of entertainment. Photographs and photography carry similar memorializing implications, as I explain in the next section.

Photography, the Subject, and the Object

Photography began in 1840 in India, almost concurrently as it began in Europe, and just around the beginning of the British Raj. The introduction of photography in India signified an industrial modernity, in which images were circulated through mechanized forms of production. It was also the most popular medium to document the official period of British colonialism in India, and has been considered a tool of the Empire (Pelizzari 2003). At first, British photographers began to document Indian architecture, peoples, and phenomena through the photographic lens to enhance their understanding of “the ruled.” In fact, the advent of photography grew from the same impetus as the beginning of anthropology as a discipline of studying the colonized. Photography caught on quickly in India, and the result was the establishment of photographic companies, studios, and the colonial exchange of the latest technologies and trends by way of published journals and gazettes (see Pinney 2008).

Photography, on the one hand, hails from traditions of visual art, while on the other from industrial and scientific technologies that privileged objectivity and visual engagement (see Bear 2015). Jonathan Crary (1990) argues that the camera entered European society in the mid-nineteenth century not as a new technology, but rather a continuation of other phenomena that

promoted the central belief that the visual image expressed reality. World fairs, exhibitions, dioramas, and innovations to the kaleidoscope and telescope are examples of how visuality mediated society's engagement with reality. Cary describes that following the Enlightenment, and especially the events and products of the industrial revolution, the central place of vision and visuality in the nineteenth century constructed a new modernity. In other words, interpreting the world from a primarily visual perspective was modern.

Roland Barthes (1981) explores the troubled nature of reality in his famous reflections on the camera. For Barthes, the uniqueness of the capacity of the camera is the relationship between the photograph and its referent—its subject. This describes the concept of indexicality in photography, in which there is a physical relationship between the camera, its captured subjects, and the resulting document—the photograph. The photographic subject had to have been there at some point for the photograph to exist. In the lineage of forms of visual representation that preceded the technology, including painting and drawing, photography diverges in its need to have had the photographic event been real.

Scholars of Indian art have further explored the relationship between photography and its antecedents in the provenance of visual art. Partha Mitter (2010) explains that the modern technology of photography is related to Mughal courtly portraits, since the photographic and painted portrait imagined its subjects. Suryanandini Sinha (2010) further argues that the portrait photographer used backdrops, props, and other accoutrements to create new realities. Though photograph subjects were physically present to pose for a photograph, the resulting images blurred interpretations of “reality” (see, e.g., Figure 7). She writes:

The studio became more than a site for image production in the days of the Raj. It was a temporary space of occupation that enclosed potential for the transformation of the mundane into the spectacular; to capture the latter on lens

and then release the frozen moments as tangible objects in the form of photos back into the hubbub of everyday living. (Sinha 2010: 45–6)

Pinney substantiates this claim by making a comparison between the photographer's and painter's studio, in which the representational result of the photographic and painterly processes—both portraits—are the product of an imagined identity of the sitter (Pinney 1997: 74). He explains in another publication that the portrait studio presented a new, less expensive,



Figure 7: A painted photograph from the ROM's courtesan album. Image courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM 2007.17.1.12).

and mass-producible “democratic” form of representation to which laypeople could go to immortalize themselves in a visual document (Pinney 2008: 134–35).

Rahaab Allana (2008) and Deepali Dewan (2012) extend this surreality to another paradigm, wherein artisans painted either photographic negatives or prints themselves to embellish people, their occupations, and social statuses. Painted photographs represent most quintessentially the liminal place of photography, between Indian art and visual technology. The ROM's courtesan album contains a few painted photographs, one of which can be seen in Figure 7. The addition of paint onto the surface of one of its mass-produced prints "is used to emphasize the qualities of the idealized portrait" (Dewan 2012: 20). The entire photograph in Figure 7 is embellished with paint, jogging the reader's imagination for what the courtesan's clothing, jewelry, and studio environment would have looked like. This is continuous with the rest of the ROM's courtesan album, which collects embellished identities of its photographic subjects, as pre-modern musicians and dancers, most without the addition of paint.

The Courtesan Album: Mobilizing Memory

Indian studio photographs reinforce and subvert reality. While studios, backdrops, sitters, and even resulting images were dressed up and modified to create imagined identities, the events of taking these photographs were real. The photographic studio was a stage, and photographers, assistants, and even sitters choreographed images by adorning props and costumes, painting backdrops, posing, and gesturing to fix these images in a kind of reality. In thinking of the photographic studio in this way, the ROM's courtesan album invites analysis on the sitters' imagined identities and realities as public entertainers. In some cases, the women hold dance poses. In others, the images' painted backdrops and stock props suggest activities of leisure. These photographic modifiers substantiate and emphasize the courtesans' identities and

occupations offstage—outside of the photographic studio. Pinney writes, “photography is prized not for its ability to produce indexical traces, but rather as a creative transformational space that permits its subjects to ‘come out better’” (2003: 13). Producing such likenesses of real-life courtesans functions to allow the professions of these women to “come out better.”

The compilation of the courtesan album memorializes courtesans as entertainers in Indian music and dance history. Compiled around 1910, the album suggests the use of mass-produced images in circulation, turning one photographic object into a curated collection. Siegel states that albums existed as hybrids between commodities and keepsakes, the result of a highly personal process linked to the desires of the compiler (2010: 9). The album’s larger narrative can be read as celebratory, where courtesans are depicted as high-class, wearing ornate jewelry and elaborate dress, and associated with leisure. They are illustrated to be practitioners of music and dance that would have been patronized by elites in courtly contexts. Taken in its historical context, the album’s compilation in 1910 would have been well into the legislated social decline of Indian courtesans, as colonial forms of administration and cultural practice met movements toward independence that sought to sever ties between cultural practices and these immoral women. This is all the more reason that the compilation of the album celebrates the culture of these women, as entertainers who were producers of feudal court culture during the British Raj.

The courtesan album documents, memorializes, and even laments the intimate forms of entertainment that surrounded courtesan culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The courtesan album reads in its compilation similar to *The Beauties of Lucknow* (1874), a photographic publication that has been attributed to Darogah Abbas Ali (Mookherji 1883: 182–83). As the municipal engineer of Lucknow at the time, Abbas Ali photographed, compiled, and

wrote an introductory preface to the publication's English and Urdu versions. Its complete title reads:

The Beauties of Lucknow consisting of Twenty-Four Selected Photographed Portraits cabinet sized, of The Most Celebrated and Popular Living Histrionic Singers, Dancing Girls, and Actresses of the Oudh Court and of Lucknow as per list, with A Short Explanatory Introduction. The whole comprising A Valuable Album. (Abbas Ali 1874)

Kathryn Hansen (2015) argues that Abbas Ali sought to create the album as a gift to Wajid Ali Shah, the last Mughal King of Lucknow, upon his colonial exile to Calcutta in 1874. Abbas Ali prepared other photographic albums during his time as municipal engineer at Lucknow, which includes the *Lucknow Album*—a copy of which is contained in the ROM's collection. The album features photographs and descriptions of Lucknow architecture. ROM Curator Deepali Dewan stated to me in a conversation that the album can be read in a way that celebrates an Indian, rather than colonial lens into the architecture represented.

Though the ROM's courtesan album does not indicate authorship, I read its compilation in a similar way. The courtesan album's compiler memorialized these women as celebrated entertainers. He might have been a patron, perhaps at a princely state, where patronage for these forms of intimate entertainment continued somewhat into the twentieth century. In fact, some of the cartes-de-visite that are represented in the *Beauties of Lucknow* are reproduced in the courtesan album, demonstrating their contemporaneously widespread circulation at the time of its compilation (see Figure 8). The photographs in Figure 8 are not only indices of the women themselves, but of their occupations as singing and dancing girls who entertained in intimate spaces in feudal and colonial India. The images are staged to illustrate stylized leisure, inextricably linked to evenings of entertainment that represent unequivocally pre-modern, intimate experiences of music and dance.



Figure 8: An image from the courtesan album (left) and a page from *The Beauties of Lucknow* (right). Left image courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM 2007.1.118), right image in the public domain (From The New York Public Library).¹⁶

Intimate Spaces, Intimate Practices

Ethnomusicologists have begun to excavate visual cultures as primary sources in the history of

¹⁶ This image sparked a debate on gender among many of the ROM staff members whom I consulted in my analysis of the courtesan album. “Eunuchs” were often members of courtly *harems* (groups of female consorts) in Mughal India (see Sharar 1879; Maciszewski 2007). The courtesan album demonstrates possibilities for further study on transgender women performers in courtesan culture, contributing to the overlapping histories of courtesans, classical dance, and transgender communities in India (see Morcom 2013).

South Asian music (see Bor 2007; Wade 1998; Walker 2013). While Walker (2013) looks at photographs and drawings to determine the origins and evolution of dance gestures in kathak, I add further that Indian studio photographs reveal vital information about the spaces in which particular kinds of music practice took place. Consider Figure 9, which depicts a courtesan holding a sitar. Whether this particular woman played the sitar is secondary to the desire to represent the courtesan and sitar as commingling. The sitar is an instrument that features prominently in Indian classical music. Its history is intertwined with the Mughal courts of North India, most often touted by many Hindustani musicians to have been invented by



Figure 9: An image from the courtesan album, in which the sitter holds a sitar. Image courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM 2007.17.1.138).

Fourteenth-century court poet Amir Khusrau (see Slawek 2000 [1987]). The courtesan in Figure 9, however, demonstrates that the sitar would have figured into her seductive entertainment, in a salon mehfil. The same courtesan in Figure 9 wears ghungroo around her ankles while holding the sitar, indicating that she could have been both a dancer and musician. In the intimate spaces of the courtesan salon or court, practices of movement and music were not aesthetically separate.

The studio portrait shows unequivocally that there was a connection between the sitar and the courtesan, as an idealized performer of the instrument. She is depicted holding rather than playing the sitar, which would have been played by a musician who sits on the floor. This immortalizes a connection between dancing girls, music, and one space of performance, rather than captures a moment in musical performance. It proves that this connection existed, and the event to document this connection—the photographic encounter—actually took place. While the sitar is considered today one of the most iconic instruments in Indian classical music, it is an instrument associated with historical practices of intimate, professional female entertainment. Moreover, it shows that the courtesan was a productive figure in the history of classical music.

Studio portraits represent primary sources for conducting historical ethnography, allowing a researcher to imagine what it would have been like to enter and feel the space of the portrait studio. The photographic portrait studio itself was an intimate space, which the courtesan entered. The studio space depicted in Figure 9 emulates that of a salon in which an evening of entertainment might have occurred during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The setting of this photographic studio incites the questions: Who “choreographed” this space? What kinds of decisions were left to the sitter, photographer, and other figures present? Did the courtesan decide upon her pose, stance, and affiliations with studio props and backdrops? Who

“branded” this kind of image? What were the politics of portrait-making in these photographic studios?

Considering the ethnographic potential of the historical portrait studio leads me to broaden my perspectives of courtesan representation at large. While photographs, portraits, paintings, murals, and etchings, for example, have illustrated the courtesan in Indian history (see Nevile 1996; Vatsyayan 1982), I also add performances of kathak dance by practitioners in the world today. Certain intimate practices that persist in kathak, such as *gabhav*, are said to have developed among courtesan dancing girls in *mehfils*. Dancers also work with musicians to improvise rhythmic compositions onstage, creating and performing a relationship that I term the “work of intimacy” (see Nimjee 2018). I argue that this relationship is primary in an audience’s engagement with kathak dance, and calls onstage the Indian courtesan as a productive figure in the history of Hindustani music and dance culture.

The co-produced performance of compositions among musicians and dancers today simulates the atmosphere of what Regula Qureshi (2006) terms “holding court,” in which audience members are meant to listen to, watch, and feel what is happening onstage, and encouraged to engage in an embodied way with the intimacy that is being produced. While audiences used to be salon- and court-visiting patrons in feudal and post-feudal India, audiences in modern and postcolonial India range from ticket-holders in proscenium spaces to onlookers at a corporate event, to those experiencing Indian expressive traditions for the first time. In all of these cases, intimacy mediates the production and consumption of the tradition, in which performers demonstrate an “improvised” mastery of their traditions while maintaining and expressing a constant connection onstage. This intimacy shows that kathak is marked by the residue of the North Indian courtesan through the persistence of a staged intimacy that is

intended to be experienced. It is still normal for audience members to express their responses with applause following the successful expression of a composition, which performers might indicate with their own smiles and congratulatory gestures. These audience members recreate the space of the court or courtesans' salon, which privileges the production of and participation in an affective display of intimacy.

The dancers and audience members who “hold court” in performances of kathak dance today are mobile bodies that engage with pre-modern movement vocabularies and performance environments while re-signifying what they mean. Kathak dancers today look, sound, and move like the Indian courtesans of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Dancers today perform gestures that mime moving and removing an imaginary veil, for example, which would have likely been a real fabric veil, used to suggest, entice, cover, and play in forms of intimate entertainment (see Walker 2013). Popular interpretations of this mimed gesture in kathak today include how Radha teases Krishna, both central figures in Hindu theology and mythology. Kathak dancers today mobilize this seductive gesture of removing a veil, in effect moralizing and cleansing its meaning to uphold its status as classical vocabulary. This gesture is often presented for proscenium audiences rather than in intimate spaces, wherein close eye contact and immediate affect are impossible. Despite the recontextualizations of courtesan repertoire in kathak performances today, it is undeniable that there are visual continuities that show up in Indian popular culture.

Mobilizing and Becoming Contemporary

While the figure of the courtesan persists, albeit tacitly, in forms of Indian classical dance, the ROM's courtesan album offers a form of visual representation that documents and commemorates her occupation and existence. Such visual media continue in a lineage of representing the courtesan that range from sculptures, statues, and mural drawings to many traditions of painting, as well as popular art—on stamps, magnets, and other objects that everyday Indians purchase in markets and shops (see Jain 2007; Nevile 1996; Vatsyayan 1982; Wade 1998).

Indian courtesans have featured on historical matchbox labels, which have become sought-after items by specialized collectors (see Figure 10). In September 2013, I was introduced to Gautam Hemmady by Shubha Chaudhuri, Director of the Archives and Research Center in Ethnomusicology in Gurgaon. Gautam is a long-time friend of Shubha's family, and a prominent collector of matchbox labels.¹⁷ In our meeting at Shubha's home in New Delhi, Gautam showed me the boxes and binders that contain what seemed like thousands from his collection. He pulled several of these carefully preserved labels from binders, kept between she sheets of plastic folders, and painstakingly catalogued by theme and number. He explained that many of the images on these matchbox labels were selected because of the value of their recognition as widespread and already in circulation. This would have been a boon to matchbox sales, among other popular visual cultures that flowed through market economies. The courtesan, or "baijee" is one among many similar images in Gautam's collection that depict what is undoubtedly a courtesan painting, or studio photograph.

¹⁷ Gautam Hemmady displayed a series of matchbox labels from his collection in an exhibition titled *Matchbox Labels and the Stories they Tell* at the India International Centre (New Delhi), from May – June, 2016.



Figure 10: Three matchbox labels featuring an Indian courtesan surrounded by male musicians. Photo taken by the author (August 2013).¹⁸

The courtesan album compiles photographic antecedents of popular visual cultures like matchbox labels. In the process, it elucidates and contextualizes mobility in Indian dance. The album presents a compilation of women, who practiced forms of intimate entertainment for elite audiences in courts and salons. As leaders in India's national movement fought for independence from the British in the twentieth century, courtesans were not only perceived as pre-modern, but as a threat to the process of modernizing, which was wrapped up in creating a new, postcolonial,

¹⁸ The term "baiji" or "baijee" was a common name that referred to the occupation of a courtesan, and also features on the versos of some of the photographs from the ROM's courtesan album.

and Hindu India. The courtesan album, however, preserves and immortalizes these pre-modern women as tradition- and culture-bearers. In effect, the album represents a collision of pre-modern and modern modes of being that allow the visual representation of courtesans to continue into the present day, in performances of classical dance onstage. The photographic indexicality of the courtesan album proves that these women were *there*. They entertained, playing sitars and wearing ghungroo, affecting poses that persist in practices of Indian classical dance. While Indian classical dance forms were the products of modern processes of inventing histories and connections to pre-imperial Indian antiquity, the courtesan album demonstrates evidence that the connection between modern classical and feudal intimate is undeniable.

The courtesan album presents a moment of becoming in the history of Indian dance. Upon its compilation, the album joined a lineage of immortal objects that prove courtesans' contribution to classicism in Indian music and dance. The album represents a point in the history of dance, which resignified and streamlined previously intimate movement vocabularies to create the new category of classical dance. Kathak and other forms became classical upon the resignification of courtesan repertoire at the hands of their institutionalized relegation. The systemic denial of the contribution of Indian courtesans to present-day classical dance is pervasive in modern pedagogies of these forms. Though visually and aurally contiguous with courtesans in their costuming and movement vocabulary, classical dancers are the mobile bodies that demonstrate how courtesans are immobile practitioners in the history of the form. They move through movement grammars and vocabularies, reproducing alternative associations with their immoral gestural past that maintains classicism in dance today.

The tacit presence of feudal courtesan culture in modern classical dance happens alongside the formation of another kind of modernity in the history of Indian expressive forms.

Figures like Uday Shankar and Rabindranath Tagore produced work in the 1930s that were modern, without reference to courtesan or classical culture (see Purkayastha 2014). These figures are folded into the history of Indian contemporary dance, among practitioners who were mostly recipients of modern classical pedagogies in dance. Maya Rao, Mrinalini Sarabhai, and Chandralekha, for example, were classically trained, respectable dancers, who staged vocabularies that were phased out in practices of culture that were previously attached to courtesans. These dancers went on to carve their own spaces as contemporary dancers, innovating from their classical training.

This chapter makes another connection between feudal, classical, and contemporary dance. I posit that some of the codes inherent in practices of Indian contemporary dance are analogous to those in the history of the courtesan-classical collision. Indian contemporary dancers move through movement-based material and aesthetic knowledge that allow them to become contemporary. They draw from various transnational and transregional practices, circumventing context-based restrictions that allow them to claim “contemporary,” rather than folk, ritual, and other categories, as a strategic term (see Chapter 2). This becomes the vocabulary that dancers mobilize to produce the choreographies that represent practitioners’ social and political activism. The individuals and institutions that defined the national movement towards independence in India enacted their abilities as more mobile bodies that could invent new traditions by rendering courtesans immobile. Courtesans remain mysterious figures in the pasts of classical forms because their ties were severed. This in part defines the process of becoming contemporary, where Indian contemporary dancers stage multiple vocabularies as mobile and empowered practitioners.

The process of becoming contemporary is analogous to the process of becoming classical. Becoming contemporary already happened in the invention of classicism. In this way, contemporaneity in dance is not new, but reproduced, in part, in recontextualizing traditions that are already in circulation. Dancers move in and out of genres, traditions, and vocabularies, demonstrating their various mobilities in doing so. At the same time, they experience restrictions on mobility. These are the politics of mobility that I investigate in the next four chapters of this dissertation. I emphasize that becoming contemporary includes modifying, resignifying, and drawing inspiration from “other” movement-based forms. This process defined becoming classical in twentieth-century India, and reprises itself today.

The courtesan album lives among other albums of photographs in the ROM’s South Asian Collection that hail from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in India. They feature *durbars* and stereotypically colonial activities of tiger hunts, parades, and retreats to hill stations to escape the blistering heat of India’s summers. While cataloguing many of the albums in the Collection, my mind wandered to imagine and even feel these activities taking place. The power of photographs lies in this ability to affect.¹⁹ I read images as snapshots of dynamic activities, while at the same time, especially upon leafing through the pages of the courtesan album, interpret them as choreographies—set to tell particular stories. These dynamic characteristics of the photographic portraits in the courtesan album lead me to mobilize their utility in the present day, where a critical study of the album supports an ethnographic analysis of moving snapshots in the history of Indian contemporary dance.

¹⁹ Michael Nijhawan and Anna Schultz (2014) use the aesthetic theory of *rasa* (see Chapter 2) to construct a larger argument on subjectivities and reading images. They show that *rasa*, and in particular the *rasa* of suffering, is experienced among transnationally dispersed Indians in reading images that depict migration stories.

I began this chapter with an ethnographic vignette of my first encounter with the ROM's courtesan album. I describe my excitement at locating dancers among the many photographs that document moments and imagine identities during the British Raj in the ROM's Jhabvala Collection of Photography. As a kathak dancer, I knew this album would be important in presenting evidence that courtesans were dancers, practicing expressive forms that continued as aesthetic traditions in classical dance. Now, ten years later, the album becomes contemporary by demonstrating that this process is in progress among the many practitioners that mobilize contemporary as a strategic term in India and transnationally.

The courtesan album renders transparent the politics of mobility among nineteenth- and twentieth-century entertainers. These politics remain contemporary. Mostly trained in classical dance forms, the ancestors of Indian contemporary dancers are visualized in the courtesan album. The making of contemporary dance, then, is tied to the immobility of the courtesan. The album proves that processes of defining new categories and movement vocabularies are in constant motion in a discussion and ethnographic study of Indian dance. The consideration of dance as a visual medium that continues from photographs, film, popular art, painting, and sculpture is useful in connecting Indian contemporary dance and its intimate antecedents. Even now, in the twenty-first century, the courtesan persists onstage. These complex politics of mobility continue to dance onstage, interacting with the practitioners that are the courtesan's contemporaries today.

Chapter 2

Becoming Contemporary:

Mobile, Flexible, and Ideal Bodies on the Floor

See, obviously whenever you see a contemporary art exhibition; I can relate to it in a certain sense, there's always a rebellion or a pursuit of trying to discover how visual art works. So in a similar sense, I understand this choreographer has a similar pursuit—at least the definition of his pursuit—he wants to see what are the boundaries of movement, and what are the movements that evolved through tradition, and how else can we creatively think out of the box about how we can interpret movement. . . . So it was nice to see even if I didn't understand what was happening, whether this was a take on a reinterpretation of a classical move there . . . but I really didn't know anything more than that. I ask myself, “you can create this modern art, this sophisticated thinking about different layers, but at the end of the day the picture has to be interesting.” So someone who doesn't care for it; it should intrigue him to some extent. He may not understand how it was constructed, but the intrigue should be apparent. . . . And that's what I loved most about this show, is that even though I didn't understand what was happening, . . . I could stay focused on it. There was something interesting as to why the dancers moved from there to there, or you know, the abruptness of movement sometimes. Or one thing ended and the next thing started, and the previous thing had this kind of movement, and was a stark contrast to this one. So that was nice.

——— Anil Adireddi (Interview, 7 December 2017)

22 February 2017. Natya Institute, Bangalore.

I stayed around for Jana's contemporary class, and it was equally challenging, but it was okay because I was a self-proclaimed beginner. They were in the middle of a “batch,” so of course there were things I didn't know to do. But also, the movement vocabulary itself was difficult, especially for my inflexible body. Immediately I was the odd one out because I was dressed from my kathak class, and these guys were wearing jogging pants and t-shirts. One person even asked me if I would change into “comfy” clothes. It didn't

even occur to me to bring them. They must have thought I was so traditional. The class started with a ton of stretches, strengthening exercises, and core work. A workout, really. We progressed into movement patterns, and then they worked on choreographies, which of course, I didn't know yet. It seemed that the students in the class were divided per ability, and presented their choreographies-in-progress to Jana accordingly. Jana stood near the mixer, turning the music off and on, critiquing their progress. There was a lot of floor work, and the most experienced of students demonstrated such an athletic flexibility in the piece they performed to Timbaland's "Apologize." I recall now a conversation I had with Madhu-didi a couple weeks ago, who said that I must practice yoga to keep up with contemporary. Will I ever keep up?

* * *

The above vignette is an excerpt from my fieldnotes, which I recorded during a period of ethnographic research in which I was a resident researcher, student, teacher, and general volunteer at the Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography in 2017. In this chapter, I focus on processes of becoming contemporary in the style, genre, form, scene, and strategic term that is "Indian contemporary dance." I first encountered a contemporary production in December 2014, during contemporary dance season at the National Center for the Performing Arts in Mumbai. I attended *Rhythm Divine II*, which was choreographed and performed by Indian contemporary dancer Astad Deboo and a troupe of Manipuri *pung cholom* drummers. Deboo, trained in kathak and kathakali, interspersed solos with full ensemble sections in his production, in which the troupe of folk drummers played, jumped, and leaped, in choreographic formations that clearly accompanied Deboo. In contrast, Deboo's movements unfolded slowly, juxtaposed against the

athletic and even frenetic activity of the drummers. Though the production contained elements of formal recognition among Manipuri musical and martial art folk forms, the entirety of the performance was very clearly contemporary, in which Deboo's avant-garde, abstract movement vocabulary was the centerpiece. The production's program notes stated that the piece was Deboo's own commentary on political strife and social inequalities in the Indian Northeast.

This chapter seeks to parse the codes and conventions that govern the practice, economy, and public that surrounds Indian contemporary dance. I do not attempt to explain what Indian contemporary dance is or is not, but rather what its actors, constituting practitioners, scholars, and organizers, prioritize in their continued mobilization of the term. I argue that these codes demonstrate kinesthetic mobilities that are required of its practitioners, on the dance floor. My research and observations come from my own positionality as a temporary resident in Bangalore, and with STEM Dance Kampni. I draw from interviews, conversations, rehearsals, classes, and performances to amalgamate a set of elements that contribute to *becoming* contemporary in dance. I refer to processes of becoming, in which processes of "transformation" and "collapse" are implicit (see Bohlman 2007). Both "transformation" and "collapse" are reconciled among practitioners of Indian contemporary dance, which is meant to be traditional and modern; old and new; continuation and rupture.

This chapter describes some of the kinesthetic mobilities that practitioners prioritize to become contemporary in Indian dance. I explore issues of contemporaneity and modernity; rebellion and topical relevance; flexibility, in form and ethos; training; and the concept of choreography to explore the codes that moderate the work of Indian contemporary dancers. This is not an exhaustive list of all of these codes, nor representative of the innovations of all of the idiom's practitioners. The idiom is expanding constantly, which is reflected in the growing

quantity and scope of its festivals and symposia, which gather practitioners and offer space to exhibit new work (see Banerjee 2010; Cherian 2016; Deboo and Katrak 2017; Kothari 2003). This chapter amalgamates some of the priorities that I have observed and collected from among the practitioners of the form. I take these priorities to construct a larger argument: that practitioners who take on the term “contemporary” demonstrate that mobility on the dance floor is a significant, tethering tenet.

In addition to my own discussion of scholarship and practitioners’ perspectives, this chapter contains punctuated excerpts of my own ethnographic fieldnotes, in which I represent the chronologically progressive process of becoming contemporary myself. I demonstrate transformation and collapse in my own body, as a classically trained dancer who moves beyond her formal idiom. These fieldnotes, only slightly edited from their original forms, are meant to evoke a rawness in connection between the reader and my own body, which attempted to become more mobile, flexible, and ideal in learning how to be contemporary. I take my embodied methodological cue from the work of scholars who study movement, wherein they reflect on their own kinesthetic processes to understand movement at large. Ethnomusicologist Tomie Hahn opens the introduction to her monograph *Sensational Knowledge* with the statement “Know with your body” (2007: 1). This is a quote from Tachibana Hiroyo, headmaster of the institution at which she studied *nihon buyo* in Tokyo. Hahn proceeds to write her ethnography of dance transmission, through her own embodied experience of the form. SanSan Kwan (2013) travels through Shanghai to understand how her movement helps construct the city. Ramón Rivera-Servera describes what it feels like to “move queerly in public space” (2012: 137), by walking from his apartment in Brooklyn to a nightclub. Marta Savigliano (1995) experiments

with the inscribed representation of her multilayered, embodied engagement with tango in sketches, margin notes, and annotations that become “the text” in her monograph.

Following the work of these scholars, I use an embodied methodology in which I, as a dancer, danced to collect data. I represent this process of becoming by including fieldnotes that show what this process of becoming felt like. I must state that I only began to become contemporary, since training and immersion into any tradition requires years—decades, even. I write this chapter to coalesce the kinds of mobilities at work on the Indian contemporary dance floor and serve as a methodological precursor to the last chapter in this dissertation, which collapses my own voice as author, researcher, and practitioner.

Contemporary Modernity

Indian contemporary dance is indelibly connected to multiple interpretations of “modernity.” I here refer to four “moderns” or “modernities” as they pertain to contemporary dance. As discussed in Chapter 1, political modernity in India was established upon the fall of the British Raj, and the beginning of geopolitical border construction that today defines the multinational region of South Asia (see Chatterjee 1989, 1993a, 1993b). Culturally, this political modernity resulted in the invention of classical forms of music and dance, which relate to Indian contemporary dance in crucial ways. The Indian classical iteration of modernity glorified the essentially non-Western characteristics of its modernity, located in its spirituality (Chatterjee 1989: 237–38). Indian contemporary modernity celebrates a similar essentially Indian identity, not located in spirituality per se, but in the plurality of traditions that become folded into contemporary vocabulary in Indian dance, which I explain in the next section of this chapter.

Chapter 1 also demonstrates a colonial modernity that is undoubtedly continuous and overlaps with classical modernity, and exemplified in the introduction of photography into India in the 1850s. Photography was a technology that continued from other “modern” visual technologies (see Bear 2015; Crary 1990). These were tools of colonialism, in which the colonizing power could document and exhibit the activities and practices of the ruled (see Pinney 2008). As demonstrated in Chapter 1, images of courtesans are undeniably similar to visual representations of classical dancers, and later generations of contemporary dancers, creating a thread between colonial, classical, and contemporary modernities.

Approximately seventy-five years following the introduction of photography into India, a new modernity entered dance discourse. The activities of dancer Uday Shankar are described as pioneering a lineage of Indian modern dance. Contemporaneous with the invention of classical dance in the mid-twentieth century, Shankar developed new vocabulary for the dancing body, and toured his “Oriental Dance” internationally, especially following his famous collaboration with Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova (see Brenscheidt gen. Jost 2011; Erdman 1996; Purkayastha 2014). Shankar’s lineage continued in the work of the late Narendra Sharma and his son Bharat Sharma, who continues to stage and direct a center for Indian modern dance in New Delhi. I have often seen Bharat Sharma folded into a larger network of active contemporary dancers in India today, perhaps for the codes to which he subscribes in the making of dance (see Deboo and Katrak 2017). The Shankar lineage has been codified as Indian “modern.” This rhetorical gesture is similar to how American practitioners Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and Martha Graham, among others, have been edified as establishing modern dance as a break from the tradition of classical ballet while simultaneously repeating pedagogical and performance

frameworks within ballet. As a genre, Euro-American modern dance is accepted within the larger umbrella of Euro-American contemporary dance today.

The last “modern” departs from a discussion of genre in dance. Here, I refer to a looser, less specific, colloquial idea of modernity that circulates among practitioners and publics alike. My ethnographic research has led me to absorb a general sense that practitioners aspire to produce modern work, in which the dance vocabulary is new, fresh, and avant-garde. This danced modernity is contemporary—both “of today” temporally and born of a desire to stage it such that it is both contemporary and essentially Indian. Indian modernity in contemporary dance, or Indian contemporary modernity, becomes constructed in a dynamic relationship with more hegemonic modernities, and Euro-American modernity in particular. It draws on Indian qualities and positionalities to stage it as such.

Historian Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000), in his sea-changing monograph *Provincializing Europe*, offers perspectives on the colonial underpinnings of the projects of modernity and history. He writes “it could always be said with reason that some people were less modern than others, and that the former needed a period of preparation and waiting before they could be recognized as full participants in political modernity. But this was precisely the argument of the colonizer—the ‘not yet’ to which the colonized nationalist opposed his or her ‘now’” (2000: 9). His later statement on the proverbial “waiting room” of history and modernity conjures an image in which the previously colonized subject is illustrated to be in line to receive what the West has defined to be modern.

Scholars have mobilized the powerful metaphor of Chakrabarty’s waiting room to challenge hegemonic conceptions of modernity throughout Indian cultural idioms. Pallabi Chakravorty refers to Chakrabarty’s waiting room among diversely classed and casted

commercial dancers on reality shows in India, whose desires to be “modern and counted” resist the kinds of modernity that are otherwise held by the middle- and upper-class gatekeepers of Indian culture (2017: 176). Indian contemporary dancers are among these gatekeepers. I discuss how the category “Indian contemporary” brushes up against issues of class and caste privilege in Chapter 4. While contemporary practitioners do experience elite privileges in taking on creative, avant-garde processes, they also resist the acts of receiving hegemonic modernity in Chakrabarty’s waiting room. They do so in coded ways, drawing from global moderns and indigenous knowledges, and demonstrating various mobilities in staging dance, which I describe in the proceeding sections of this chapter.

Literature scholar Ulka Anjaria (forthcoming, 2019) illustrates analogous processes among Indian authors, who work from the idiom of “contemporary literature.” She states that this idiom is produced from the current contradictions of a right-wing India, growing inequality, and sectarianism, which coexist among increased queer spaces and audience accesses to culture and social commentary (forthcoming: 7). She explains further:

So how do writers, artists and cultural producers reclaim a contemporary that is continually denied to them? For one, this involves regaining control of one’s own representations, which in turn requires refusing the dominant idea of what is significant and important and what counts as a legitimate position for non-western literature to take. . . . It not only rejects global assumptions of what life in India is like, it refuses to be simplistically narrated or understood; it claims to be *all those things at once* and it does not ask for permission to move between them. It portrays life as diverse and irreducible—the opposite of #firstworldproblems. And it is that *restlessness* around fixed definitions that becomes the marker of the contemporary. (Anjaria forthcoming: 24)

Anjaria’s description of Indian contemporary writers refers to acts of “reclaiming,” “regaining control,” “refusing,” and “rejecting,” all the while moving between these active processes.

In the adjacent world of Indian contemporary dance, practitioners' work (and works) are engaged with Chakrabarty's "waiting room" metaphor in similar ways. Dancers resist any conception that they could be perceived as "not yet," to extend Chakrabarty's metaphor. In a recent compilation on Indian contemporary dance, Anita Cheria states, "A continued concern [in Indian contemporary dance] has been the need to develop concepts alert to the realities of dance in post-colonial and neoliberal India. Also relevant was the desire to resist a sense of a conceptual lag, of adopting and adapting concepts handed down from the west" (2016: 17). Cheria demonstrates a rejection of a Euro-American modernity that is defined and mapped onto Indian cultural forms. This is certainly true of Indian contemporary practitioners, who argue for a place at the global modernity table. Many of my collaborators cite the plurality of co-existing vocabularies, content, philosophies, and ethos to maintain their work as modern. Scholars of other postcolonial dance practices analyze similar processes at work (see Templeton 2017).

At the same time, Indian contemporary dancers continue to keep up with the modernity that exists on the other side of the waiting room. Dancers rally to participate in workshops and masterclasses with European, Japanese, American, and other contemporary dancers, iterations of which I attended during my fieldwork. They seek to remain current in world events that in many ways appraise and maintain contemporary art at large, including the Venice Biennale—an infrastructure that has been recreated among contemporary institutions in Delhi and Bangalore. Studio pedagogies for Indian contemporary dance involve the use of nomenclature like "relevés" and "tombés" to teach the practice. Required history courses in studio curricula include the insertion of Indian dancers Uday Shankar and Chandralekha, for example, among Ruth St. Denis and Merce Cunningham.

My first substantive ethnographic experience in Indian contemporary dance constituted my participation in a two-week workshop titled “From Bharata to Bartenieff” in February 2017. Hosted by the Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography, the workshop was conducted by Berlin-based bharatanatyam dancer and researcher Rajyashree Ramesh. Ramesh designed the course to teach Laban/Bartenieff movement analysis and its applications in Indian classical forms. I registered for the course along with some of the members of STEM Dance Kampni, and we spent days learning and practicing the six patterns of total body connectivity; spatial pulls of the kinesphere; flows, qualities, and forms; and efforts that are expanded by Irmgard Bartenieff in Rudolf Laban’s four categories of movement (see Laban 1976 [1966]). Our exercises in carving and tracing our kinespheres gradually morphed into a study of how these exhaustive forms of movement can be diagnosed in kathak and bharatanatyam.

The workshop was chock full of information. Ramesh had by then immersed herself for years into the inscrutable texts of Laban and Bartenieff, translating them to her lived practice of bharatanatyam. I was intrigued at Natya’s offering this workshop. I was told that it had arisen from an opportunity that Ramesh proposed to Natya’s administrative team. Toward the end of my fieldwork, I realized how perfectly the program fits into the ethos of being Indian contemporary. The Laban workshop offered a means to learn a piece of the modern canon while at the same time connect the canon to quintessentially Indian movement forms. It is a small instance that demonstrates a philosophical and kinesthetic mobility between multiple moderns in the sustained practice of Indian contemporary dance.

Throughout my fieldwork, I sought different practitioners’ perspectives on moving between these moderns. I was sure that it was residual of an internalized colonialism, wherein dancers sought to construct a modernity for themselves while at the same time privileging the

canon. I was struck, however, by a particular perspective that proved me wrong. In an interview with Keerthi Kumar, Natya/STEM principal dancer and Projects Head, I asked about the connection between Indian and Euro-American contemporary dance. Keerthi responded, “The society, basically. Everything is Indian, so that makes it Indian contemporary.” I inquired further into the need to keep up with world traditions of contemporary, and Western contemporary in particular, and he responded, “Because we are again, simultaneously living in the rest of the world at the same time. So that’s what it is” (Interview with Keerthi Kumar, 12 April 2017).

As a kathak dancer in North America, I am often asked to perform contemporary dance, which I know to mean a fresh take on classical dance repertoire, with slight alterations in costuming and musical material. In other situations, contemporary Indian dance is meant to mean the presentation of something that is exotic and can be housed in a contemporary, chic space (see Chapter 3). In the latter scenarios, exotic, Indian dance is akin to presentations of world music in coffee shops and sampled in popular music tracks, which render these typically white spaces “cosmopolitan” (see Chapters 4 and 5; Taylor 2007, 2012). Audiences for Indian dance in North America are often people with an interest in Indian culture first, and dance, second (see Chapter 5). My ethnographic collaborators often lamented a similar issue, wherein they expressed that their Indian contemporary work is too unrecognizable for international audiences, who want to reconcile an imagined India with its performance traditions. At the same time, within India, historical audiences for concert or art dance have typically been unsupportive of the idiom Indian

contemporary because it does not celebrate the formal and representational genres that identify Indian dance as Indian. These include classical and folk forms specifically.²⁰

I have observed audiences for contemporary dance in India to include a majority of its own practitioners, which is evidenced in the number of scene-serving festivals and resulting publications that discuss burgeoning work (see Banerjee 2010; Cherian 2016; Deboo and Katrak 2017; Kothari 2003). The form has become popular among a post-liberalization middle class in India, which includes creatives (see Chapter 4) and other professionals, especially in the areas of media and technology. In addition to these audiences, contemporary dance is patronized by corporations, wherein audiences also include the employees and delegates of the corporate events at which the idiom is programmed (see Chapter 3).

In the midst of considering these audiences, especially within India, Keerthi Kumar's comment on the existence of India in the world demonstrates the extent of Chakrabarty's waiting-room narrative. Indian citizens are not afforded the status of equal moderns in the global staging of dance. While Indian contemporary choreography is partially formed from among socially engaged content, it is judged on its "Indianness" first (see Chapter 5). Euro-American contemporary dance is unquestionably allowed to exist as contemporary without its cultural referent, wherein abstract vocabulary onstage is perfectly legible as high art, and moreover, is considered socially impactful.

At the same time, Euro-American contemporary dance is not a homogeneous category. Contemporary dance includes continued practices of what is identified as "modern dance," such as Graham, Duncan, and other lineages. While the continued restaging of these pioneers'

²⁰ Prarthana Purkayastha (2014) presents these issues similarly in her study of Indian modern dance, and seeks to challenge the Euro-American hegemony of modernity throughout her monograph (see Purkayastha 2014: 3–5).

choreographies is an accepted convention in this idiom of high art, contemporary dance also assumes membership of a number of self-identifying radical and anti-establishment forms. These draw on methods in participatory theater, for example, wherein dancers and audiences are drawn into performance events that put bodies into experimental places of risk and empathy (Kolb 2011, 2013). Euro-American contemporary dance includes queer voices and bodies of color, who resist white hegemonies of defining modernity in dance. Katherine Dunham and Alvin Ailey are among the most influential historical laborers in this effort, who carved a space early on for concert and staged dance that were premised in African American experiences of contemporary culture-making.

While Euro-American or Western contemporary dance is not a monolith, herein lies the friction between current geopolitics and the residues of colonialism. Given the systems of patronage for culture-making in Euro-American contexts, the state, granting agencies, audiences, and practitioners continue to validate the belief that dance engenders a place for social change. Or, a space that inspires dialogue, at the very least. My field collaborators have argued that in expectations of Indian contemporary dance, it must be representational first, before accessing capacities for social dialogue. This is true of its national and transnational publics. Dance scholar SanSan Kwan presents the same problem, using the language “traditional” in opposition to “contemporary.” She writes, “Another way to think about this is that ‘Asian’ becomes the necessary qualifier for contemporary work that comes from Asia because ‘contemporary dance’ is otherwise assumed to be Western. Thus, ‘Asia’ is yoked to ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’ is yoked to ‘Western.’ It is difficult for choreographers to be both Asian and contemporary” (2017: 45).

Mumbai-based dancer Ashley Lobo described similar issues in an interview with me in December 2017. At the time, I was on tour with Joanna-ji's Chhandam Dance Company, performing our production *BARDO*. Ashley Lobo had attended our premiere at the National Centre for Performing Arts in Mumbai two nights prior to our interview. We met in Andheri, at the location of his organization, The Danceworx. As Artistic Director, Lobo is a choreographer of both contemporary and commercial dance, and in the case of the latter, Bollywood films. In our interview, he explained that he does not expect to make a living from his work in contemporary dance, and rather, uses his commercial work to keep his organization afloat. He is driven by a desire to bridge Indian and Western modernities in his contemporary work. Lobo elaborated:

So how do we stay intrinsically Indian but connect at a much wider place, and draw people into the beauty of Indian dance as well? Because there's a huge audience out there that wouldn't bother to look at Indian classical, because they're so removed from it. So for me, can we try and allow ourselves to be that bridge between the deep classical form and the extreme West? And what is that in between? Can we find that? (Interview with Ashley Lobo, 28 January 2018)

The Indian contemporary dance practitioners with whom I collaborated seemed to acknowledge the metaphor of Chakrabarty's waiting room. They seek to design, innovate, and stage a modernity that is self-defined, as an antidote to this metaphor. I describe some of the codes, patterns, and even priorities for design, which coalesce in the next section. I demonstrate that their articulated priorities demonstrate mobility between these codes to construct and uphold the category "Indian contemporary."

Being and Becoming

The opening epigraph in this chapter is an excerpt from an interview with Anil Adireddi, a friend, collaborator, and Indian contemporary visual artist (see Chapter 4). Here, Anil refers to our discussion of a performance of the production *FAR* by Company Wayne McGregor, which took place in Bangalore in December 2017. The performance was part of a weeklong residency that was organized in collaboration with the British Council and Bangalore-based Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts, along with contributions by other local institutions, including the Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography.

Choreographed by Wayne McGregor, *FAR* toured in New Delhi, Bangalore, and Mumbai. McGregor's credits include Resident Choreographer of the Royal Ballet and Movement Director for the *Fantastic Beasts* Hollywood franchise. *FAR* is an acronym for British historian Roy Porter's book *Flesh in the Age of Reason* (2003), which explores the Enlightenment and its impact on the body. McGregor wrestles with similar narratives in the production, which was performed by an ensemble of his company dancers, to a score on track. During its Indian tour, a physical installation served as the stage backdrop, which featured a constellation of lights that blinked on and off, punctuating the movement of the dancers and the progression of the score.

Anil's comments about *FAR*, represented in the epigraph, demonstrate some of the codes that mediate Indian contemporary dance. Anil emphasizes the need for rebellion; experimentation with "boundaries"; reference to "tradition" and "classical"; and an abstract intrigue in reading form. This section explores and expands these codes in the context of Indian contemporary dance, and the mobilities that are required of and afforded to practitioners to toggle between them.

8 March 2017. Natya Institute, Bangalore.

I went to the contemporary class that evening, and it was SO great. We didn't just stretch and work on material, but we did three partner exercises. In the first, one of us did a freeze, and the other had to carry the first to the other side of the room in their freeze. So, if my partner hunched over from her waist, I had to squeeze into the space created just below her concave chest, and lift her on my back across the room. I did better than I thought, but I wasn't very creative. And then we did something more choreographic, where we had to pretend we were carrying an imaginary bubble, using different parts of our body—carrying the bubble with our hands, shoulders, ears, lower back, wherever the imagination took us. The last choreographic exercise was to work with a different partner, and present three emotions or characters using just the body. No face. No abhinaya. I did it with the face the first time, and my other partner corrected me. But then, I started to explore “fear” using the quivering of the hand, the lip, the hunching of my body inward, all the while keeping an emotion-less expression.

* * *

The above excerpt offers a lens into the second or third class I took in Indian contemporary dance, with Natya/STEM Dance Kampni's principal dancer Janardhan Raj Urs (Jana). These classes met twice per week at the Natya Institute, and were offered to the community. The weekly regulars included longtime Natya community members who also participate in its kathak batches; fitness and general dance enthusiasts; and STEM Dance Kampni members.

The fieldnote excerpt comes from a class in which we were asked to imagine, test, and experiment with our bodies, responding to instructions that required us to think, and act

accordingly. These exercises were a break from the general sequence of other classes, in which we began with a stretch- or cardio-based warm-up; proceeded into learning movement progressions; and continued to learn pre-set choreographies that corresponded to a student's ability or experience with the idiom. It seems that the movement progressions and choreographies expose students to what my collaborators term "the vocabulary" of Indian contemporary dance, which is different per each practitioner's style.

For Natya/STEM's Artistic Director Madhu Nataraj, developing vocabulary was of utmost importance to her in how she focused her efforts following her training at the Limón Foundation in New York City. In an interview with me, Madhu-didi explained:

So that was the thing, and it was definitely to have an Indian contemporary *dance* vocabulary. And in order to get that, the first decade [of my work as a choreographer] was just search. And that meant not just training people from scratch, but also to have enough vocabulary. And in a country which already has five martial art forms, now eight classical forms, and hundreds of ritualistic, you're not short of vocabulary. (Interview with Madhu Nataraj, 14 June 2017)

Madhu-didi indicated that the contemporary arts had begun to take shape, but not dance. Indian contemporary vocabulary is a combination of recognizable movements from within the idiom that draw from those of already existing Indian forms. It has been my experience that all movement forms are fair game for selecting vocabulary, and that these classical, martial art, ritualistic, and "other" categories have contributed to becoming contemporary in dance.

Scholars and writers have identified that the contemporary dance idiom began with practitioners who sought to innovate from Indian classical forms—the forms that characterized their own training (see Chatterjea 2004; Cherian 2013; Katrak 2011; Deboo and Katrak 2017; Kothari 2003). Practitioners like Mrinalini Sarabhai, Chandralekha, Daksha Sheth, Aditi Mangaldas, Astad Deboo, and Madhu-didi, among many others, experimented with the kinds of

vocabularies that were inscribed in their bodies as classical dancers. They moved beyond the aesthetic and formal boundaries of these forms, at the same time seeking new movement idioms that could supplant classically formal vocabulary. The same practitioners sought training in forms of Indian martial arts, folk theater, and other movement traditions that retained an alternative Indianness for staging contemporary dance.

The “vocabulary” seems to grow from here. Practitioners are no longer only classical, classically trained, or previously classical dancers. They do, however, incorporate Indian classical, folk, martial arts, theater, and yoga forms while embodying movement experiments that are abstract, and represent avant-garde explorations of topics and themes. It is a foundational component of the idiom that Indian contemporary dance must draw from an Indian experience. This may be as direct as the work that Madhu-didi had begun to choreograph for STEM Dance Kampni at the time of our interview, on the concept of *gat* in kathak (see Figure 11). *Gat* is a particular genre of repertoire that involves the exploration of characters through an available set of movements in kathak. Madhu-didi explores *gat* philosophically in her approach to Indian contemporary dance. Figure 11 is a screen grab of a short video in an early rehearsal of this work. The video depicts four of STEM’s dancers in the midst of movement that is stripped of a formal recognition of *gat*. The beginnings of Madhu-didi’s choreographic framework provide an example of a contemporary treatment of this otherwise recognizable, Indian classical movement.



Figure 11: Members of STEM Dance Kampni rehearse a new choreography on the theme of gat. Photo taken by the author (June 2017).

On the less representational end of the spectrum, practitioners emphasize the importance of an Indian ethos, approach, and incubation of a set of choreographic ideas. Mumbai-based Ashley Lobo, for example, discussed how his daily interactions, which take place in his immediate Indian surroundings, shape his approach to choreography. For him, there are experiences that are “intrinsically Indian,” to cite the language he used in our interview. He brought up the idea of affect and audience connection in performances of Indian dance, which he sourced in social and kinship systems. Lobo stated that the “lowest, most indivisible unit” among Indians is the family, which is paradigmatically different than the “individual” in Euro-American culture. For him, this results in an aesthetic prioritizing of vulnerability in dance. The connection of audiences and bodies through affective frameworks like *rasa* and *abhinaya* rely on communal and public experience, rather than *an* audience member’s individual experience of a moving

body (Interview with Ashley Lobo, 28 January 2018). I explore rasa and affect further in the last section of this chapter.

Whether Lobo's logic on kinship and its connection with vulnerability in dance is provable is beside the point. What remains significant is the intentionality with which practitioners seek and repeat the acts of becoming contemporary through Indian vocabulary, which is rooted in Indian experiences. I parse the meaning of "Indian" in discourses of citizenship and ethnic identity in Chapter 5, in which I consider what kinds of Indian environments validate Indian contemporary vocabulary. I argue here, though, that from the perspectives of many practitioners in the scene, the acts of becoming contemporary and embodying the vocabulary take shape in a disciplining of the body that is particular to the idiom.

24 March 2017. Natya Institute, Bangalore.

We kept going with the basic knot technique on the aerial silks, and I did it, and can do it now. I did it quite low to the ground, so that if I did fall, I wouldn't have very far to go. I sat in the knot with turnout in my knees, and only then did an inversion. The pain is tough on my right foot, which one must get used to. This is another part of training the dancing body—pain is part and parcel, and your body needs to get used to it and relax into moving in particular ways that are not part of your daily life. It's a different field process altogether. When I did the inversion, Jana told me to straighten my hip and enjoy the stretch—enjoy the feeling of lying there upside down with my foot in pain, knowing that there was a bruise forming. Even with my foot so tender, it was addictive to feel that I could do it, relying on my own knotting of just a piece of fabric that supported me in suspension while I defied gravity.

* * *

3 April 2017. Natya Institute, Bangalore.

We started with partner stretches. I thought this was going to be just the first thirty minutes of the class, as usual, but it ended up being one and a half hours of partner stretching, going through a sequence of intense pushing-to-the-max stretches, rewarded in the end by a nice and indulgent partner massage. It was incredible. We didn't review any sequences, nor rope work, but it really felt like a class. And it's made me realize how much emphasis there is on training and conditioning the body. And how much the technique, from my interpretation, is about allowing your body to be a fertile ground to enable the mobility of movement to happen. Perhaps to enable mobility to happen.

* * *

Throughout my sustained engagement with workshops, classes, rehearsals, and performances in the idiom Indian contemporary dance, I encountered flexible, limber, and strong bodies (see Figure 12). In the field excerpts above, I describe the physical processes of beginning to train my body to be the same, and discuss the resulting stretching, conditioning, and pain that were byproducts of this process. The contemporary dancing body must be disciplined as such, to move and push the boundaries of whatever dance grammar the body has been attached.

Scholars of dance investigate connections between movement practices and the physicalities of the bodies that bring them to life. Amita Nijhawan (2009) explores how articulations of appropriate femininities are expressed on the bodies of women in Bollywood films. The physical bodies of these dancers become imprinted with dialogues on freedom,

sexuality, and propriety. Anna Morcom (2013) and Sangita Shresthova (2011) discuss new kinds of physicalities that are expected of bodies in post-liberalization economies of Bollywood dance. Morcom writes, “Union dancers typically had a plump physique and the way they danced did not emphasise athleticism. The choreographers Farah Khan and Ahmed Khan brought in dancers who conformed to international standards of a slim, young, sexy, attractive body” (2013: 120). Morcom refers in particular to bodies that must already look a certain way before they are shaped to move in specific ways.

Indian contemporary dancers enter the idiom not necessarily with bodies that are ideal, but rather bodies that are ready to engage in training to result in ideal physicalities. This training



Figure 12: STEM Dance Kampni member performs a solo in a “contemporary ballet” as part of the Natya Institute’s Diploma curriculum. Photo taken by the author (March 2017).

is imprinted on the body to show what it can do, and the kind of vocabulary it can imbibe that ranges from varying levels of flexibility, athleticism, balance, awareness, and strength that allow movers to hold their bodies square and taut, perhaps supporting other dancers at the same time (see Figure 12). In contrast to Morcom’s statement, the contemporary body’s physicality is not for the goal of appearing “slim, young, sexy, and attractive,” but rather to illustrate its physical capacities—to do and take on more. As such, the body must have a reliable basis to take on any movement vocabulary, whether from *chhau* (a martial art-folk form that originates in West Bengal), yoga, bharatanatyam, *ninjutsu* (a form of Japanese martial art), and ballet—all examples of the intensive training processes in which my collaborators have engaged through their professional careers.²¹

Traces of training and physical changes in the body show up in a variety of disciplining processes in Indian performance practices. Ethnomusicologist Daniel (1990 [1980]) describes his own engagement as a disciple in the *guru-shishya parampara* (master-disciple tradition)—a pedagogical system that I explore further in the next section of this chapter. Neuman writes:

Often when I met musicians, the first thing they asked me was whether I had been practicing hard; and while saying this, one would take my left hand and look at my nails and cuticles for the “hard” evidence. If the cuticles were built up into a horny ridge, and if my nails had grooves at the point where the nail meets the cuticle, then the evidence was there. . . . There were times when my practice was less than perfect, and I sometimes seriously considered cutting grooves in my nails with a file, so that I would look more accomplished than I was. (Neuman 1990: 31–2)

Neuman illustrates a scenario in which training is imprinted onto the physical body of the musician. Here, these bodily traces of discipline demonstrate a commitment to the practice, which is required of the disciple as they carry out their *riyaaz* (practice). Traces of *riyaaz* means

²¹ The dancers and administrators at Natya/STEM host practitioners and masters in global movement traditions often, offering focused workshops to their community members.

that a disciple continues to go deeper into their classical *taalim* (curricular training). In Indian contemporary dance, the traces of discipline show that the body is committed to expanding its repertoire, to do more physically, to ultimately change shape for the requirements of an ever-evolving vocabulary. The body must continue to train to be able to take on any movement material that may not even be considered contemporary (yet).

Shantel Ehrenberg (2015) describes the Euro-American contemporary dancer as having a heightened sense of awareness of their body, during processes of movement. She terms this the “kinesthetic mode of attention,” which she defines thus:

a mode of intentional consciousness while dancing, which includes a number of elements, such as listening to the body’s movements, problem solving with the body, a curiosity about bodily feelings in conversation with different choreographic and performative contexts, and various types of embodied translation processes, such as a dancer translating verbal descriptions, which are heard from a choreographer, into kinesthetic sensations in the dancer’s attempts to match what the choreographer describes. (Ehrenberg 2015: 44)

Ehrenberg continues to explore accounts from dancers who describe what this kinesthetic attention actually feels like in practice. Training the body in Indian contemporary dance includes the development of a kinesthetic mode of attention. Stretching and muscle conditioning, and the general “pushing” of the body includes constant processes of reflection and connection with the body, and the vocabulary it seeks to imbibe.

In my contemporary classes at the Natya Institute, I recall a particular series of movement progressions that were built around the “animal stances” from the Keralan martial *kalaripayattu*. We followed Jana’s instructions to contort our bodies into four or five these stances, and held them for what felt like minutes. My core and quads burned during these processes, and I was forced to connect with these areas, breathing into them to hold the stances, and push past the boundary of movement newness into acquaintance. It seemed that the animal stances were

selected to awaken muscles, using them differently while building stamina. The presence of kalaripayattu vocabulary in Indian contemporary dance goes further than just a possible place from which to pull material. Many practitioners cite the form kalaripayattu, or “kalari” as the basis for their training today. The members of STEM Dance Kampni engage in regular kalari training, and both state and national competitions in the form, and Madhu-didi reflects this in STEM’s choreographic repertoire.²²

Madhu-didi and other STEM dancers often emphasized to me the need to keep an active practice of yoga to be able to sustain contemporary training. While the kinesthetic principles of yoga have been incorporated into movement traditions much beyond India (see Jain 2015), its premise in Indian contemporary dance celebrates its association as a necessarily Indian tradition, with principles for movement that are ancient. Practitioners refer to the importance of yoga not just in disciplining the body, but also in choreographing its vocabulary into “the vocabulary” of contemporary dance. As a student of both yoga and contemporary dance, I experienced where yoga fitted into not just training and strengthening my body, but also in floor work. Of course, most dance, takes place on a floor. The floor holds extra significance in contemporary dance, however, since floor work involves movement in which bodies lie down on it, embracing its gravitational force.

As a kathak dancer, floor work was the most difficult aspect of the disciplining process for me. Practitioners in the kathak idiom engage with the floor with their feet, which tap percussively on it to create rhythms. The dance form is mostly upright, and not much thought goes into the floor further than its capacity to effect a certain noise from the swift slap of the foot, and support bodies as they walk, stand, and perform upright movement. The floor in

²² See Zarrilli (1998, 2005) for an ethnographic study of kalaripayattu.

contemporary dance is another creature altogether. It is a space of choreographic possibility, wherein the body interacts, letting the floor take the fall of its support in performing movement. The body must succumb to the floor, sweeping the floor with its arms and legs, sliding around on it, and trusting the floor to support the limbs in a stretch. Only in the full embrace of the floor and leaning into these capacities can the contemporary dancer grasp another dimension of its vocabulary.

The process of disciplining my body to become contemporary resulted in a stronger, more flexible, and effectively more mobile body. Even as a beginner, the training process enabled me to move more comfortably and assuredly. I trusted my body to support me in kinesthetically vulnerable moments, such as in an inversion at the top of the aerial silks. At the same time, my training enabled me to move faster and smarter, knowing what my boundaries were, and making decisions to push past them. I recognized small victories, and could make connections between vocabularies and how they related to my body. I argue that the disciplining of my body to become contemporary shed a sliver of light on the kind of kinesthetic mobility that the contemporary dancer navigates on the dance floor. Dancers must move between sequences and progressions, as well as the resulting kinesthetic attention, connections, and awareness that are required of them. Training the body is an active process of ensuring that the body is reliable and supportive in constantly exploring more vocabulary. The vocabulary comes from active processes of innovation, with the necessity to channel an essentially Indian experience into its varied expressions on the floor. Indian movement traditions that are “already there” among its diversity of practices, such as chhau, yoga, and pung, become contemporary with this plurality of treatment possibilities. This all coalesces into the grammar of contemporary dance, which codes how new and existing vocabulary in “other” traditions become and live as

Indian contemporary.

Contemporary Pedagogies

Indian performance practices have been learned, taught, and transmitted in a variety of ways. These pedagogical models not only facilitate the training that I describe in the previous section, but also introduce and immerse a student into the social and cultural worlds that surround a particular tradition. James Kippen (1988), Daniel Neuman (1990), and Regula Qureshi (2007) discuss different approaches to the guru-shishya parampara, which, in the history and mythology of artistic practice, has been the dominant pedagogical system in South Asia. In this model, shishyas (disciples) enter spaces of apprenticeship with their gurus, and study conventionally in solo and group lessons. They are expected to perform various forms of *seva* (service) for their gurus, which include cleaning their teachers' domiciles, cooking for them, and facilitating and performing their routine errands. The guru-shishya parampara is typically associated with classical music and dance. It is also the system that facilitates the study of South Asian folk, martial art, and devotional traditions, including the movement practices I have mentioned in this chapter, as well as qawwali and *kirtan*.²³

Neuman (1990) explains that learning to play music in the master-disciple tradition demonstrates that music encompasses much more than honing a technique. Musical specialization incorporates a commitment to a conceptual orientation toward aesthetic practice that transcends an instrument, vocal practice, or dance form. While this system continues to the

²³ Kirtan refers to a sacred vocal tradition in Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist ritual practice. See Schultz (2013) for a study of Hindu kirtan in Marathi contexts.

present day in South Asian transnational contexts, Regula Qureshi (2000, 2007) argues that it is rooted in feudal interactions that prioritized intimate relationships. Dard Neuman (2012) demonstrates how the guru-shishya system persists in sitar pedagogy, where he states that one can only learn to play by synthesizing, imitating, and practicing in the body the exercises presented by one's teacher. This may or may not include preparing chai or attending to household errands. Nevertheless, it demonstrates the residue of an apprenticeship system in which a student interacts intimately to gain knowledge.²⁴

Even today, when it is acceptable for students to pay for classes and not necessarily live with the guru at their residence, the guru and guru-shishya system effects so much more than a transactional relationship. I consider my own kathak teacher, Joanna de Souza, my guru. She is simultaneously a family member and the first point of contact for my own life achievements and advice. Other gurus occupy similar places as surrogate mothers, fathers, and objects for religious devotion. At the same time, codes for appropriate accords and acts of respect can put pressure on a relationship during times of difficulty and frustration between student and guru. A guru must navigate the waters of having many disciples, and accordingly, hierarchies must form to ensure that knowledge is passed on efficiently and deservedly. Rolf Groesbeck (2009) describes systems of “peer-group immersion” in the tradition of kathakali, in which students learn “horizontally.” Here, students learn from each other as much as they do in the vertical system of the guru-shishya infrastructure. This describes my experience as a student of Indian dance, wherein students work out movement sequences, musical patterns, and clarify material that has been

²⁴ See Neuman (1990: 43–58) for a more comprehensive depiction of the role of the guru, or Muslim *ustad* (teacher) in traditions of South Asian musical practice. Neuman states that women cannot become gurus—a point with which I wholly disagree, especially in the cases of kathak gurus Kumudini Lakhia and Maya Rao, who continue to be revered and acknowledged as gurus in the Hindustani music and dance worlds.

received from a guru in spaces in which they teach other. This is true for my study with Joanna-ji and Madhu-didi.

Janaki Bakhle (2005) and Amanda Weidman (2006) document how training in the classical arts changed especially during the British Raj and toward the building of the independent nation of India. Both argue that the institutional conservatory model came to exist in parallel with the guru-shishya tradition. Sangita Shresthova (2011) and Pallabi Chakravorty (2009, 2017) show how systems for learning dance have not only adopted the “conservatory” method, but new methods that cater to changing aesthetics in popular dance in particular. Shresthova’s ethnography of Shiamak Davar’s Institute for the Performing Arts and Chakravorty’s exploration of dance reality television shows depict modified systems for learning dance that match their aesthetic priorities. It cannot be underestimated to what extent popular forms of dance, and specifically dance in and for film have impacted practices of Indian dance at large. The “item number” in Bollywood films has progressed to what is understood today as a typically unison choreography of dancers, designed to create a spectacular, moving image that accentuates a film’s narrative. As a teacher of kathak dance myself, I find it undeniable that many once-a-week students attend to study and perform unison choreographies in the style of kathak, an expectation that I suspect has been absorbed from the consumption of filmi item numbers.

Pedagogies for Indian contemporary dance draw on a hybrid of guru-shishya, horizontal, conservatory, and commercial teaching methods. I came across multiple cases of by-audition diplomas, or certificate programs in contemporary dance, offered by institutions in several Indian cities. In Bangalore, Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts, Nrityarutya, and Meeraqi all offer several-month-long programs for immersive training in contemporary dance, in which curricula

are focused on disciplining the body and developing the contemporary dancer-choreographer. While in residence at the Natya Institute, I helped mentor its 2017 cohort of BA students in Choreography, a joint program that Guru Maya Rao had set up with Bangalore University early in the Institute's establishment. Natya continues to host its eighteen-month Diploma in Choreography, in which students learn how to choreograph in and beyond the styles of contemporary dance. Curricular classes and components for study include studio classes in Indian contemporary, classical, folk, yoga, and martial art forms; dance theory, with a focus on texts like the *Natya Shastra* (see Chapter 1); world contemporary traditions and their histories; Indian music; and practical studies in lighting, technical design, software, and other media technologies. Students are encouraged to participate in vetted and approved workshops, conducted by visiting residents and practitioners.

When I arrived at Natya, I overlapped briefly with a visiting practitioner of contemporary dance from Berlin, who had come to conduct research and exploratory work in choreography. She held workshops for Natya's BA students and STEM Kampni dancers, and adjudicated assignments and works-in-progress. The workshop model is one that I observed at other institutions. Attakkalari's Diploma students, for example, hosted a resident composer-choreographer duo, which created work for them. I attended an open recital in December 2017 to watch Attakkalari's Diploma students, as they performed their own experimental choreographies, as well as the work of their resident guests. The recital represented a checkpoint in their own professional training processes: audiences were invited to watch how the Diploma students' bodies had begun to take on "other" vocabulary, moving between their own experiments as dance makers into dancers that improvised, spoke as part of their performances, and carried out contact choreography.

Diplomas, certificates, and programs in Indian contemporary dance persist alongside a prevailing guru-shishya model. In the case of the Natya Institute, though Madhu-didi remains Artistic Director of the institution and STEM Dance Kampni, she and the other members of Natya's community continue to recognize and commemorate Maya-didi as their guru. Figure 13 depicts a celebration of the festival Basant Panchami (the fifth day of Spring in the Hindu calendar), which I attended at the Institute early on during my research residency in 2017. Maya-didi's photograph was adorned lovingly, next to an image of Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of



Figure 13: Basant Panchami at the Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography. Photo taken by the author (February 2017).

knowledge and the arts. Maya-didi's larger photograph sits atop a chair, which is covered by an orange cloth in Figure 13. A smaller photograph of Maya-didi rests just below her larger photograph, on the chair that remains hers, even after her death. Each morning, Natya/STEM's community members perform a short *puja* (ritual ceremony) that commemorates Maya-didi's chair, which sits, now empty, in its customary place downstage in the studio.

I suspect that Natya's continued practice of the guru-shishya tradition is rooted in its identity as a part-classical, part-contemporary institution. At the same time, the place of contemporary dance in the larger ecosystem for dance in India has come to replace classical dance as high, concert, modern culture in the post-liberalization era (Chakravorty 2017: 178). Contemporary dance gurus have taken shape among esteemed dancer-choreographers, who have begun their own institutions that train and house performing companies of their own. The students in these institutions commemorate their leadership, albeit less ritualistically. Chandralekha, Astad Deboo, Daksha Sheth, Jayachandran Palazhy, and Madhu Nataraj, among many others, have initiated lineages for the study of contemporary dance that are modern versions of classical *gharanas* ("styles" that result from hereditary lineages of study in the classical tradition). These *gharanas* may not be codified or known entities, but rather contour the culture of Indian contemporary dance in similar ways, as gurus of recognizable styles, whose students continue to invoke their names in their own performance activities. Modern-contemporary choreographers in Euro-American dance hold similar places in the culture. The lineages and works of Isadora Duncan, Merce Cunningham, and ballet choreographer George Balanchine, subsist through generations of dancers who continue to stage their original works, and cite their proximities to these movement pioneers. Perhaps this presents an opportunity for the guru-shishya tradition to describe Euro-American modernity in dance, to account for the

kinds of teacher-student, generational pedagogies that persist in the tradition.²⁵

Mobilities in Choreography

The final section in this chapter explores one of the most ubiquitous terms in Indian contemporary dance: choreography. The idea of choreography itself is a code for engaging with and in the idiom. Susan Foster (2011) traces a detailed history of the term “choreography,” which has come to mean the act of designing dance. She refers to Roland Barthes’s (1985) series of essays, to locate “choreo” in *choreia*, which Barthes defines in describing the Greek theater.

Barthes writes:

The fundamental technique of the Greek theater is one of synthesis: it is the *choreia*, or consubstantial union of poetry, music, and dance. Our theater, even our lyric theater, cannot give any idea of *choreia*, for with us music predominates to the detriment of the text and of the dance, which are relegated to interludes (ballets); now, what defines the *choreia* is the absolute equality of the languages which constitute it: all of them are, so to speak, “natural”; i.e., derived from the same mental framework, formed by an education which, under the name of “music,” included letters and song. (Barthes 1985: 80)

Barthes’s exegesis points to an inherent confluence of poetry, music, and dance in the Greek theater, wherein the three create one affective environment of performance. This is very similar to emic concepts for music, dance, and theater in South Asian performance traditions, wherein their production is not categorically different, and take shape in one body in performance.

²⁵ I draw inspiration for this conclusion from conversations I have had with a colleague, collaborator, and friend—Mike Allemana, who is a scholar and practitioner of jazz in Chicago. Mike and I have discussed the possibilities for modal improvisation in jazz as productively described using codes for understanding Hindustani *raga* elaboration. In the same vein, Mike and I have engaged in dialogue about the guru-shishya parampara, and the role of the guru in apprenticeship models in jazz, which for him was epitomized during a decades-long relationship with his “guru,” the late and esteemed Chicago-based jazz saxophonist Von Freeman.

“Choreo” today has come to focus on an essential descriptor for dance—for movement that is separate from an attention to poetry and music. “Choreography,” then, becomes the graphing, or inscription of dance.

Foster’s (2011) history of “choreography” in the Euro-American canon locates the action in a desire to inscribe dance. She begins with the court of Louis XIV in the 1670s, who ordered for the writing of ballet “scores” of sorts, so court dancers could read movement instruction from written manuals. The result was a series of systematic explorations of dance notation, such that dance could be followed from such notation, without the need for personal teaching.²⁶ These were the beginnings of a compositional process for dance that was separate than the act of dancing, and the role of dance composer that was separate from the dancer. The dance choreographer held this role, as author, luminary, and master puppeteer.

Foster explains that the term “choreographer” was first used in reviews of Vaslav Nijinsky’s sequence of dance for Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* (2011: 43). She states, “Taken up enthusiastically by those involved in the new modern dance, choreography began to specify the unique process through which an artist not only arranged and invented movement, but also melded motion and emotion to produce a danced statement of universal significance” (Foster 2011: 44). She continues, noting that the choreographer transitioned into the role of arranger while remaining credited as choreographer, in the staging of source material among world dance forms. Susan Manning (2004) demonstrates that this process was tied to the appropriation of black and brown movement traditions without representing black and brown bodies, edifying the

²⁶ Modern experiments with dance notation are epitomized in Rudolf Laban’s system of Labanotation (see Laban 1975), which remains etched in the canon for Euro-American dance pedagogies. See Jablonko (2001–2002) for a description of Alan Lomax’s “choreometrics,” which sought to expand Labanotation to the analysis of world dance forms.

elite and white subjectivities of the choreographer in the history of modern dance.

In the case of Indian contemporary dance, the terms “choreographer” and “choreography” continue and depart from Foster’s narrative. The diploma courses in contemporary dance that I describe in the previous section of this chapter seek to train dancers as *dance-makers*. In other words, the skillset to become a contemporary dancer is also premised in designing dance. A choreography must explore a theme or topic that is socially relevant and socially aware. As I explain further in Chapter 4, Indian contemporary dancers articulate their own activism through their work, and their choreographies represent social and cultural commentaries to inspire dialogue and protest.²⁷ I have observed Indian contemporary practitioners explore ideas of feminism in Hindu mythology; caste and social organization; border politics; Hindu-Muslim strife; and poverty, from lenses that are located among transnational South Asians who inhabit and interact with these issues.

The Natya Institute’s Diploma Program in Choreography is built upon the premise that the act of choreographing involves thinking about dance as much more than moving the body. As described in the previous section, Natya’s Diploma students take courses in the history of music, dance, and art; the study of Indian aesthetics; and practical studies in lighting, technical design, and various softwares for producing music and graphics (see Figure 14). The underlying belief seems to be rooted in the experience of dance as primarily a visual idiom, wherein choreography is the organization of images onstage. The body is the primary source for these moving images, while other production and design elements accentuate the body.

²⁷ See Foellmer (2016), Giersdorf (2013), and John (2012) for examples of Euro-American contemporary choreography as protest.

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Figure 14: Advertisement for the Natya Institute's Diploma in Choreography, now eighteen months long. Image courtesy of the Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography.

In Indian classical dance, Pallabi Chakravorty (2009) and Uttara Asha Coorlawala (2010) invoke the affective framework of *rasa*, which organizes a dancer's approach to constructing movement. Per classical dance pedagogy, it is the dancer's responsibility to help effect the experience of *rasa*, which can only happen in interactions between performers and audience members.²⁸ Coorlawala explains *rasa* as resulting from performers, dances, and/or plays, which "might orchestrate a pyramid of emotional states differently, creating a broad base of many passing emotions that accumulate as one (*sthyayi bhava*) generic emotional state. When these resonate for the viewer as a lingering aftertaste, then there is said to be *rasa*" (2010: 123). Chakravorty (2009) argues that while the aesthetic goals of dance training and performance in classical systems have been to produce *rasa*, the ubiquity of the song-dance sequence in India's

²⁸ See Vatsyayan (1977 [1968]) for a more detailed analysis of how *rasa* works in music, dance, theater, and other Indian allied arts.

cinema industries today have led to an emphasis on “remix”—dance sequencing for the purpose of commodified image consumption.

The affective system of *rasa* sets a precedent for alternatives to image-making as aesthetic goals in Indian dance. I add here another residue of classical aesthetics. One of the most unique aspects of kathak dance is its focus on rhythmic improvisation, which takes place between a dancer and musician. The dancer and musician construct an intimate, charged relationship onstage, which audiences consume in performances of kathak dance. I argue elsewhere that this improvisatory, intimately charged aesthetic is the goal for performance, rather than the repertoire performed (see Nimjee 2018). This, in combination with the more codified system of *rasa*, provides a basis for more-than-visual approaches that inhabit the design of Indian dance. Indian contemporary dance draws from visual, image-based approaches to choreography. At the same time, the contemporary choreographer demonstrates their mobilities in pulling from aesthetic frameworks for designing dance that draw from a variety of experiential systems. The Indian contemporary choreographer, who continues to emphasize the importance of classical aesthetics in curricula and training, is imprinted with an affective approach to choreography that works within and beyond the model of the moving image.

Early on in my research residency at the Natya Institute, I was invited to observe and record a video of an early lesson for two of the Institute’s Diploma students (see Figure 15). The students were about to begin one of their first choreography assignments, in which they were to stage the story *Abhisar*, a core assignment in the curriculum. The story hails from the *Natya Shastra* classical text, and concerns one of the eight (*ashta*) *nayikas* (heroines). In the story, the protagonist (Abhisarika *nayika*) journeys at nighttime toward her lover (an ascetic) during *Vasant Utsav* (the Spring festival of Holi). *Abhisar* has been a milestone assignment for many



Figure 15: Ramya Nagaraj directs a lesson for students in the Natya Institute’s Diploma in Choreography. Photo taken by the author (February 2017).

years in Natya’s Diploma that Guru Maya Rao set decades ago. The students must stage an original choreography of the story to a recorded musical track, choreographing their peers into the small, in-studio production, acting as directors and dramaturges in decisions about lighting, stage movement, and of course, dance. This recalls Groesbeck’s (2009) theory of horizontal pedagogy in “peer-group immersion.” In Natya’s Diploma Program, students are asked not only to teach their peers, but direct them in various choreography assignments.

In the *Abhisar* lesson I observed, Ramya Nagaraj (Natya/STEM Assistant Director and dancer) asked two students to consider the kinds of narrative and practical factors at hand in staging a choreography of the work (see Figure 15). The lesson was conducted in the style of a Socratic dialogue, wherein Ramya pushed the students to imagine themselves in the body of the protagonist, thinking about her essential qualities, which would translate into movement and

stage decisions. I represent an approximated transcription and translation of excerpts of the lesson below, which was conducted fluidly between English and Hindi:

Ramya Nagaraj (RN): So what else? In the Vasant Utsav, the environment?

Student B (B): Groups of boys, girls . . .

Student S (S): A game, in which one of the girls is blindfolded . . . and another, where there are stacks of stones, and you throw one to try and hit and knock them over . . .

RN: Okay, what about the Abhisarika *nayika* (dancer)? What are her qualities? When does she journey out?

B: Nighttime. Full moonlight.

RN: Okay, so what else happens?

S: They are playing Holi . . .

RN: Even at nighttime?

S: No, in the morning.

B: It's raining.

RN: Okay, so in the rain, would she take a lamp like this (*gestures*)? Or a lantern like this (*gestures*)?

B: A lantern.

S: She has her earthen pot, and her *chunni* (shawl) is covering her.

RN: But the rain doesn't come on her? How does she see her lover?

B: By the light of the moonlight.

RN: But it's full raining, is the moon still shining? *Are!*²⁹ Practical! Thunder, lightning. Can you actually see the moon?

²⁹ "Are!" is an exclamation of surprise, bewilderment, and annoyance in many Indian vernaculars.

This early conversation was meant to incite the students to begin to conceptualize how to make choreographic decisions about *Abhisar*. Ramya urges the students to imagine how the story, and the essential qualities of the character can be communicated. Here, the narrative and characters are of utmost importance, and Ramya's questions point the students in a direction that is continuous with the way she teaches abhinaya in kathak. Abhinaya is the mimetic dimension of the form, in which dancers tell stories using a series of hand gestures, eye and eyebrow movements, and facial expressions. A dancer can mime using the rest of their body, but a mastery of the tradition comes from a command of its subtlety, wherein just a twitch of the face, or even the trigger of an inward emotional change in the body of the dancer pushes forward the story's narrative.

Abhinaya is inextricably connected to the rasa framework, wherein abhinaya becomes a path to help produce the affective output that results in rasa. Ramya, in her initial, exploratory lesson, encourages the students of *Abhisar* to internalize its story, characters, and essence similarly. At the same time, Ramya consults a book as she conducts the lesson. The book is a portfolio that represents the student's own choreographic process, which they are required to submit upon their performances of *Abhisar*. The portfolio contains a description of the main characters, adapted story, diagrammed movement onstage through formation changes and "acts," and sketches of costume design—all visual representations of the choreographer's intentions in their *Abhisars*. As demonstrated in the early *Abhisar* lesson, the student choreographer is also encouraged to explore affective frameworks for design.

22 March 2017. Natya Institute, Bangalore.

We ended with an assignment to choreograph movement from Point A to Point B to Point C in the studio. We had to select and mark our Points A and B in the room, which we all did differently. Point C was the same for everybody, at center-center. We also had this other exercise where we walked and walked around the studio, while Madhu-didi asked us to observe the space. And then, she asked us to stop where we were, close our eyes, and she asked us how many fans there were in the room, how many windows, how many drums beside the harmonium, etc. We couldn't answer, because we weren't observing like that. Also when we were moving through the room, she asked us to do so on our toes, on heels, running, walking backwards, etc. Using all the resources of our bodies.

Okay, back to the Point A thing. So Madhu-didi gave us time to choreograph moving from one point to the other, using a kick, spin, lunge, in the space of mid-level, and then floor level. She wanted us to choreograph it so that we weren't making it up on the spot. And we would have to perform it twice so that we could be tested that we were actually inscribing the movement. This is what she was emphasizing—movement sequences that are natural. Why is this hand moving there? Is it necessary? Does it flow?

Then Madhu-didi asked us to make a narrative out of what we were doing, and work with it more. What is the story of our movement? We each performed our sequences solo, told the narrative, and then performed it again. She gave us feedback right away, which I incorporated. And she used that as a teachable moment to say that feedback and work in progress is important in both contemporary dance and choreography.

* * *

The excerpt above is taken from my fieldnote reflections of my first workshop with Madhu-didi. Each workshop task encouraged me to explore Indian contemporary dance and choreography, simultaneously. The thought experiments, vocabulary, and design instructions were all new to me. She asked us to observe our environments, close our eyes, and recount its constituting objects. This, I realized was an awareness warm-up, to understand the spaces, planes, and bodies with which we could work as movers. We experimented with different facilities for movement—different qualities of the ways our limbs interacted with the floor and sliced the air. And inevitably, we were asked to choreograph—to inscribe movement in space, in which we traveled using these tested qualities. Narrative emerged from the processes of trying, inscribing, and recalling.

To become contemporary in Indian dance is also to become a choreographer. Madhu-didi's workshop encouraged and required innovation, but not without intention. For Madhu-didi, these intentions have to be located in movements that “make sense,” which is shaped by her particular set of values as a choreographer. As she related to me on many occasions, movements must be designed “organically,” wherein their kinesthetic sequencing as performed by the body is logical. Foster (2011) argues that kinesthetic logic is socially and culturally produced—a body's logic in one movement system is inherently different than in another's. The point is, though, that the choreographer must attend to a logic for movement. In order for this logic to be evaluated, it must be repeatable, and inscribed. Other bodies should and must be able to carry out this kinesthetic logic. And so, it must be graphed.

Though Madhu-didi's workshop was designed for the beginner, there is a clear continuity between the tasks that were assigned in the workshop, and Madhu-didi's own journey as a choreographer. She emphasized in an interview with me that following her return to India from

the Limón Foundation in New York, she sought to develop vocabulary and train other dancers, who could carry out and show her work (Interview with Madhu Nataraj, 14 June 2017). She explored new avenues to construct “the vocabulary,” and discipline her body further, initiating her and others’ training in Indian and “other” movement forms that became contemporary with her stylistic treatments. Her resulting choreographies were works that resulted from innovation that was intentional.

Madhu-didi issued tasks in her workshop that located the choreographer and mover in the same body. As a participant, I explored the resources of my own body and the vocabulary my body knows as a kathak dancer to experiment with new and contemporary qualities of movement. I graphed these movements into short sequences that introduced me as a mover to the process of movement design. In the Natya Institute’s Diploma Program in Choreography, the students are tasked with these instructions and, moreover, to move past these rudimentary tasks into assignments that call for designing movement for and on the bodies of their peers. The *Abhisar* assignment is the first of this kind, wherein the choreographer is not permitted to choreograph for their own body. They must stand outside the work, which Madhu-didi explains is a crucial part of the choreographic process. This results in a different experience of movement, from the choreographer and dancer’s perspectives.

Madhu-didi explained to me that her choreographic process cannot happen without constant engagement with her dancers. STEM Dance Kampni member Keerthi Kumar validated this, stating to me in an interview that the dancers are the choreographer’s tools (Interview with Keerthi Kumar, 12 April 2017). In other contemporary scenarios, dance scholar Alexandra Kolb describes the role of the Euro-American choreographer as a “delegate,” or “facilitator,” in amalgamating the inputs of the dancers (2013: 34). Jennifer Roche (2015) advocates for the

perspective and experience of the dancer in activating choreographies, similar to how Western classical performers realize scored music. Meghan Quinlan (2017) demonstrates how the dancer toggles between the role of dancer, improviser, and choreographer in Gaga technique—a movement practice that was developed by dancer-choreographer Ohad Naharin.

Madhu-didi presents another narrative for the relationship between choreographer and dancer. In a post to Instagram on March 23, 2019, Madhu-didi (@madhunatadance) captioned a short video of three STEM dancers in rehearsal, “As a choreographer, I think of dancers as the quintessential colours that charge a #canvas” (@madhunatadance, March 22, 2019). In Madhu-didi’s metaphor, dancers are the required colors to construct an image. The master artist can work with the capacities of these colors to mix, change, and be treated; to saturate, de-saturate, and create new shades. In an interview with Bangalore-based artist Anil Adireddi, he explained that working with colors means knowing that they interact. The role of the artist is to facilitate this physical interaction, understanding that the larger picture is shaped from this interaction (Interview with Anil Adireddi, 7 December 2017). Madhu-didi’s metaphor as a visual one recalls earlier discussion of the process of choreography as image-making. I argue, however, that her idea of dancers as colors encourages a theorization of the choreographer as having an affective, experiential, and physical relationship with her dancers, wherein the final product is the dynamic result of these interactions.

To become an Indian contemporary dancer is also to become a choreographer. My experience with the Natya Institute’s Diploma Program in Choreography leads me to understand choreography as dance-making that is founded in thinking about dance in a series of moving images, augmented with other production decisions about lighting, scoring, sound, and costuming. Indian contemporary dance-makers learn how to innovate with intention, inscribing

movement for themselves and their peers. In doing so, they move between vocabularies, but also aesthetics for dance that draw from affective frameworks. The results are traces of these mobilities in choreographies, which represent the work of thinking, intention, design, and physical and kinesthetic interactions between dancer and choreographer.

Coda

I have described in this chapter the codes and processes associated with becoming contemporary in Indian dance. The residues of colonialism continue to etch themselves in evaluations for contemporary and modern dancing bodies. Practitioners in the idiom respond with a series of kinesthetic mobilities on the dance floor that demonstrate how they are contemporary and Indian at the same time. They navigate different movement vocabularies, aesthetics, and treatments to design work that is a pastiche of embodied forms. They engage in systems of training that include diploma courses and certificates as introductory steps to a modified guru-shishya system. In these methods, contemporary practitioners are simultaneously choreographers, in which they are taught to become master image-makers who draw on affective frameworks and interactions to result in productions.

6 December 2017. Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts, Bangalore.

Following warm-up, we started to get into learning a sequence—an excerpt from Company Wayne McGregor's production FAR. The company member conducting the workshop taught the sequence. He was relentless and unforgiving. I think he thought we weren't very good. He went "bang, bang, bang," demonstrating a bunch of foreign

movements in real time, to a track we'd never heard. The other company member kept trying to slow it down and break it down. Maybe the two of them had different workshop priorities. Maybe he wanted us to pick up fast, pick up more, feel more, in quantity. Maybe she wanted us to learn something in depth.

The movement itself started with a run, which wasn't broken down with counts in relation to the track at all. Rather, it was him saying "ga Ka, bah bah BAH," accentuating certain movements with syllables for emphasis, which you just had to catch. And regurgitate. Nothing like the systematic logic of bol. So I relied on muscle memory and following the group to be able to reproduce it. We ran, struck a pose, moved into this triangular relevé, changed directions, dropped on the right side into a bit of a controlled suspend, and then an arabesque; a jeté, jeté toward the back, a bit of a chakkar. . . . I started to get into this situation of following rather than absorbing, probably because I couldn't keep up with the teaching style. And then I started to lose confidence, because I really didn't have the technique to keep up either. And I was getting tired. And losing focus.

I felt frustrated, disengaged, and protective of Indian contemporary. The workshop required me to approximate and absorb the movement fast, and deal with it on my own later. But in a workshop, or masterclass, I can understand it, I guess.

* * *

I recapitulate the beginning and middle of this chapter in my final fieldnote excerpt, in which I participated in city-wide programming that resulted from Company Wayne McGregor's short residency in Bangalore. The workshop was held at Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts, which

helped to co-sponsor the visiting company, and its performance of *FAR*. At the time of this workshop, I had already conducted a research residency with Natya/STEM earlier in 2017, and was preparing to leave to participate as a dancer in a five-city India tour of *BARDO*, a production directed by my own dance teacher Joanna de Souza.

The workshop with Company Wayne McGregor in Bangalore began similar to my Indian contemporary dance classes at Natya/STEM; with a warm-up, and movement progressions that were seemingly within the repertoire of the company's approach to contemporary dance. It progressed into the *FAR* sequence that I describe in the fieldnote excerpt, following which the two workshop facilitators directed a spontaneous choreography of their own, formed from among us, the participants. The workshop ended with a section led by Wayne McGregor himself, who instructed us to choreograph, in tasks that were similar to those I attempted in Madhu-didi's workshop.

I reflect in my fieldnote excerpt that I was frustrated in Company Wayne McGregor's workshop, during the section in which we were taught an excerpt of *FAR*. I watched how the teacher who led this section was surprised that his pedagogical style did not immediately result in our being able to execute the sequence. I observed the other teacher, who suggested a change in approach, to slow things down, and to break down movements. I listened for where gestures landed musically, trying to memorize them to keep up with the general arc of the sequence, while watching the bodies of the others, to approximate how my body could contort into similar, approximated shapes. I wished in the moment of the workshop that this section felt less like *receiving* contemporary dance.

It is customary of workshop, masterclass, and intensive models that one expects to be given a large amount of material to work through later. I recall a workshop that was led by

Pandit Swapan Chaudhuri, master tabla player in the Lucknow gharana. He was teaching a *qaida-rela*, a genre of tabla that is organized in somewhat of a theme and variations. He demonstrated, in his characteristic warp speed, how he created new and exciting compositional material from just subtle changes to theme, keeping to the rules for Hindustani rhythm and meter. We students counted and wrote ferociously, treating the masterclass as an opportunity to document now, and grasp later. Company Wayne McGregor’s workshop was presented similarly. The problem was that I could not rely on a contemporary foundation to pick up the sequence quickly enough.

As the section progressed, it was clear that my background as a kathak dancer was not sufficient to truly embody the sequence, even having opened slightly to learning the Indian contemporary idiom in the months that I did with Natya/STEM. Over the course of the 45-minute long section, I noticed that the Indian contemporary dancers in the room exhibited more comfort with the sequence. Their vocabulary and disciplining of the body in the idiom Indian contemporary demonstrated the flexibility, and kinesthetic sensibility required to understand the logic of movement as it was presented. These dancers have presumably been engaged in the process of becoming contemporary for years—possibly even decades. Even so, it seemed that they were not contemporary *enough*. SanSan Kwan’s overarching question, “when is contemporary?” continues to resound in my analysis of the form, in the context of contemporary mobilities. I reprise different versions of this question through the next three chapters, beginning with a consideration of post-liberalization models for patronage in India.

Chapter 3

Dancing Corporate: Shifting Patronage in Indian Contemporary Art Worlds

[Dance] with these people is a very serious and ceremonious matter, a kind of worship and incantation rather than amusement. . . . The very word for dancing, ‘nolávaio,’ means literally ‘to work.’ The wise old man may reproach laggard, inexperienced younger ones, saying, ‘Why do you not go to work?’ meaning that they should go to the dance and not stand idly about while the feast is going on. If the Tarahumares did not comply with the commands of Father Sun and dance, the latter would come down and burn up the whole world.

—— Carl Lumholtz, *Among Unknown Tribes* (1892: 94)

On February 13, 2017 I spent the evening at the Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography. I had arrived in Bangalore about a month earlier, and had begun to visit the Institute in a few difference capacities: I had attended the Institute’s celebration of Basant Panchami; participated in a two-week workshop on applications of Laban movement in Indian classical forms; observed rehearsals and classes; and given a presentation on creating music for choreography for the students of the Institute’s BA and Diploma programs.

Around the time of my workshop, STEM’s company dancers and some of the BA and Diploma students were beginning to rehearse an eleven-minute choreography for an upcoming “corporate show” in Mumbai. Artistic Director Madhu Nataraj invited me to watch a few of the rehearsals, which unfolded in a matter of days just before the company flew from Bangalore to Mumbai on the morning of February 14. The gig was a last-minute request from the event management company hired to handle the Indian Leadership Summit hosted by NASSCOM: the

National Association of Software and Services Companies. A large trade group for IT products and services in India, the company is based in New Delhi. Madhu-didi, and later, Keerthi Kumar (Head of Projects and principal dancer at STEM), described that the event was standard in terms of corporate shows. In short, corporate shows are performances solicited from companies—large and small; multinational and local, wherein musicians, dancers, celebrities, magicians, acrobats, stand-up comics, and other performing artists are contracted to commemorate a company event. NASSOM’s Indian Leadership Summit is an annual forum for encouraging companies to workshop and present their products. STEM Dance Kampni was contracted to perform in a cultural program at the Summit—a common practice at the meetings of many government, corporate, and NGO institutions in India, during which delegates are treated to presentations of various Indian performing arts.

During the several-day process of conceiving and rehearsing the NASSCOM choreography, Madhu-didi intimated to me that during their contract discussions, they were asked to present a piece related to the ideas of leadership and “soaring to new heights.” Madhu-didi stated that she interpreted and choreographed this quite literally, in her signature approach to Indian contemporary and aerial dance—a vogue form in which dancers ascend and descend large pieces of silk fabric that are rigged onto ceiling and structured fixtures in performance. Madhu-didi joined the eleven dancers in their travel to Mumbai, also accompanied by lighting designer Surya Rao, a previous STEM dancer and longtime Natya community member. The troupe loaded into technical rehearsals at a high-end hotel near Mumbai’s Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport on the evening of their arrival into the city. Here, the dancers and Summit production teams tested the musical track, lighting, and choreographic spacing, while rigging and working with the silks onstage. STEM performed on the same stage the next evening (see Figure

16), while the Natya Institute's other administrators and teachers proceeded with regular classes and programs in Bangalore. I greeted Madhu-didi



Figure 16: STEM Dance Kampni perform at the NASSCOM Leadership Summit, February 2017. Photo courtesy of Shrirang Swarge for Natura.

and some of STEM's dancers at the Institute a few days after they had arrived back in Bangalore. Madhu-didi reported that the show had gone well. She laughed as she recounted that the tech rehearsal was a disaster, but the show was fabulous. She ended our short exchange with the statement, "Good. We needed a corporate show right now."

The opening epigraph to this chapter is a description by explorer, scientist and photographer Carl Lumholtz, during his exploration of the Tarahumara Indigenous community of Tuaripa, Chihuahua in Mexico in the 1890s. In this passage, he refers to emic understandings of

dance as work, and by extension, dancers as workers. Scholars in the study of expressive traditions have categorized dancers as laborers, and affective laborers in particular (see Baade, Fast, and Grenier 2014; Morcom 2015; Peterson 2013; Srinivasan 2012; Tatro 2014). Michael Hardt defines workers in creative economies as having come about especially in the third wave of capitalism and information age, wherein the products of this labor include “a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion—even a sense of connectedness or community” (1999: 96).

As producers of the performing arts, Indian contemporary dancers are also affective laborers. They engage with various audiences in their performances, inciting connection, wonder, anxiety, confusion, and excitement. As laborers, they engage in a diverse economy of patronage for their work. This chapter outlines some of the issues that are embedded in the corporate patronage of the performing arts in India. In the context of Indian contemporary dance, I focus on the “corporate show” as one version of this patronage, wherein dancers are contract laborers who work within the boundaries of these contracts to produce performances. In corporate shows, event planners and company representatives hire contemporary dancers to perform these choreographies as modern interpretations of Indian traditions. In these cases, artists are treated as contracted consultants, who perform services and are bound by the terms of their contracts. These include clauses related to required performance time and theme, technical rehearsal and equipment, food and beverage, breaks, transportation, costumes, music production, and many others.

This chapter discusses different aspects of corporate patronage of the performing arts in India, with specific reference to the ways in which Indian contemporary dancers are laborers within this system. While Indian contemporary dancers are by no means the only category of

laborers in this system, I argue that a study of corporate patronage, of which I present the corporate show as a central example, renders transparent some of the mobilities (and immobilities) experienced by contemporary dancers. On one hand, they have the opportunity to present, at times, recycled choreographic material in exchange for larger sums in the context of their fiscal years. On the other hand, they are bound by the terms of their contracts, and some of the immovable and strict guidelines that come with contractual labor.

I begin this chapter with a brief outline of patronage for the arts in India, contextualizing where and how the corporation fits into this narrative. I return to fieldwork-based reflections on patronage for the arts, referring to individuals and institutions in Bangalore that engage with their own financial realities. While some working artists discuss expected corporate underbellies, others point to the kinds of agency afforded to them upon entering contracts and commissions from corporate houses. I follow this section with a discussion of corporations as patrons. Current infrastructures, such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, offer models for the study of how artists and art-based institutions are recipients of social activism. I explain how this unfolds in the case of the contemporary arts, which lie in the hands of an elite few. Finally, I explore one of the most ubiquitous models for the corporate patronage of the arts, and in this case the popular arts, through the framework of MTV and Coca-Cola's *Coke Studio* television franchise. I argue that the multifaceted systems of the corporate patronage of the arts are a locus for the production and limitation of fiscal mobility and flexibility; existential agency and anxiety; and desire, on both sides of the corporate contract.

Political Economies of Arts Patronage in India

In her anthology of arts patronage in India, dance scholar Joan Erdman describes the arts patron as both customer and benefactor (1992: 4). As customer and benefactor, the corporation as patron enters an overlapping, and nebulous ecosystem for the patronage of the performing arts in India. Ethnomusicologist Adrian McNeil (2017) addresses the differences in patronage for modern Hindustani musicians as belonging to three chronological political economies: colonial feudal, state, and corporate. Musicians and dancers with whom I have worked as a researcher and performer through the years generally validate this statement. The realities of fiscal subsistence as artists in the world today, however, necessitate drawing from many sources of patronage, which work from among different pretenses. Other sources of historical patronage include religious institutions, such as Hindu temples and Sufi shrines; transnational tours; state and privately organized festivals, private entities, and the bygone-yet-everlasting framework of the Mughal courts, which continue to occupy an important position in the iconography and imagination of Indian music and dance history. I concentrate on state patronage and the transition to corporate patronage in particular, which many attribute to the liberalization of the Indian economy in the 1990s.

Amrit Srinivasan (1983, 1985), Kapila Vatsyayan (1982), Avanthi Meduri (1996), and others have discussed the ways in which dance and dancers moved in and out of temple spaces, through the periods of India's heterogeneous, imperial, and modern systems of leadership. Regula Qureshi (1995) explores the patronage of music in Sufi spaces, providing another kind of religious institutional patronage for the Indian performing arts. Bonnie Wade (1998) and Pran Neville (1996) demonstrate how music and dance figured into the life of Mughal courts, through a systematic study of *Ragamala* (paintings that visually depict *raga* modal melodies), miniature, oil, and company-style paintings from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.

These iconographic sources demonstrate amalgamated idealizations rather than snapshots of courtly life. In combination with other sources, such as travelogues, letters, and courtly texts (see Schofield 2010), they illustrate the extent to which musicians and dancers entertained in courtly spaces.

Davesh Soneji (2010), Regula Qureshi (2006), and Veena Oldenburg (1990) among many others have continued the study of feudal patronage through the period of the British Raj. They focus in particular on the figure of the Indian tawaif, who was patronized by kings and



Figure 17: “The Infantry Band Marching post” from the album *Royal Visit to Gwalior 1905*. Image courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM 2007.17.8.44).

other members of royal families, nobles, landowners, feudal elites, and British officials.

Photographs contribute to a rich collection of iconographic sources, which offer fascinating illuminations for the study of intimate spaces that include courts and kothas as stages for concert art (see Chapter 1). Photographs of durbars show how public nautch performances and marching bands commemorated these iconically colonial occasions, wherein the performing arts were meant to exhibit the particularities of Indian culture (see Figure 17).³⁰

The period of the British Raj also saw transnational travel of Indian artists abroad. The opening epigraph to Chapter 1 describes scholar Priya Srinivasan's discovery of media coverage in a January 1881 edition of the *New York Clipper*. The story describes three nautch girls who traveled from India to perform in impresario Augustin Daly's production *Zanina* at Coney Island (Srinivasan 2012: 49). Srinivasan follows the lives of these women as hidden laborers through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the United States. They were sent on international tours to exhibit forms that reconciled with the imagined cultures of the exotic East. While not "patronized" openly, their work resulted in the transnational performance of Indian cultural forms.

Joan Erdman (1987, 1996), Diana Brenscheidt gen. Jost (2011), Asokakumara Mukhopadhyaya (2004), and Prarthana Purkayastha (2012, 2014) explore the career of Uday Shankar, who is credited with formulating a distinct lineage and vocabulary for Indian modern dance. He traveled outside of India to perform this work, and in the 1920s, famously collaborated with Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova to tour his work abroad. Ajay Sinha (2015) outlines an iconographic account of a series of interactions between Indian dancer Ram Gopal and American

³⁰ See Booth (2005) for a history of wedding bands in India, which are rooted in an overlapping history of colonial and military bands.

photographer Carl Van Vechten in New York in 1938. These accounts all demonstrate systems of transnational patronage that took shape in the exchange of bodies and knowledge through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Though India was firmly identified as residing in “the East” or “the Orient” during these periods, some Indian bodies performed India abroad. This includes the exhibition and participation of Indian bodies during imperial exhibitions and world fairs (see Hoffenberg 2001).

Before and during the period of the British Raj in India, nobles and landowners in feudal systems patronized forms of music and dance that are now identified as “classical.” The overlapping practices of princely court and salon entertainment continued to subsist among the establishment of conservatory learning and the anti-nautch movement as India progressed in the first part of the twentieth century towards its independence from the British imperial government. As explained in Chapter 1, the decades preceding and immediately following Indian Independence saw the institutionalization of music and dance as a means of creating a modern-yet-ancient Indian classical culture. This included the visibility of upper-caste, upper-class, Hindu, and hyper-mobile women such as Madame Menaka and Rukmini Devi, the latter who is considered the mother of modern bharatanatyam. Devi established Kalakshetra in 1936 near Madras (now Chennai), which remains a leading institution in the pedagogy of bharatanatyam, and represents an early example of the transition of feudally-based, intimate dance traditions into their modern versions in state-sanctioned institutions, changing the respectability of dance as a form of curricular practice rather than mehfil entertainment. Rumya Putcha (2013) explains how this was shaped in meetings of state officials, practitioners, and scholars in the mid-1900s to codify the now eight classical forms of dance. This resulted in the establishment of the Sangeet

Natak Akademi in 1952, as the central state institution for the pedagogy of Indian concert dance forms.

Two years earlier, in 1950, the Government of India created the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and other state [re]organizations, which edified the new Indian government as the central patron for the performance of art forms. This not only included concert and classical art forms, but ritual, folk, and regionally specific traditions of music, dance, and theater. Early on, the ICCR was a body that aimed internationally, performing diplomacy and exchange through living culture and heritage. Today, it continues some of its founding activities: planning exhibitions of Indian culture worldwide; programming state festivals within India; and “empaneling” artists and institutions, to facilitate tours of artists abroad, while touring international artists locally. The practice of empaneling refers to creating an official relationship with an artist, or company of artists, who access ICCR resources to perform and tour. I conducted a series of meetings with ICCR representatives in New Delhi in May 2017, on the topic of state sponsorship of our touring production *BARDO*, led by Joanna-ji, in which I participated as a dancer and administrator. Though the tour proceeded successfully, our ICCR support never panned out.

While the ICCR was state-founded in the twentieth century, other existing institutions were given overtly recognized state sanction through the twentieth century. One example is Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan, West Bengal. Originating as an ashram among members of the illustrious Tagore family in the mid-nineteenth century, Rabindranath Tagore established a co-educational school in the ashram in 1901. The ashram functioned as an educational institution and nationalist hub through the first half of the twentieth century, as well as a center for poetry gatherings and literature. The Government of India officially recognized

the institution as a university in 1951. The Kerala Kalamandalam in Thrissur shares a similar history in having been founded by Vallathol Narayana Menon and Mukunda Raja in the 1930s, for the study of the Keralan “classical” arts. The Indian government later sanctioned the institution as a university for the continued practice of southern Indian arts (see Erdman 1992).

State interventions supported the creation, transmission, and continuation of Indian cultural traditions in the new nation of India, through pedagogy and performance. State-sanctioned institutions like those described above patronized the teachers and diploma programs at the Sangeet Natak Akademi and other academies, as well as awards, festivals, national competitions, and tours. This work continued through the 1980s, which saw the beginning of the design of cultural policy among individuals and departments within the Government of India.

Anita E. Cherian (2016) unpacks the establishment of this cultural policy in her critical reading of two reports that impacted the late-twentieth century state patronage of Indian cultural forms. The *Report of the High Powered Committee Appointed to Review the Performance of the National Akademis and the National School of Drama* (1990) and the *Report of the High Powered Committee Appointed by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India to Review the Seven Zonal Centres* (1994–1995) reflected a change in state policy toward a neoliberal ethos (Cherian 2016: 32–3). The liberalization of India’s economy unfolded during the decade of the 1990s, when India opened its figurative doors to multinational investment and institutional establishment within its geopolitical borders. The Festivals of India were exhibitions of Indian folklore and cultural traditions planned by the Government of India to tour in the UK, US, and France during the first half of the 1980s. Cherian argues that the Festivals communicated this liberalizing ethos, designed as a strategy to create “Brand India” (2016: 37).

Neoliberal cultural branding continued through the establishment of Zonal Cultural

Centres (ZCCs) for the distribution rather than creation of Indian art. These artistic centers are located in cities such as Nagpur, Patiala, Kolkata, and Allahabad, and house state-supported handicraft exhibitions, markets, and *melas* (festivals). The state designed these centers on models of successful corporate companies, and the Indian Tobacco Company (ITC) in particular.

Cherian writes:

Within the dispensation that was being installed, organizations like ITC were worthy of valorization. They provided a state overseeing privatization of its institutions useful instruction in the acquiring, protection and reproduction of capital and investments. It is not surprising, thus, to learn that the ZCCs were to receive funds from the Ministry of Culture, not to develop infrastructure that would enable production but to create a distribution infrastructure. (Cherian 2016: 39)

Cherian's larger argument demonstrates that public (state) and private entities are blurred and commingling enterprises in the patronage of the Indian performing arts, especially toward the turn of the twenty-first century. This paves the way for a discussion on corporates as patrons of the performing arts in India's ecosystem today.

Pathways to Private Patronage

Private patronage for the arts in India includes cultural centers, festivals, galleries, arts collectives, and corporations. The Goethe-Institut, Alliance Française, and the British Council are three organizations that receive funds from the states of their home countries Germany, France, and the UK, respectively. They program performances, workshops, and talks, and activate the arts for community and patron engagement. These institutions are undoubtedly accessible to [upward of] the middle classes in India, wherein programs are meant to work within an infrastructure for intellectual inquiry and cultural programming. They seek to promote the

study of German and French in the cases of the Goethe-Institut and Alliance Française, and all three have interesting links to the history of European colonialism in India (see Horne 2017). During the year 2017, I attended various events related to contemporary culture at large in Bangalore, sponsored by these three institutions. These included exploratory meetings at arts collective 1Shanthiroad and a citywide residency by London-based Company Wayne McGregor (see Chapter 2).

The Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography in Bangalore is an example of a privately-run training institution, which operates as a school, home to a performing unit (STEM Dance Kampni), and hub for community programming. Its fiscal model is similar to many such institutions, which takes in a combination of state, private, and self-generated support. Other programming spaces function as patrons with diverse event calendars. These include the India International Centre and India Habitat Centre in New Delhi, National Centre for the Performing Arts (Mumbai), and smaller organizations throughout India's urban centers that include Meeraqi (Bangalore), Gati Dance Forum (New Delhi), Shoonya Centre for Art and Somatic Practices (Bangalore), and Weavers Studio (Kolkata).

Festivals of the performing arts have been dispersed in their patronage among the state, religious institutions, and the private sector. Privately funded festivals of contemporary dance in particular have begun to establish themselves firmly in the visibility and even governance of the idiom in and outside India. Many of my field collaborators have pointed to the importance of exhibiting and experiencing new work, for which festivals provide a forum. Among these are Kala Godha Arts Festival (Mumbai), *IGNITE!* Festival of Contemporary Dance (Delhi), contemporary dance season at the National Center for the Performing Arts (Mumbai), and Attakkalari India Biennial (Bangalore). The latter indexes the importance of biennales in the

convening of contemporary dance and the contemporary arts, wherein artists working within this arena have the opportunity to see, be seen, and take pulse of the kind of work that is continuing to contour the field (see Bydler 2004). Indian contemporary dancers in frameworks for contemporary dance worldwide, and seek to attend these global biennales to keep abreast of contemporary art-making among non-Indian dancers. This relates to the work Indian contemporary dancers do in general, who jostle between being understood as Indian and/or contemporary in various contexts (see Chapters 2 and 5).

The contemporary dancers with whom I worked in India perform in and between the private institutions and the festivals described above. They emphasize the importance of continued engagement with state-led festivals and shows, which are important statements for lending a larger validity and relevance to their work. Performing in government-sponsored shows is by no means a fiscal draw for artists, but rather a means to remain visible, and even perform a patriotic responsibility to generations prior, who fought to be recognized as Indian arts outfits. This is especially the case among contemporary dance institutions that have grown from classical ones, such as STEM Dance Kampni. In fact, Madhu-didi often described her mother, Maya-didi as a “freedom fighter,” indicating her belief and involvement in an India that transitioned from a colony to independent nation. State support includes official recognition of ICCR empanelment, in which artists and companies join a roster to be sent abroad on tours and international exchanges. In addition to remaining visible within the sanctioned spaces of the Government of India, ICCR empanelment also becomes an opportunity for transnational mobility.

In the twenty-first century, the patronage of the Indian performing arts lies most lucratively in the “corporate show.” Corporations such as multinational IT firms, jewelry

companies, design houses, and many others engage artists as contractual laborers to perform at various events. The idea of the “corporation” in India and South Asia has been theorized, conceptualized, and defined from diverse disciplinary perspectives. Considering Henry S. Turner’s definition, the corporation is a legal entity, in which it appears as an “artificial” or “fictional” person created for its own purposes, that are different from those of the individual members who make it up (2016: 10). Scholars such as Tirthankar Roy (2012) and Nick Robins (2012) have written on the East India Company as one that caused paradigmatic change in India and the world. Robins posits, “The [East India] Company pioneered the shareholder model of corporate ownership and built the foundations for modern business administration” (2012: xii). Thomas Timberg (2014) and Ritu Birla (2009) explain the rise of kinship-based enterprises and the importance of the joint family system in creating industrial companies that have resulted from the enterprising efforts of the Tatas and Birlas, as families who exemplify the generational kinship-business model. These are some of the wealthiest industrial kinships in the history of Asian business.

Industrial magnates that have resulted in the Tata Group and Aditya Birla Group coexist today among IBM, NASSCOM, and Vodafone. The latter companies are byproducts of the liberalization of India’s economy in the 1990s, during which the Government of India opened its doors to foreign investment. Ulka Anjaria describes that this process “gave rise to new social dynamics premised on consumerism and aspiration rather than the older Nehruvian idea of restraint and the deferral of desire. This rhetoric sees India’s high economic growth, buoyed by foreign investment and relaxed import restrictions, as promising a new space for India on the world stage” (forthcoming 2019: 13). This kind of narrative, of India having “opened its doors” in the 1990s, has led to a multinational corporate presence in the form of flagships, call centers,

and other hubs in India, as well as the movement of knowledge professionals or knowledgeable labor in and out of India's borders (see Amrute 2016). It has also led to the rise of Information Technology as a primary export in the global market (see Sen 2016). I discuss some of the compounding effects of the IT sector in Bangalore in Chapter 4.

Many of my collaborators who work as musicians and dancers in India have identified economic liberalization as the driving factor in catalyzing the corporate patronage of the performing arts.³¹ In this system, artists sign contracts to perform at a variety of events, hosted by national and multinational companies (MNCs). Henry Turner (2016), in theorizing the "corporation," explains that employees of these kinds of companies are interpreted as extensions of the larger legal entity that employs them. The ethos of the larger whole is reflected among the human resources that enable its existence. While artists and arts practitioners are not employees of these corporations, they do similar work in signing contracts. They negotiate the time allotted for their performances; manage technical resources and equipment; and even incorporate themes and other elements that reflect the sponsoring event or company. Corporate companies can make requests for certain phrases, references, and other "branding" to be reproduced somehow in moments of performance. Artists and practitioners agree or counter-offer, negotiating compensation accordingly. The power dynamic is not necessarily equal, and shifts from one contract negotiation to another. It is difficult to surmise what is consistent and what changes

³¹ I acknowledge the feedback of dance scholar Joan Erdman, who generously responded to an early version of this chapter in May 2018. She posited that the connection between economic liberalization and corporate patronage is over-determined, since her interlocutors among the eminent Shankar dance family were performing for companies in the 1980s. Given the establishment of the British East India Company as the country's first "corporation," and continued with those like The Gramophone Company in the early 1900s, one might argue that corporate patronage of the performing arts in India preceded political modernity. I bookmark further inquiry into these issues as I develop this chapter past its existence in this dissertation.

from one contract to another, and what kinds of requests can be accommodated on both sides of the proverbial table. I will refer, however, to my field collaborators' perspectives on these issues in the next section.

Corporates as Patrons, Dancers as Corporates

In traveling to and from India as a performer and student of kathak dance during the past ten years, I was familiar with the term “corporate show,” but not what it actually meant. I first came to understand the corporate gig as a genre of patronage in conversations with a friend and fellow dancer, Komal Shah, a Mumbai-based dancer with whom I danced kathak in various contract settings between 2014 and 2015 while she lived briefly in Chicago. During this time, we accepted contracts with various institutions in the city, procured by Kalapriya Center for Indian Performing Arts. I had thought that corporate gigs were similar to “jobbing gigs,” a term I was used to as a classical pianist, when I performed in hotel lobbies and at cocktail events. Here, I performed “background music,” which functioned to help evoke an ambiance, while event attendees chatted, ate, and drank. In these cases, music was not a focal point for attention, but it was noticeable if I stopped playing. Jobbing as a dancer is not quite the same, since background dance functions differently from background music. While hearing background music enables conversation, and perhaps fades into the aural décor of an event, watching background dance disrupts this process, while also doing the same kind of work. There is something about the process of watching, or consuming a performance visually that disrupts the concepts of background and foreground in the context of events at which performance-based activities are ancillary to the event's *raison d'être*. Background dance, however, surely exists.

By way of example, I offer an event that I had thought at the time to be a “corporate gig.” Komal and I, along with two other Chicago-based dancers Kinnari Vora and Anu Bhatt, were contracted to perform at the Redmoon Theater’s annual fundraiser, Lunatique, in May 2015. Redmoon has since closed, but was a large theater company located between the Chicago neighborhoods of Chinatown and East Pilsen. Redmoon’s productions were premised in building



Figure 18: The author (in purple; on the right platform) is joined by a musician and other dancers to perform at the Redmoon Theater’s annual fundraiser in Chicago (May 2015). Photo courtesy of Kalapriya Center for Indian Performing Arts.

large and elaborate structures that were centerpieces from which performances emanated. As we corresponded with Redmoon’s representatives, Komal and I were asked to prepare “our best stuff,” since the event’s attendees were theater and dance connoisseurs. When we arrived at our dress rehearsal a week prior to the event, we were met with a large, vertical structure—a “drum tower”—which we were to ascend and perform on platforms that jutted out from the structure’s central ladder. There was not much room to dance, but rather we were to perform a series of poses in styles of Indian dance. We did this dutifully at the fundraiser a week later, while the event’s attendees watched us and took pictures from below as they sipped glasses of wine and partook in hors d’oeuvres served by waiters and waitresses who glided through the crowds (see Figure 18).

In the case of Lunatique, we dancers were jobbing. We were moving décor that contributed to the ambiance of the event. I figured that this is what was considered a corporate gig. Upon reflecting on the event with Komal, however, jobbing is not necessarily a corporate gig, although it can be. She described to me a phenomenon that I encounter much more in India than I do in my dance contracts in North America. From Komal’s perspective, the quintessential characteristics of corporate gigs are: 1) a dancer must be hired to perform by a corporate entity; and 2) the company has a determining stake in what is performed. In the case of Redmoon’s Lunatique, the corporation was a not-for-profit theater company—an entity that stands on “our side” of the artist-corporation see-saw. Though we were asked to prepare material for a certain kind of audience, the content of our performance lay with us.

Engaging dancers in corporate gigs opens doors for corporations to have a variety of “say” in what is performed, to the extent that artists perform the company’s ethos and aims. Returning to the opening vignette of this chapter, this was certainly the case in my observation of

Bangalore-based STEM Dance Kampni, as I observed the company prepare for their performance at NASSCOM's annual Leadership Summit in Mumbai in February 2017. The company took about a week to choreograph, design, and rehearse the performance of "Akash" (Sky), which included a new ten-minute choreography, stitching of new costumes for the eleven dancers, assembly of props, and the production of new music with the company's music director, Praveen D Rao (Praveen Sir).

13 February 2017. Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography.

The studio is outfitted with four aerial silks hanging from the ceiling, somewhat symmetrically dispersed across the approximated stage space. The performance space will presumably be a lot larger. The seven girls are dressed in almost-done versions of their costumes: in one of three colors of gagra skirts, that billow and swirl as they move, in either magenta, fuchsia, or saffron-like orange. Their sleeveless blouses are fitted in brocades that correspond to the colors of their skirts, with gold foil-print ornamenting the pinks and oranges. The four boys match the girls, wearing cropped dhoti-like billowy pants, made from the fabric of the skirts, with a thick brocade belt featuring the same gold-foil design.

I watch from downstage-left. Madhu-didi is seated downstage-center, with her back facing the mirrors, looking on with her characteristic, choreographic eye, concentrating on the visual dissonances that must be cleaned up to put on the show. I pop up every so often to help turn on and off the music—a studio track that is open in its waveform, to help cue quick stops and starts. I recognize some of the musical sections from our midnight studio session last week, watching Keerthi and Madhu-didi explain to

Praveen Sir how to manipulate the existing piece to work in the “corporate voiceover.” I’m always so impressed watching audio engineers work with their gear. Praveen Sir and his partner worked in Logic, I think, and I can still hear the click, click, click of the mouse as they shaped, twisted, dragged, dropped, and manipulated the tracks into their multiple-monitor setup. What were horizontal mini waveforms in textures of recitation, synth, and live recordings of Praveen Sir’s percussive sampling onscreen have been compressed into a single wave file, wherein the textures work themselves out into various foregrounds and backgrounds of musical space that provide the aural backdrop to STEM’s choreography.

The above vignette is written from my fieldnotes and video snippets of STEM Dance Kampni’s dress rehearsal of “Akash,” the night before they left for Mumbai (see Figure 19). In my notes, I refer to a studio session I attended with Madhu-didi and Keerthi Kumar. Here, I watched the process of musical creation—not from ground zero, but from an existing track that had to incorporate a voiceover mandated by NASSCOM. This process was one of manipulation of an existing track that the company had presumably used before. Praveen pushed, pulled, elongated, repeated, and squeezed in musical material that corresponded to Madhu-didi’s directions for what was choreographed to figure in “here,” “there,” “at the beginning of this section,” and the end of the next. Though the spaces for sound and choreo-graphing were separate, in Praveen Sir and Natya’s studios respectively, the processes were intertwined and interdependent. Most importantly, time spent on these processes became budget line items that



Figure 19: STEM Dance Kampni rehearsal for the NASSCOM corporate show. Photo taken by the author (February 2017).

were part of negotiations for how much STEM Dance Kampni could quote and charge NASSOM for services rendered.

The piece's choreography was created similarly. Madhu-Didi described the piece as an example of "pressure cooker choreography," referring to her having designed the movement quickly. I watched a short video excerpt I had taken on the evening of the company's dress rehearsal, as I prepared a draft of this chapter months after concluding my fieldwork with STEM. Having taken dance classes at Natya, and rehearsing and performing with STEM, I observed

movements and sequences that I had learned and observed in other choreographies. I describe this video excerpt in the following section, which is meant to simulate the notes that I take to cue and remember choreography.

Piano: [transposed] -F-G-F-E-D; -F-G-F-G-A, syncopated; just after the downbeats of the clear four-count. This call-response phrase is repeated three times, upon which a trio performs an excerpt from “Dance of Light” in Natya’s larger production Vajra. The dancers move, purposefully into stage center-center, while the others hold formations around them. The movement begins with the circling of their arms into a left-leg vertical balance. They continue with two steps, walking ahead diagonally while the arms and head move in opposition—a sequence that always seemed counterintuitive to my body. Cartwheel. Floor dive toward upstage right, eliding with a quartet, who move in a quick sequence into a kalari lunge, and shift weight immediately into an asana, pointing their arms and heads vertically up to the ceiling. The sequence is move-shift weight-hold. Piano fades on [transposed] A, and the music’s scape empties, save a click-track-like phrase from metal cymbals. High, low, low, low. Variant.

Booming male voice: “. . . BUT, THEY ALL HAVE ONE THING IN COMMON . . .”

Bols: Dum, takataka dum, takataka dum, takataka dum, taka dum, taka dum.

Repeat. All the dancers resume movement, walking around the room in seemingly random directions in the “contemporary walk.” The walk is purposeful, the upper body is flexed, and the arms don’t dangle, but are held at the body’s sides with somewhat of a curved shape in the elbows—taut, and with energy. The walk finishes with two quick

spins, which we performed in the company's piece "Taka Diku." The dancers take off, arms in field goal position, similar to formation transition in "Dance of Light."

Open "aah" voice enters the track, and the dancers take cue from both an internal four-count and the signaling of the particular track changes. A group of the girls head downstage-center, and pose, while the others move upstage, and perform a rehearsed freeze. Headstands, lifts, and arm-lines create a larger shape that seems to be a signature feature of STEM's vocabulary. The downstage girls run upstage, gathering around a second freeze.

Booming male voice: ". . . THE DESIRE TO RISE ABOVE THE REST . . ."

The dancers lift Adrika, Simba-like, into the air, as a trumpet performs a half cadence. Takataka dums travel to the background of the track, while the dancers disperse from center-center to the fringes of the stage, moving in the contemporary walk. The girls gather downstage-center, some facing forward, the others facing backward. They hinge from their waists, left and right creating the effect of paper blowing in the wind, seeming to follow the cues of the two-tone-phrased trumpet calls. The boys begin to ascend the four silks, dramatically; largely. All of the textures in the track come to the foreground in a brief climax, then fade to silence as the boys freeze at the tops of their silks.

Booming male voice: ". . . BUT THE JOURNEY IS NOT EASY . . ."

The above vignette is written in the spirit of others in this dissertation, in which I try to create an empathetic connection between the reader and the mover. In addition, I seek to establish a

kinesthetic connection between the reader and myself, watching the video and being stimulated to recall certain choreography and conjure imagery as I would in a rehearsal or class.

The video excerpt illustrates the repurposing of choreography in “Akash,” in which snippets and sequences are taken from other company repertoire and placed in this piece. Madhu-didi, the dancers, and Praveen Sir create the new piece in the one-week time frame allotted, graphing movement that may be already familiar to the dancers, and is easy to set and organize into formation. It corresponds to the content of NASSCOM’s mandated voiceover, which narrates a story of how leaders reach new heights. These are the requirements outlined in STEM’s contract with NASSCOM, and performed live. The resulting production is one that matches STEM’s returns for engaging in the event, and suffices the contract as written. In many ways, STEM’s rallying in one week to enable the gig to happen is a very economical use of time and resources, reusing choreography and music, while taking in monetary compensation that allows the company to continue its other creative pursuits.

J.P. Singh (2011) terms the corporate patronage of the performing arts in “market networks,” which he explains is a response to the current moment. He states:

There is also increasing flexibility in terms of the networks that make possible particular types of creative products, especially as market networks increasingly supplant state-led patronage networks. Both the patronage and market networks are now also global in nature, leading to ever greater degrees of hybridity and cross-fertilization. Once, patronage led to worries over the freedom of the lonely artist, but the new worries concern cultural commodification in which artistic content may be diluted or dumbed down for mass consumption and production. (Singh 2011: 22)

I spoke about corporate gigs in both informal conversations and interviews with musicians and dancers. Some of my interlocutors reflected the anxieties associated with Singh’s stated “dilution” of artistic content in corporate environments.

Trilochan Kampli, a reputed and sought-after Bangalore-based tabla player, expressed his cynicism for the “good” in corporate gigs. He stated in an interview with me that HR or event management companies seek artists to perform for launch parties, meetings, mergers, and other events, and most often engage in contracts with artists whom they have engaged before. In response to my question, “Why do companies want music at all?” He explained:

Just like that. I don’t really understand the purpose of it. I have told many people that if you want this, you get CDs, you just play it. Why do you want artists that come, right? They say, “we are creating opportunities for artists.” I don’t see any opportunity there. Sometimes people might feel “okay, we are getting paid. Anyway people listen to us, or they don’t. We don’t care, we just sit there, do our work and come back.” So I don’t really understand the purpose of music if you are going there and nobody is paying attention to you. You are just in the background. Some people sometimes come, they are drunk, they praise you sometimes. Sometimes they say, “okay enough now.” (Interview with Trilochan Kampli, 16 February 2018)

Trilochan detailed that artists take corporate gigs solely for the money, which is plentiful—sometimes as much as five, six, and ten lakh INR per show.³² He performs in classical and “light-classical” styles at these gigs. Sometimes he is slotted as a background musician, to contour the social environment of the event. Other times, he is the main event at a staged show, and is often asked to collaborate with another musician—perhaps in a conventionally classical solo or accompanying tabla concert, or in a classical-adjacent presentation. Trilochan’s general perspective on his engagement with corporates in our interview was cynical, as it pertained to the type of music requested, the artistic knowledge of the individual or company writing the contract, and the experience while performing at the event.

Trilochan’s opinions on corporate shows come from a place of artistic success, having achieved the status of being able to select the kinds of performances, gigs, and contracts in which

³² A lakh is 100,000 in number. One lakh INR is equivalent to approximately 1,445 USD at the current exchange rate of 1 USD to 69 INR.

he engages. Fiscal survival really is not in question for him, as he acknowledged in our interview, but rather claims to “true” art, or an audience’s worthiness to experience his artistic output. His cynical opinions are contoured by the idea of artists having “sold out” in signing corporate contracts for performances, wherein the terms of the contract lead to the death of true art, and an imprisonment to the terms that bind the agreement.

The members of STEM Dance Kampni, on the other hand, seem to locate agency as artists in working with their corporate patrons. Keerthi Kumar detailed in an interview with me the ability with which STEM’s administrative members could dictate terms in corporate contracts, indicating a paradigmatic difference in comparison to other fiscal agreements. He explained:

Ideally you prefer you know a white set [backdrop] with the way you look at it in a proscenium theater but you can’t expect that here. But on the other hand, corporate events also have the money to bring in good technology, which means they bring in good equipment. And we never compromise on the equipment. We send them a clear tech rider, we say “this is what is needed.” So of course, how they set a few parameters, we set a few parameters also. So it’s not one-way traffic here. We set clear parameters, saying “these are our requirements, this is how it should be.” We have our principles, we have our rules, we have our requirements in terms of this many green rooms of this size, with this kind of lighting, this kind of sound, and this decision that we’ll perform and we will not stay back for a long time. . . . for example, we often get these inquiries of performances for award nights, where there will be one sequence in the beginning, and then we have to wait for the awards to get over. Then second sequence, then wait for ten more awards, then third sequence. Then we say “no, that’s not going to happen.” Because the way we present our performances, there’s a tempo to it. We say “maximum we’ll wait for one hour for these three sequences, so plan it accordingly.” So of course we set our rules too. (Interview with Keerthi Kumar, 12 April 2017)

Keerthi later detailed the process of accommodating special requests and changes to the contract, referring to the clarity and professionalism with which they, as artists, have been able to demand and advocate for themselves. He even refers to parameters and principles, indicating associations

with artistic virtue, merit, and some of the opposing dynamics suggested by Trilochan Kampli in working with corporate houses.

I suspect that Keerthi, and later, Madhu-didi's statements to me about their corporate work is an appeal to consider themselves as hard-working, professional artists, likening them to the corporate professionals with whom they engaged in service contracts. Ethnomusicologist Anna Morcom (2013) has theorized professionalization in her termed "embourgeoisement" of dance. She argues that Bollywood dance has resulted in a distancing between middle-class professional dance, and that of illicit communities like historical courtesans and today's bar girls. These include *kothis* and *hijras*, especially in the wake of industry professionals like Shiamak Davar, who has worked to "corporatize" Bollywood dance transnationally. In doing so, he has codified reproducible systems of teaching and company-izing the form such that Shiamak Davar is no longer just a household name in Bollywood dance, but a recognizable brand.

Corporates work hard, and dancers work hard. Dancers quote corporates in sums of money that they believe they deserve as creative professionals. Madhu-didi elaborated,

Like this [government] show we did the other day . . . they'll pay us in under sixty days they say, and I know it's going to take them six months to chase them and get the money. You know the corporate houses it's very clear. I have a contract, get paid, finish. If they're sponsoring the evening, then they're very clear. "I need this ad space, need my banner up, I need my name on your letterhead" . . . whatever. It's a clear thing, and you're paid, and you're done. Transparent. And also I have a lot of, I would say the corporate ethic if there's such a word, or etiquette, turning up on time somewhere, keeping my word, because for them maybe it has to do with money, but with me I've always had that. So this thing of "oh she's an artist she's going to be late" . . . doesn't work for me. You know? Because I don't think a Balasaraswati or somebody else, because it was also about discipline.³³ When you have a discipline you can do riyaz everyday, you better turn up on time for a meeting or a rehearsal, it doesn't matter. No? So for me I

³³ The late Balasaraswati (1918–1984) was an acclaimed bharatanatyam dancer and pioneer who hailed from a devadasi background. She was the first Indian dancer to hold a named residency at an American university, which continues at Wesleyan University today. See O'Shea (2007).

work very easily with corporate houses. (Interview with Madhu Nataraj, 14 June 2017)

As a performer myself, these contracts sound almost too good to be true. It is hardly ever the case that the equipment in a tech rider is present as per requested. Green rooms are a mere myth in my experience, and the expectation of meals, water, and other provisions start and stop at the tray of sandwiches, or “bandwiches,” that never seem to be enough. It is understood that working artists must be flexible enough to endure these kinds of surprises in any gig. Keerthi and Madhu-didi’s comments about the professionalism of corporate contracts seem to indicate circumstances in which working artists *can* make demands and expect them to be reconciled with a large payout, for creative work that has always been painted by my patrons, at least, as superfluous.

Keerthi and Madhu-didi’s perspectives, however, offer a lens into how they see themselves as industry professionals—as value-makers in competitive networks and the production of Indian culture at large. In our interview, Madhu-didi stated that as one of the first on the [Bangalore] scene in contemporary dance and performing at corporate gigs, she was the first to create a patronage, audience, and resource base for the form. From her perspective, she galvanized a renewed interest in the arts among IT professionals, representing a diverse-in-class group of income-aspirational workers, who would have never watched a classical or folk dance piece before. Madhu-didi’s contemporary dance aesthetic and corporate ethic encourage engagement with the Indian performing arts and heritage in fresh ways.

The following interview excerpt describes the production *Vajra*, which was commissioned by India-based jewelry house Ganjam. Madhu-didi remarked:

You wouldn’t believe it, I kept telling them “keep it for two nights.” And their marketing person said, “tsk, people don’t come for dance.” Chowdiah has the capacity of thousand two hundred. We fitted thousand four hundred and fifty people somehow. There were four hundred people standing outside. He refused to

even put a screen outside, that man. That marketing guy. And he came and told me, “I should have listened to you Madhu.” And I said “I told you this for ages.” And four hundred people waiting outside, I’m getting angry texts “I came from Whitefield!” Yusef Adukal and all are coming, and not getting space. But you can’t even enter the foyer. So that was great. (Ibid.)

Madhu-didi’s sentiments reflect her larger beliefs in the significance of Indian contemporary dance having created a larger and current ecosystem for engaging with Indian culture and heritage through the performing arts. She locates agency in corporate patrons that she has not been able to locate in government shows, for example, run by government officials whom she has to chase to receive the small amounts that they offer for shows.

Dancer-researcher Veena Basavarajaiah (2018) investigates corporate patronage among classical dancers in Bangalore. Her interlocutors voice some of the same conclusions about the limitations and affordances of corporate gigs. She observes:

Riya, a solo Bharatanatyam performer, describes a corporate show as . . . something that has a minimal artistic mileage and substantial monetary compensation. They are also usually shows that require just one or two pieces that serve as a cultural exposure for people who are not usually art connoisseurs and who may or may not have any knowledge and interest in a very introspective, intellectual or emotionally stimulating performance, but are more interested in a cultural distraction from a series of meetings and work. (Basavarajaiah 2018: 99)

Basavarajaiah later states that dancers locate agency in the kind of fiscal mobility they are afforded in working corporate gigs, which enables them to self-produce other work, participate in festivals, and do “art for art’s sake” (2018: 99–101). Her interlocutors repeat the kind of rhetoric echoed in my interview with Trilochan Kampli, who talks about the artless space of the corporate gig, only a boon to an artist’s bank account.

Brahma Prakash notes the relationship between contemporary art and the neoliberal regime, in that they are cyclically co-productive (2016: 140). While contemporary art continues to be performed in elite and capially driven spaces, its corporate patrons support and consume it

to “raise their social status and expand their entrepreneurship” (ibid.). He calls for contemporary dancers to leave corporate and elite spaces, disturbing constructed ideas of spectatorship. This rather bleak perspective adds to those of my interlocutors, who comment on the limited, while also motivating and empowering parameters of the corporate patronage of the performing arts in India.

In another cultural context, ethnomusicologist Mark Laver (2015) investigates the corporate patronage of Canada’s most visible jazz festivals by Toronto Dominion (TD) Bank. He writes:

If the main purposes for the festival sponsorship are (among other things) to generate goodwill and to reinforce TD’s status as a valued member of the community who works to protect the community’s interests, it is vital that audiences sense the economic fragility of jazz music, and that they understand TD’s role in ensuring its survival. Hence, gratitude is a pervasive theme at every event. . . . At the same time, however, TD works to ensure that audiences aren’t made to feel that they are being manipulated—that their gratitude isn’t being exploited too nakedly. If the festival were too obviously corporatized, the music would lose the fragile quality of anti-commercialism for which audiences feel so grateful. On the other hand, TD’s corporate presence must be just visible enough that we know where to direct our gratitude. (Laver 2015: 210)

It is clear that there are intersecting anxieties and desires at play in TD Bank’s sponsorship of Canada’s TD jazz festivals. Support for jazz as an economically “fragile” tradition is balanced in just the right amount of brand visibility to ensure that consumer-audience members have the “right” kind of experience.

It is not too much of a stretch to hypothesize a similar balancing act among Indian corporations, which sign contracts with artists and celebrities across the gamut of classical, contemporary, popular, and even folk cultures. Here, I argue that the patronage of Indian traditions in particular is seen as a corporate responsibility to shareholders, employees, and attendees at events, who can gather and take in an Indian experience. This is rather continuous

with state efforts, like the establishment of the Zonal Cultural Centres and the Festivals of India, which Cherian (2016) argues are distributive in nature. Corporate events distribute Indian traditions in similar ways, and are perhaps seen as benevolent investors in the cultural sector as a result.

Scholars have studied corporate patronage of visual art, in practices of corporate collecting, office lobbies as gallery spaces, and alliances among American magnates such as John D. Rockefeller and museums in the twentieth century (see Martorella 1990; Wu 2002). Similar processes have taken place in India, and I will refer to a case study among Tata Trusts later in this chapter. Chin-Tao Wu states, “By rewarding artistic endeavour, corporations have been seeking to place themselves squarely in the spotlight and to elevate themselves to the level of taste arbiters of contemporary culture. In short business influence is by now well advanced in every phase of contemporary art—in its production, its dissemination and its reception” (2002: 2). He argues that modern, neoliberal corporations align themselves with the patronage of contemporary art in particular, wherein contemporary art serves as “material and symbolic value” for corporations to be seen as taste-makers within their larger social markets. I return to the ways in which Bangalore-based artists navigate contracts with corporates in the next section.

The city of Bangalore especially has become India’s symbol, or “shining” star. I refer here to the 2004 slogan circulated by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), India’s right-wing political party that currently presides over India’s central government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The slogan “India Shining” was meant to conjure feelings of economic optimism for the resulting products and byproducts of the liberalization of the Indian economy almost fifteen years earlier. These narratives are mapped onto the relationship between Bangalore, neoliberalism, and modernity, which is reflected in Indian contemporary dance as the

most ideal form for corporate patronage. I discuss these issues further in considering broader models for corporate patronage, and their intertwined associations with the contemporary aesthetic.

Beyond the Corporate Gig

Further than the gig as a model for corporate patronage of the arts, several private institutions have begun to engage in support for the arts as a social enterprise. These models seek to support the production of art among communities of artisans and practitioners for social good. One of the most visible enterprises for this kind of work can be seen in state-mandated Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The Government of India amended its Companies Act in 2013 to state that businesses with certain minimum annual incomes would be required to donate a portion of their net profits to projects for social development in India (Singh, Holvoet, and Pandey 2018: 2).

Bidyut Chakrabarty (2011), writing earlier than the Government of India's announcement of new company mandates, historicizes CSR in the context of philanthropic enterprises that were founded and built during the establishment of India's early industrial corporations in the nineteenth century. They continued through Gandhian structures of "Trusteeship," which gained traction during the movement toward Indian Independence. CSR focus primarily on issues of urban and rural poverty, health, and environmental sustainability, but a very small portion is focused among the continued production and support for the arts as Indian cultural heritage. Chakrabarty (2011) argues that the institutionalization of CSR into the 2010s is the result of the liberalization of India's economy, wherein the state was less effective in contributing to social development than the country's ever-expanding businesses. He continues:

CSR is both a device/instrument and a process. As a device, CSR is the articulation of welfare schemes that the corporate houses proclaim to fulfill. This is also a process whereby the private sector gains acceptance with the public by projecting its image of being responsible to the stakeholders. The company is not there merely to protect the interests of the shareholders, but also to safeguard the ecosystem supporting their production and thus helping them to augment profit. . . . CSR is basically institutionalized philanthropy that enables the business houses to discharge their social responsibilities. What motivates private entrepreneurs to engage in CSR activities is perhaps their moral commitment to those contributing to their business goals. (Chakrabarty 2011: 149)

CSR structures enable corporations to become curators of development, whether directly through the establishment of research and projects, or indirectly, by funding existing institutions to do so.

Tamsin Bradley, Avijit Chakravarti, and Jane Rowan (2013) discuss a related venture in the form of social enterprise. Defined as a business model that is built around activities already being pursued by a community, they state that social enterprise differs from CSR in that the former is developed *from* communities rather than enacted on them. They focus on the enterprise Art as Livelihood, which mobilizes historical practices of “traditional” art-making among communities of disenfranchised artisans in West Bengal. The authors write:

Art livelihood projects are generally developed on the assumption that culture is a great enabler. Cultural capital, in the form of oral and performing art traditions, is an asset for developing rural enterprises. In the art for livelihood initiative looked at in this article, cultural heritage is revitalized through training, exposure, and promotion. New markets are created and new brands developed to promote traditional performing and visual arts and crafts. Heritage becomes a means of livelihood and empowerment. (Bradley, Chakravarti, and Rowan 2013: 86)

In the social enterprise model, the arts are potential terrain for empowerment and economic gain. This rhetoric, similar to that used in CSR, is premised on the notion that art-making is “cultural heritage.” It is “traditional,” and by extension, must be preserved. This creates the need for social enterprise and CSR, wherein corporations can access social development via practices of art

among communities that are socially and economically marginalized, whether among the urban or rural poor in India.

Contemporary dancers must participate in a creative choreography of bookkeeping, wherein a fiscal year might feature state-patronized shows and efforts, festivals, self-produced (and “at-a-loss”) productions, and corporate gigs. Contemporary dancers, however, are by no means systemically disenfranchised in India. Among the contemporary dancers, teachers, and studios I have encountered, there are certainly processes in place to support low-income trainees and scholarship students. Contemporary dancers are not a homogeneous group, and consist of a variety of ethnic, socioeconomic, and caste backgrounds. Nevertheless, the endeavor of Indian contemporary dance is a privileged space of labor. Indian contemporary dance is not an example of a hereditary or even community-based practice that can be mobilized to generate income or social standing. Rather, it is a choice, calling, or innovation to existing forms of high art that impacts other elites in the various strata of Indian society (see Prakash 2016). I posit that contemporary dance is not exactly “cultural heritage,” drawing from available rhetoric in CSR and social enterprise categorical vocabularies. It does, however, invoke corporate philanthropy as sources of patronage, as in the case of the Tata Trusts.

According to their website, the Tata Trusts are two larger sources of money—dividends drawn from endowments that were set up by Sirs Ratan and Dorabji Tata in 1919 and 1932, respectively. The Tata family is representative of a hereditary, family-based corporation that grew from the industrial production of steel in the nineteenth century. In fact, Chakrabarty (2011) locates CSR today in a history of philanthropy in India, in which the Tatas were central

figures.³⁴ The Tata Trusts operate in sectors similar to CSR and social enterprise initiatives, including environmental sustainability, health, and solutions to both urban and rural poverty, as well as one of their website “tabbed” categories “Arts, Crafts & Culture.” The parent page for this development category is written as rhetorically similar to the way cultural heritage is described in other social initiatives, wherein work in the material arts in particular is channeled to create sustainable livings for artisan communities. Nestled within this parent page, however, is a “Programme” titled “Performing Arts,” which is dedicated to maintaining viable professions for performing artists. In June 2018, when I first visited this web page to cite it in this chapter, there seemed to be an emphasis on contemporary dance:

Tata Trusts’ Performing Arts Programme focuses on the revival of performing arts with a strong emphasis on enhancing the livelihoods of artistes. As newer forms enter the performing arts in India, Tata Trusts looks to support contemporary dance and more inclusive music that is rooted in tradition yet incorporating contemporary influences while continuing to support regional theatre and traditional music. (“Performing Arts”)³⁵

The image that supported this text was a production still from a performance by Bangalore-based Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts. As of November 2018, however, the overview copy text and cover image had been changed, describing additional current projects among forms of jazz that have developed in the Indian Northeast, as well as training in a style of rural theater that is prominent in the state of Tamil Nadu.

In September 2018, I spoke on the phone with Deepika Sorabjee, who heads the Media, Arts and Crafts Portfolio at Tata Trusts. She clarified that with respect to the performing arts, the Trusts do not fund productions, but rather innovate with community partners to sustain training

³⁴ The Tata family co-founded and funded the National Center for the Performing Arts in Mumbai, which remains one of India’s most prestigious performing arts venues.

³⁵ See <https://www.tatatrusters.org/section/inside/Performing-Arts>, accessed May 16, 2018.

programs. We talked briefly about a new program, in the form of an MA in practice-based dance, now hosted in the School of Culture and Creative Expressions at Ambedkar University Delhi. The Tata Trusts launched a pilot of this program as an intensive workshop, in which gurus of chhau and *kutiyattam* (a form of Keralan theater) contributed to the program along with prominent practitioners of Indian contemporary dance. These include Jayachandran Palazhy (Attakkalari, Bangalore), Mandeep Raikhy (Gati Dance Forum, New Delhi), and Ranjana Dave (Gati Dance Forum, New Delhi), who helped lead the project with the Trusts, to create a sustainable university curriculum for dance. On the importance of contemporary dance to the Trusts' mandate, Deepika elaborated:

So that is why we chose the program called “Way of the Masters” where the gurus from chhau and kutiyattam came, because it’s addressing vocabulary in Indian contemporary dance in a particular way. Whereas [contemporary dance] is a modern movement that is universal, like around the world, but . . . when you are in a country with traditions of other forms, it’s only natural as an artist you would be looking everywhere. And seeing, because a lot of even traditional Indian forms have benefitted a lot in the “Way of the Masters” program of seeing how contemporary dance in India is developing, and what it has done to their practice. So this kind of exchange was artistically very vibrant and necessary instead of just borrowing from the West and just establishing something that just looked . . . and didn’t have any expression of its own. (Interview with Deepika Sorabjee, 18 September 2018)

According to Deepika, who represents a corporate philanthropic institution for the performing arts, contemporary dance has a place in the continued practice and preservation of cultural heritage. The focus on contemporary forms provides into relief the ways in which artists connect heritage to living traditions today.

Contemporary dancers choreograph vocabulary from among Indian folk and text-based traditions in ways that are legible as high art. On one hand, this enables the persistence of an elitism in Indian contemporary dance, wherein forms of folk, ritual, and other movement-based

practices “become contemporary” in choreographies that only move through elite spaces, such as dance “galleries” (Prakash 2016: 142). In other words, Indian contemporary dancers are mobile in their ability to frame “other” vocabularies as contemporary (see Chapter 2). They exhibit this in corporate gigs, in addition to other kinds of performances, wherein practitioners of otherwise “non-contemporary” forms are less invited into lucrative corporate contracts, where the exhibition of cultural heritage is much less the priority than creating spectacular choreographic pieces. Indian contemporary dancers create these pieces as agentic elites. On the other hand, training programs and educational models that engage with gurus, masters, and practitioners of non-contemporary forms allow for the interfacing of institutions with underrepresented communities and traditions in spaces of intellectual inquiry. It is this mandate that contributes to what many contemporary dancers identify as the “Indian” qualifier of contemporaneity, wherein they define a modernity for themselves that is diametrically not Western (see Chapter 2). In exchange, underrepresented traditions in the mainstream are lent a visibility in interactions with more mobile, contemporary bodies, especially in the arena of the corporate gig.

I offer a final model for the corporate patronage of the performing arts in India, through the omnipresent *Coke Studio*. Though not a model that supports or renders direct visibility to contemporary dance, *Coke Studio* is built on contemporizing as a process, and an ethos that I interpret to be akin to the production of contemporary dance and the music that is created for it. Sponsored by the Coca-Cola company, *Coke Studio* refers to both a television series and popular music franchise. It began as none of these things in Brazil, wherein Coca-Cola sponsored a series of one-off collaborations to produce pre-packaged music to be loaded onto Nokia mobile phones.

Coke Studio Pakistan was formulated as televised moments of music production by record producer and composer Rohail Hyatt, along with his band Vital Signs in 2008. *Coke*

Studio India aired in 2011 as an MTV effort, to create a body of popular music repertoire that existed outside of India's film industries (Unni 2011). In both *Coke Studio Pakistan* and *India*, prominent musicians who perform in popular, folk, and ritual forms in the subcontinent are selected to collaborate on track(s) with a featured "house band," which changes from season to season. The house band features a rock music backline that usually includes a drumkit, bass guitar, rhythm guitar, and keyboard, played by musicians who also demonstrate facility on other instruments—both Western and South Asian—and can be seen playing these instruments throughout a given season. *Coke Studio Pakistan* is currently in its eleventh season, while *Coke Studio India* is on hiatus after four seasons. A representative show features the collaborative performance of a track that is behind-the-scenes in its affect. It is edited and enhanced during months of post-production work following the filming of collaborative in-studio performances. Prominent and repeat collaborators include a star-studded roster, among the likes of Abida Parveen and Rahat Fateh Ali Khan, Bollywood composers Salim-Sulaiman Merchant, and Manganiyar musicians from Rajasthan.³⁶

The *Coke Studio* model has revolutionized the popular music industry in both India and Pakistan. In India, *Coke Studio* has accomplished a decentering of popular music, away from the Indian film industries as the main sites of popular music production. In Pakistan, journalists and cultural critics point to the double-edged sword of a patronage system that seems to be the "only" option in markets for music patronage (see Tanweer 2012). Scholar, musician, and producer Rakae Jamil (2017) further comments on *Coke Studio Pakistan* having changed the externally consumed image of Pakistan and Pakistanis. He writes:

³⁶ *Coke Studio Bangladesh* is another offshoot of this model, and has featured musicians from the *baul* community, including renowned performer Parvathy Baul.

In a country where the socio-cultural environment is plagued with political turmoil and ethnic violence, digital recording studios have helped construct alternative, more progressive images of Pakistan . . . the global reach of *Coke Studio*'s emergent and established artists through new media . . . [has] played a critical role in promoting Pakistani musical talent and intangible cultural heritage to the world. (Jamil 2017: 112)

Najia Mukhtar (2015) goes so far to say that *Coke Studio* offers an altogether different face of Pakistani Islam altogether, in its constant collaboration with Sufi musicians.

It is undeniable that *Coke Studio* and the Coca-Cola company lends visibility, ability, and mobility to musicians who are patronized with this framework. Jamil (2017), as well as journalists and other culture writers have acknowledged one of the most ubiquitous criticisms of the model—that even with the diverse collaborations among musicians across the subcontinent, the resulting tracks all “sound the same.” Furthermore, for folk and ritual music to remain viable, they must be synthesized into packaged tracks that feature backline instrumentation, formulaic chord progressions, and the rises and falls of a popular, digitally produced track to be consumable. The corporate patronage of music in the case of *Coke Studio* creates its own musical aesthetic—a process that is not dissimilar in Indian contemporary dance. While Indian contemporary dancers choreograph pieces that draw on the staging of “other” movement vocabularies to create an avant-garde, contemporary whole, the *Coke Studio* model does so in an analogous way, collaborating with musicians from parts of South Asia to create a recognizable product. While Indian contemporary dancers mobilize their many vocabularies for performance in different kinds of spaces, they also demonstrate their mobility in reframing and recontextualizing the material itself.

In 2016, a larger research project hosted at the University of Chicago brought me into contact with the Noida-based Peninsula Studios, which runs *Coke Studio*'s *Roots* project. I

visited and toured the Peninsula Studios in November 2017, facilitated generously by its founder-director Subroto Chattopadhyay, who offered insight into this particular offshoot of the Coca-Cola music sponsorship. In *Coke Studio Roots* the Peninsula Studios are tasked with locating folk and ritual musicians as studio collaborators, who work in borderland areas between India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka. Similar to the *Coke Studio* setup, these musicians record with a house band, creating a high quality, industry-standard, studio-produced single. While touring the Peninsula Studios, Subroto told me of the empowering effects of the musicians' collaborations in the *Roots* project—musicians who are otherwise considered marginalized and disenfranchised practitioners. The opportunity to collaborate with *Roots* and the Peninsula Studios is presented as nothing but positive, raising the prestige of these musicians, and allowing them to leave with a nicely packaged product—a track—that can be used to publicize their work as artists.

On the other hand, it has been noted by community organizers who work with these musicians that following the musicians' return to their rural homes in mostly borderland villages, they experience the liminal effects and consequences of having had a taste of access to studio production. They return to their lives as occupational musicians, performing at weddings and other rites of passage under the assumption that the collaborative and contemporary methods of working with other instruments and arrangements of otherwise “traditional” repertoire is needed for survival. The resulting repertoire that is meant to commemorate ritual rites is lost in translation among the musicians who have had an unsustainable taste of corporate contemporaneity. What is the corporate footprint in this case? In all cases of corporate patronage, beyond having to answer to corporately driven mandates for artistic and practice-based production, what is the residue of the corporate-art interactive moment?

Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, I have sought to parse the results, consequences, and phenomena associated with the corporate patronage of Indian contemporary dance. My ethnographic point of departure in this discussion has been the “corporate gig,” wherein Indian [multinational] corporations engage producers of contemporary dance in contracts to perform at various events. These producers include dancers, musicians, music directors, costume designers, tailors, lighting designers, and technicians. I add corporate patronage to a larger ecosystem, in which patrons for the Indian performing arts have included wealthy individuals, nobles, ranked members of court hierarchies, colonial government officials, the “state” upon the formation of the Government of India, and other international institutions, partners, and private entities. I place the corporate gig against the backdrop of other kinds of corporate patronage for contemporary dance, and the performing arts at large, whereby CSR and social enterprise initiatives, and the mighty *Coke Studio* have aroused new and shifting models for the continuum of corporately driven art that is also considered cultural and intangible heritage.

The corporate gig indexes larger models for the corporate patronage of the performing arts in India. Corporates curate the artists that they engage in contracts to perform at their events, which in effect become statements on their fictive ethos as socially engaged, culturally knowledgeable, and in some cases taste-makers themselves. Some of the working artists who participate in events interpret corporate shows as the dilution of their art forms and selling out. Others, like those at Natya/STEM, locate agency in corporate contracts, likening themselves to the corporate professionals whom they entertain. Madhu-didi even goes so far to suggest that

contemporary dance in particular creates an ecosystem for a renewed appreciation among these professionals, in the Indian performing arts at large.

Anthropologist Shreya Sreenath offered an alternative reading of contract labor in a paper that he presented at the Annual Conference on South Asia in Madison, Wisconsin in October 2018. Sreenath acknowledged that contracts and the “gig economy,” a product of neoliberalism in India, have pervaded the nation’s many industries. He argued that for Dalit laborers in Bangalore, corporate contracts are a new way to re-articulate caste stratification and violence among laboring bodies. Sreenath provided two case studies in the Bangalore sanitation industry to demonstrate his argument. In one, a restaurant in the hip district of Indiranagar contracted two Dalit laborers to fix its broken sanitation system. Within minutes, the two individuals were exposed to lethal gases and died immediately, with no clause for recourse, insurance, or protection in their contracts. Sreenath (2018) demonstrated that for Dalits, corporate contracts edify and reify the immobility and violence that take shape among low-caste communities in particular.

This stark example of the underbelly of corporate contracts and India’s neoliberal gig economy illustrates precisely how contemporary dancers move in privileged ways through systems of patronage. In most cases, corporate gigs are the most lucrative in a given fiscal year for contemporary dancers and dance companies. They allow dancers to subsist while practitioners devote their artistic and creative efforts to self-produced work. This is not just art for art’s sake, but allows them to delve into new paradigms for movement themes and vocabularies that further solidify how they exist in the world as contemporary dancers. During my fieldwork, the issue of caste was perhaps implied in the acknowledgment of different practitioners, teachers, and administrators explaining the existence of scholarship programs to

support under-resourced practitioners. Caste in itself, however, is not the only factor in accessing resources, but works in a system of intersections with other subjectivities inhabited by individuals and communities in India (see Chapter 4). Indian contemporary dance does address caste as a social theme to theorize, choreograph, and explore on the dance floor, among other socially aware issues that represents a practitioner's activism in dance. This reflects the privileged space of contemporary dance as a domain of work—an artistic endeavor in which the system of practice is elite, which is separate from the intersectional identities of the practitioners themselves (see Chapter 4).

Sareeta Amrute (2016) presents the case of Indian IT workers in Berlin, as creative laborers in precarious economies. She states:

As cognitive laborers, Indian IT workers are Berardi's cognitariat. They are a class of workers who offer up their creative, analytic, and communicative labor power to capital. Yet, they are also affected by an economy that uses and remakes race such that being *Indian* programmers becomes synonymous with accepting precarious work contracts and visas, extending the working day, and performing cultural knowledge as a part of work. (Amrute 2016: 17)

She continues, "In Europe and the United States, the Indian programmer is a source of cheap labor; in India, the very same figure is a member of a burgeoning middle class increasingly able to flex its consumption-based muscle" (Amrute 2016: 18). I compare Indian contemporary dancers in India to similar categories of labor. They are creative laborers to produce consumable, intangible culture, while they navigate economies that are contoured by changing patrons and customers, whom they must engage to continue their work. They work by choice, and are also middle-class consumers themselves, participating in patterns of consumption that are similar to other economically empowered laborers.³⁷ Career-specific examples of these consumption

³⁷ See Baviskar and Ray (2011), Brosius (2010), Donner (2011), and Fernandes (2006).

patterns include attending performances and workshops by other contemporary artists, whose presenting institutions charge fees as socially exclusionary barriers. The comparison between Indian contemporary dancers and transnational IT workers becomes even clearer in the consideration of how practitioners travel abroad, during tours, festivals, and other exhibitions, and how their resulting vocabulary is represented by other bodies who are more transnationally mobile in their citizenships and access to visas (see Chapter 5).

The paradigm of corporate patronage of the performing arts is a heterogeneous and expanding model in India. Its relationship with contemporary dance is multiple and complex, wherein dancers are beholden to corporations in contracts for performance gigs, while they flex their mobilities as creative professionals in their own right. Corporate patronage systems epitomize the current neoliberal moment in India, in the third decade following economic liberalization, and over seventy years after the establishment of the politically modern state. This patronage model is unavoidable for many performing artists today, and is treated warily. It offers a particularly fruitful lens into the larger ecosystem for the subsistence of the arts in India, and how its practitioners move through it.

Chapter 4

Off the Dance Floor:

Mobile Intersections Among Bangalore Creatives

We are artists, writers, filmmakers, dreamers, musicians, tweeters, designers, instagrammers, gamers, dancers. Coming together under one roof in Bangalore. With a common belief that an idea can change everything. We are not a creative agency. We are an idea shop. We are not an organisation, we are an organism. Alive and kicking. Changing form. Breeding concepts. Spreading happiness. Setting up special units for special requirements. Partnering with those who wish to do things differently.

—— Happy mcgarrybowen India (<http://www.happymgb.com/>)

He thinks the metro is going to worsen the traffic. And I was like, “Why? It’s actually supposed to ease the traffic.” And he says, “No you put up metro and then more people will come to Bangalore. Everybody’s just coming to Bangalore.”

—— Cab driver, translated from Kannada by Anil Adireddi

On September 9, 2018, STEM Dance Kampni premiered two new pieces at the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) in Bangalore. The first, titled “Kalpavriksha,” is a thirty-minute choreography that was conceived by Madhu Nataraj as a collaborative response to the work of Bangalore-based visual artist SG Vasudev. A retrospective exhibition of Vasudev’s work was on display at the NGMA, and STEM’s resulting production was a program that invited the public to engage with the exhibition. “Kalpavriksha” was created in response to Vasudev’s *Vriksha* painting series—the Tree of Life, with reference to narratives of Hindu mythology and cosmology. Performed by a team of lighting, fashion, and multimedia designers, music producers, and dancers, STEM’s “Kalpavriksha” was by no means a proscenium performance.

Rather, STEM's dancers engaged kinesthetically and texturally with the iconic trees in the NGMA's courtyard, and later, the pool and fountain through the Gallery's outer perimeter in a second piece, titled "Rhapsody."

I left Bangalore in June 2017, following a short residency at the Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography. I returned to the Institute sporadically a few months later during a seeming period of transition—STEM had begun to post to its Instagram account quite frequently, and had even live-streamed a few of its studio events on Facebook, inviting patrons and enthusiasts from across the world to participate. In the days and weeks leading up to the premiere of "Kalpavriksha," I followed STEM's activities from Chicago, as Madhu-didi and other Kampni members posted rehearsal photos, videos, behind-the-scenes images, and costume glimpses, teasing choreography snippets on Instagram and Facebook. In the live-streamed video of the premiere, Madhu-didi welcomes those present to the NGMA's courtyard, inviting the audience to participate and be part of the "verdant" space around them.³⁸ She continues, describing the piece as a "spacio-temporal work that looks at line, texture, and paint through various movement and aural motives." Madhu-didi is poised and elegant, demonstrating her beautifully articulate, high-register English while describing choreographic experiments on the subject of Hindu cosmology, all the while celebrating a Bangalorean collaboration between two artists working in different idioms. Just in her short introduction to the piece "Kalpavriksha," Madhu-didi demonstrates her mobility off the dance floor, as the quintessential, creative cosmopolitan.

This chapter is a case study in how contemporary dancers are mobile off the dance floor, in shifting and experimental paradigms of collaboration. I discuss the ways in which practitioners

³⁸ See <https://shaale.com/live/kalpavriksha>, accessed September 8, 2018. The video was also linked via Natya/STEM's Facebook page.

move through spaces of idiomatic collaboration, working across aesthetic boundaries and with other artistic and creative professionals to continue to define and expand contemporary repertoire. In doing so, dancers extend the boundaries of their professional identities to participate under the broader aegis of “creatives”—creative professionals who make a living through labor that is creatively inclined. Drawing on my ethnographic fieldwork with Natya/STEM, I posit that to be and maintain their work as contemporary, practitioners of Indian contemporary dance must break barriers between what is and is not—in genre categories, spaces for performance, and places of choreographic inspiration. In order for contemporary dancers to continue to be patronized as such, they must be “complete artists,” with literacy off the dance floor, and a creative impetus to collaborate.

I begin this chapter with a more detailed analysis of STEM Dance Kampni’s premiere of “Kalpavriksha” at the National Gallery of Modern Art. I follow this with a contextual setting of Natya/STEM in the city of Bangalore, which, in many ways, reflects the ability to be collaboratively mobile. I refer here to a discussion on cosmopolitanism and the IT boom in the city. I investigate the concept of “the creative” as a professional identity, with reference to urban planner Richard Florida’s controversial coining of the Creative Class in North America in the early 2000s. I discuss creatives and the Creative Class in the South Asian context, especially in relation to the post-liberalization Indian middle classes, and the kinds of class and caste privilege that enter a conversation on creative economies. I return to creative individuals and institutions in Bangalore, among representatives from Jaaga, Meeraqi, and the Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology, inciting a larger dialogue on creative collaboration through ethnographic interviews. I conclude this chapter on the dance floor, in a discussion of STEM Dance Kampni’s performance in Bengaluru Fantastic, a festival that merged the arts and tech sectors in December

2017. I argue in this chapter that contemporary dancers demonstrate their mobility as creatives off the dance floor to remain contemporary on it.

STEM and “Kalpavriksha”

Dusk. The silk is hung from one of the tree’s enormous branches—probably much higher than it hangs in the Institute. Jana hangs near the top. Not hangs, but rather defies the gravity that pulls his body toward the ground, using just the right balance of arm, core, and leg strength to remain upright, elegant. He ascends just enough to see that he’s already gotten the two pieces of silk wrapped around the arches of his two feet—the method that we were taught in his class to use, to ascend and descend the silk, usually at the end of class. “Three laps,” he would say. I would jump for just a little momentum, holding myself up with my arm and core, while I twisted my right leg once, twice, around the two pieces of silk, making a little ledge for me to step on and climb up. Right below my arches, which screamed at me the morning after class. Step, pull up, repeat. Touch the ceiling. Reverse to go back down: release, fall, step. Never so fast so the hands burn, I learned the hard way. . . .

A bansuri alaap (unmetered melody) begins against a backdrop of birds chirping, digitally superimposed above intermittent synth. A yellow wash of light appears from below—a production decision that complements Jana’s movement into a series of freezes, painting Jana’s body in a silhouette against the darkening sky that frames him.

The Sequence:

Bansuri phrase 1: Middle split, walking the proverbial tightrope between relaxed flexibility and a contraction of the core and leg muscles to hold the pose.

Bansuri phrase 2: Unravel, descend a little, turn upside down, with a little momentum.

Pulse. Click. Click. Click. . . .

Bansuri phrase 3: Continue to descend—now upside down, sliding—gliding downward, with control, against four short phrases that each end with a downward gesture—a melodic flick as the opening notes of each phrase begin, sustain, and quickly die away.

Pulse. Click. Click. Click. . . .

Bass drum rhythm: Long, short-short high [Jana reaches the floor, dismounts]

Long, short short high Long, short short high, as Jana walks toward the courtyard “stage.”

Janardhan Raj Urs (Jana) is one of STEM’s lead creative directors, and principal dancer. He begins “Kalpavriksha” with an aerial choreography, twisting and contorting himself into gymnastic poses (see Figure 20). Jana follows his aerial introduction with a solo on the ground, during which he interacts with the NGMA’s own Tree of Life. The other dancers in the production appear in series of duets, trios, and full-ensemble sections in which the dancers perform in STEM’s signature style, drawing from vast movement vocabularies among yoga, Indian martial arts like kalaripayattu, the classical forms kathak and bharatanatyam, and global



Figure 20: Screen grab from the live-streamed video of STEM Dance Kampni’s premiere of “Kalpavriksha” at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Bangalore (September 2018). STEM dancer Jana performs an opening aerial solo.³⁹

contemporary movement forms that have etched themselves into the choreographic approach taken by Madhu-didi and her collaborators.

About eighteen minutes into the piece, five of STEM’s dancers perform a short quintet. Here, the dancers oscillate between performing sequences of movement in unison and the collaborative construction of shapes, made from the lines of many bodies in group tableaux. The performance indexes company rehearsals and training in a variety of movement systems, disciplining the body to be oriented to a certain kind of flexibility, classical aesthetic, and contact work (see Chapter 2).

³⁹ See <https://shaale.com/live/kalpavriksha>, accessed September 8, 2018.

The musical track, credited as a “soundscape,” is composed by longtime STEM collaborator Praveen D Rao, whose studio visit I describe in Chapter 3. At face value, the rhythmic structure of this section is arranged in a relatively simple eight-count. In actuality, it is in an Indian classical *taal* framework, in which the eight-count is really a sixteen-count that resolves using a repetitive motive to *sam* (beat 1) of a new cycle. The dancers mark this *sam* through their performance, in sequences that are sharp and angular, moving their heads to look



Figure 21: Screen grab from the live-streamed video of STEM Dance Kampni’s premiere of “Kalpavriksha” at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Bangalore. Five of STEM’s dancers hold a tableau freeze in a short section, partway through the piece.⁴⁰

up on *sam*, or marking this musically salient moment by creating or changing tableau (see Figure 21), lunging, slashing, freezing, or launching into a new series of movements. Their moving bodies contour a rectangular, imaginary stage, wherein they perform these movements

⁴⁰ See <https://shaale.com/live/kalpavriksha>, accessed September 8, 2018.

using their limbs and torsos without the added element of abhinaya. Praveen Sir's voice can be heard on the track, ornamenting the rhythmic cycle using *solkattu bols*—a language of vocables that index percussive or danced compositional material. Here, the bols are used ornamentally, as another aural layer on the track. The dancers end this short section “offstage,” at the trunk of a neighboring tree. They touch the tree, undulate, and play with the casting of shadows just before the climactic end of the section, where the track signals an unexpected tritonal piano chord, at which point Madhu-didi appears, to dance the next choreographic section.

This small excerpt, less than two minutes in length, is a larger snapshot of the choreographic mobilities at play in STEM's performance. The section is choreographed from among movements that are recognized in yoga and kalaripayattu, while demonstrating a flexibility of the body that is residual of the modern/contemporary “suspend-releases” practiced in the rehearsal studio (see Chapter 2). All the while, the cyclical, rather than linear, motion that drives the excerpt is organized into Indian classical taal. It is a choreographic cosmopolitanism that is quite literally off the dance floor in a “verdant” courtyard, to quote Madhu-didi's introduction, with deliberate reference to non-choreographic sources of inspiration among visual art.

“Kalpavriksha” and STEM's spatial and idiomatic experimentation at the NGMA are quite characteristic of their work in Indian contemporary dance. They often collaborate with other “creatives”—a host of designers, visual artists, curators, writers, and “techies”⁴¹ to produce pieces that push the expectations of what dance should look, sound, and feel like. This kind of pliable flexibility in bending the boundaries of innovation in dance reflects the aesthetic and

⁴¹ I encountered the term “techies” in India to indicate creatives whose trade was in the production of technology. They include multimedia producers, coders, and graphic designers, among others.

kinesthetic values of Indian contemporary dance at large. Experimental collaboration especially gives a market edge to dancers in an economy of over supply and scarce resources (see Chapter 3). Madhu-didi's ability and enthusiasm to work with visual artist Vasudev in her choreography of "Kalpavriksha" creates a scenario in which paintings are possible source material for movement. STEM dancers' willingness and enthusiasm to perform on "alternative" stages, engaging the iconic architecture outside the NGMA, offers an interesting and fresh take on the use of its already built space, activating the Gallery and exhibition with an innovative program for its audiences. The dancers prove their malleability in situations that call for creative labor. This, in my experience as both a dancer and museum professional, is an easy sell for the gig.

Creatives in the *Multiple City*

The southern Indian city of Bangalore serves as the ethno-, techno-, and landscape (see Appadurai 1996) for not only this chapter, but for much of my dissertation's ethnographic fieldwork. Author Aditi De (2008) describes Bangalore as "multiple city" in her anthology of collected musings on the city, which hail from mythological texts, colonial travelogues, academic articles, and mini-memoirs. Her anthology surely points to Bangalore's multiplicity, which in many ways mirrors and facilitates the traversing of disciplinary and idiomatic boundaries among its creative citizens. De states, "[Bangalore] is as much at ease with the masala dosa⁴² of Vidyarthi Bhavan as with the stiff upper lip colonial traditions of the Bangalore Club, or the shining new towers and gated communities of IT-based international commerce"

⁴² An iconic dish across southern India, *masala dosa* refers to a flat, round, crispy crepe that is folded and stuffed with a spiced potato filling.

(xvi). In the same volume, cartoonist Paul Fernandes offers a series of drawings in his visual essay “The Morphing of Bangalore,” which epitomize this “multiple city” (see Figure 22).

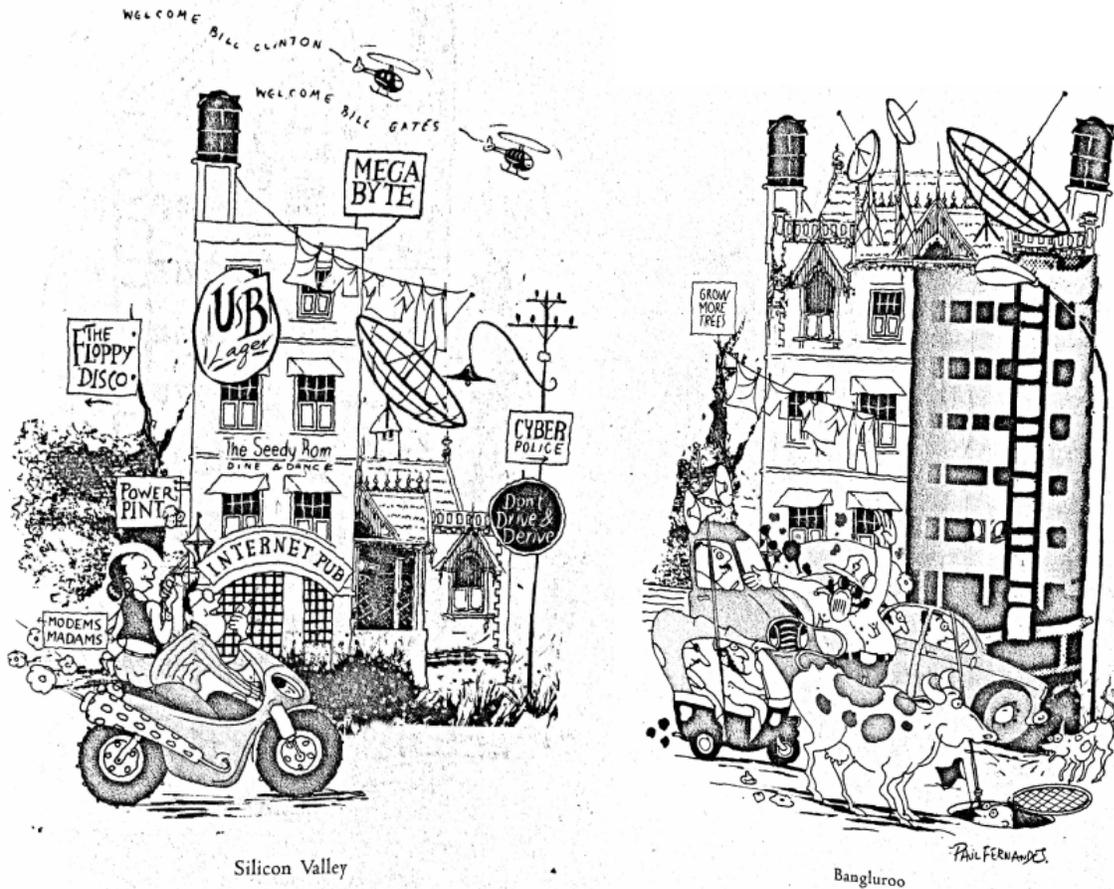


Figure 22: “Silicon Valley” and “Bangluroo” by cartoonist Paul Fernandes (Fernandes 2008: 259–60).

The two drawings reproduced in Figure 22 playfully juxtapose the multiplicity of objects, technologies, and ecologies that illustrate daily life. These cheeky views of the city depict Bangalore as a collision: of cultures, traffic, languages, satellite dishes, and people.

Bangalore’s multiplicity is otherwise reflected in the anxieties of urban and regional planners, who discuss its strained infrastructure and exponential population growth in the new

millennium as contributing factors to a city that urban planner R. P. Misra states “is now reeling under its own weight” (Misra in Sastry 2013: 246). Another urban planner, L. R. Vagale, describes:

Metropolitan Bangalore . . . with its polyglot and variegated culture, is tending to become a mega-polis. It abounds in industrial complexes, commercial centres, teaching and training institutions, administrative campuses, and new residential layouts. Its skyline, low-lying as it is, is pierced by numerous high-rise buildings. The city, known for bungalows, villas, and detached houses with private gardens, is now filled up with residential apartments, and group housing. Overgrowth, aimless sprawl, and disorder characterize its rapid and random growth. In recent years, Bengaluru has emerged as India’s electronic, aerospace and high-tech centre, and as a preferred venue of national and international conferences. (Vagale in Sastry 2013: 232)

N. Narayana Sastry adds, “No matter which sector one takes into account, (industry, trade, commerce, transportation, information technology, or education), [Bangalore] has become one of the main destinations of investors in India” (2013: 235).

My first six months in Bangalore were a whirlwind, and I left not only having immersed myself at the Natya Institute, a long-established, reputed institution for dance in southern India, but having also engaged in the processes of crossing idiomatic borders. I visited exhibitions, art collectives, art-spaces-slash-residences, design firms, modular build-ups, gallery-pubs, and other local ecosystems that breed creative collaboration. I began to work as a creative writer for the firm Twenty Nine Design, serving clients across industries and transnational borders. In each case, I encountered a group of people who define themselves as creatives and creative professionals, engaging in processes of making objects, performances, installations, and art pieces that represent their commentary on the world around them.

Scholars, especially in the areas of business and global markets, have turned to the study of Bangalore’s economy in the past twenty years to explain the explosion of its tech and

Information Technology (IT) sectors in the twenty-first century (see Kenniston and Kumar 2000; Lorenzen and Mudambi 2013; Saxenian 2000; Sen 2016). Many media outlets and personal accounts have pointed to these industries as having contributed to an increasing “cosmopolitanism” in Bangalore, resulting from the co-location of an influx of new students and professionals from across India and abroad, who sought IT jobs in Bangalore’s technology services sectors in the early 2000s. As I show later, the newness of this cosmopolitanism is overstated, but a reality for how people, and creatives in particular, relate to the city around them.

Anil Adireddi is a Bangalore creative, in many senses of the term. Following the completion of his Master’s degree in Computer Science, he led a thriving career as an IT architect, coding and developing software for international companies like Nokia and Yahoo, and several India-based tech startups. He “left” this field to pursue visual art full-time, which he had always done alongside his professional work. Today, he works as a painter, photographer, and entrepreneur, from his home studio in Bangalore’s Kalyan Nagar neighborhood. He is the founder and director of the design firm Twenty Nine Design, at which he continues to code, program, and create visual brand identities among logos, web interfaces, fonts, and other graphics for his many clients.

I met Anil in early 2017, and we developed a close friendship and professional collaboration, during which we explored projects together in the areas of music, dance, and visual art. I began to navigate Bangalore’s design scene as a semi-producer myself, when I worked at Twenty Nine Design as a contract creative writer, creating copy text that Anil fed into graphic design deliveries to his clients. I wrote taglines and descriptive ad text for websites,

manuals, and brochures, for companies that specialize in machine manufacturing, luxury leather goods, and real estate development.

In the past two years, Anil and I have had several conversations on Bangalore, and the overlapping fields that make up the “creative sector” in India. In an interview with me, he stated that he has experienced the city in three distinct bubbles: as a child, college student, and professional. The latter bubble has been colored by a sea change in the entire city rallying around the delivery of IT services. From Anil’s perspective, the origins of this “IT boom” were located in North American and Western European companies needing services done by programmers to re-structure online systems in the late 1990s, in advance of the expected Y2K crash. Indian labor could be sourced for much less than was available in other parts of the world. Anil explained:

And I think at that time, even when IT picked up, there were a lot of Indians who studied Engineering in India, went for MS [Master of Science] there [in the US]. And they were already working in the dot com era, when Y2K came up. So there were always those people who could ideate, and said, “we could always go back to India and set up a center where we could hire one hundred people and we can do this thing.” And they had to pick a place, and Bangalore was picked because of its climate, and Bangalore had a reputation, like if you ask my dad, for being a clean city. Because Bangalore by policy never had polluting industries around it. . . . Another reason is that it was English-medium education, so it was easier for us to learn. There was the engineering colleges, a lot of things converged. Engineering was picking up in private colleges, and when there was this need for jobs, it was easy to prop these colleges up, because it was an investment gateway. . . . When I finished college [~2000], it was quite on the upside. (Interview with Anil Adireddi, 7 December 2017)

He later expanded on the idea of the IT boom in Bangalore contributing to what is colloquially understood as an increasing “cosmopolitanism” in the city. In the early years of the 2000s, IT companies were given subsidies by the state government to purchase land and further develop their institutional sprawl (see Sen 2016). This drove these companies to pull from among budding talent from across the country, creating a landscape of cultures, languages, and human

resources in Bangalore that mimicked a cross-section of the country's states. Anil stated, "IT changed Bangalore, because this was not an organic but a fabricated influx, of pulling people from all over the country, so that's why it's a cosmopolitan Bangalore. Because initially people came from the southern states, [then] northern states. . . . And in a matter of ten years, it just boomed" (ibid.).

Anil comments on his struggle with the IT boom and Bangalore in his own visual art, in a series of sketches titled *The City*. He wrestles with the benefits and pitfalls of such a rallying around IT in a Bangalore that for him was once idyllic (see Figure 23). While the IT boom has



Figure 23: Sketch by Bangalore-based creative Anil Adireddi in a series titled *The City*. Image courtesy of the artist.

certainly enabled the movement of people and opportunities, it has caused a clog and resulting insularity of its many inhabitants. Their mobility through Bangalore has changed almost irrevocably, due to traffic and infrastructural development—an idea echoed by many of the city’s cab drivers, which I quote at the beginning of this chapter.

The idea of a “cosmopolitan” Bangalore today is considered to be a positive byproduct of the city’s IT sector. It results in what my collaborators and friends have discussed to be an increasing diversity of people, food cultures, and languages—both from India and abroad. Kathryn Hansen (2010) summarizes “cosmopolitanism” in opposition to “composite culture,” in her analysis of Indian and Pakistani literature. She writes:

As a response to cultural and political multiplicity, cosmopolitanism moves beyond the nation-state model of belonging or identity. It disavows cultural essentialism, contrasting with communitarian philosophies that affirm allegiance to community, clan, and kind. Cosmopolitanism rejects identity politics and supports the existence of plural loyalties and multiple identities. It may entail a vision of global democracy and world citizenship, or provide a transnational framework for social movements. (Hansen 2010: 8)

Stuart Hall (2002) similarly locates cosmopolitanism in choosing multiples. He states that cosmopolitanism “means the ability to stand outside of having one’s life written and scripted by any one community...and to draw on a variety of discursive meanings” (2002: 26). In the same volume, Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen point to a historical elitism that has been afforded to cosmopolitans, who have the privilege to move and choose from among multiples (2002: 5–7).

Sheldon Pollock, Homi Bhabha, Carol Breckenridge and Dipesh Chakrabarty call for a plurality of cosmopolitanisms, which enables the location of multiple historical and contemporary incidences of cosmopolitanism in what are today considered developing countries

(2002: 3–8).⁴³ The plurality of cosmopolitanism challenges a center-periphery, first-world-third-world model in locating instances of cosmopolitanism in places that continue to be in the proverbial “waiting rooms” of history and modernity (see Chapter 2; Chakrabarty 2000; Baviskar and Ray 2011).

Anthropologist Andrew Willford (2018) provides an alternative perspective on Bangalore as a cosmopolitan city today, wherein he argues there has been an over-determined connection drawn between cosmopolitanism, Bangalore, and the twenty-first century. He writes:

Bangalore has come to signify “progress” and economic possibility, both within India and the to the outside world, to which it turns for investment. As the capital of the linguistically drawn state of Karnataka, it has become increasingly charged by movements to make the city more monocultural and monolingual. The very ambiguous but materially powerful forces of globalization that produce inward migration, material development, and landscape transformations, coupled with the redrawing of political maps within a postcolonial context, enable and generate monocultural fantasies of the nation. These in turn contradict the densely textured forms of pre- and early modern cosmopolitanism that have been inscribed onto the landscape of the Deccan and in the Bangalore region in particular. (Willford 2018: 2)

Willford historicizes Bangalore’s identity as a global city, noting that cosmopolitanism can be located in Bangalore’s pasts. In doing so, he proposes that the year 1965 was a watershed moment in declaring Bangalore as the capital of Karnataka, the contested boundaries of which were formed on the basis of language in drawing up the geopolitical boundaries of the modern Indian nation-state.⁴⁴

The location of multiple cosmopolitanisms that precede the 2000s in Bangalore is a crucial part of this dialogue. It points to a more complicated framework for modernity in the

⁴³ See Lavan, Payne, and Weisweiler (2016) for historical case studies of cosmopolitanism that destabilize the colonial lens.

⁴⁴ See von Tunzelmann (2007) for a detailed account on the determination of India’s state borders, which were drawn in the mid-twentieth century.

commonly-held, teleologically-driven version that misses the many collisions that characterize the *Multiple City*, to quote from Aditi De's anthology (2008).⁴⁵ I posit, however, that a contemporary cosmopolitanism resulting from the growth of the IT sector in Bangalore is a reality that is claimed by many of Bangalore's citizens, and creatives in particular. My field collaborators constantly refer to the city's tech parks and neighborhoods that are built around the companies that make up the tech sector, which include the suburb of Whitefield—a regional microsystem that epitomizes civil infrastructure constructed from this sector. These developments have led to the corresponding institutions for patronizing creative professionals (see Chapter 3).⁴⁶

The opening epigraph to this chapter comes from the home page text of the Bangalore-based design firm Happy mcgarrybowen India. The motley of “artists, writers, filmmakers, dreamers, musicians, tweeters, designers, instagrammers, gamers, dancers” who are employed by this firm are creatives, who not only do work that is creative, but are associated with other signifiers that brand creatives as such. Happy mcgarrybowen's website text continues, in the “About us” section:

No two of us are the same. Some loud. Some not so. Some wallflowers. Bikers. Hikers. Wrestlers. Footballers. Chefs. Garage bands. Normcore. Hardcore. What's-that-core. Dog lovers. Cat lovers. Cat haters. Carnatic. Trance. Carnatic-trance. Bob. Babu. Roy. Joy. Whatsappers. Tinderers. Good old Facebookers. Bacon. No bacon. Paneer. Android. Apple. Species of every kind. With only one thing in common. We are here for great. We are Happy mcgarrybowen.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ See Menon (2012) for her theorization of “palimpsestic” Bangalore, in which active processes of creating nostalgia are part of Bangaloreans' experience of the city's neoliberal modernity.

⁴⁶ See Khubchandani (2018) for another result of the development of the IT sector, which has pushed and pulled the geography for queer nightlife.

⁴⁷ See www.happymgb.com/about-us/, accessed February 25, 2019.

These personality traits, preferences, lifestyles, and interests, demonstrate—predictably—a fluency with media and technology that is consistent with the environment offered by Bangalore’s many startup firms, which have rallied around the IT sector to spawn new institutions in the areas of media, design, and communications. The traits above express an intrinsic eclecticism, and eclectic purchasing habits, that hints at a “greater” whole, formed from a diverse sum of its parts—a concept reflected in processes of fluid collaboration that I introduce at the beginning of this chapter.

Written to advertise Happy mcgarrybowen’s design services, its web text expresses an important combination of interests, priorities, and ways of being. The short phrases above seem to indicate ideal citizens of the world, with signifiers that are neither culturally rooted in one particular place nor stereotypically “Indian,” to paraphrase reactions from among my North American peers in reading this text.⁴⁸ There are, however, four (likely five) phrases peppered in the text above that suggest not just a South Asian referent, but the coexistence of old and new, grasping at a particular combination of signifiers in a cosmopolitanism that I have seen repeated in kind throughout Bangalore’s creative communities. “Carnatic,” “Carnatic-trance,” “Babu,” and likely “Roy”⁴⁹ suggest just enough of an Indian subjectivity in classical and colonial cultures, combining tradition with modernity amidst phrases that locate the subject as a hyper-mobile, hyper-connected, self-defined creative. This, of course, is against the backdrop of using English as the medium for communication, which I will address in the next section of this chapter.

⁴⁸ My peers read this text as hailing from any design company located in the Bay Area of the United States, a hotbed for production in design and tech, among other industries.

⁴⁹ Though “Roy” is a popular name in the Anglo-Saxon context, here it likely refers to the commonly encountered Bengali surname.

Creative Class/Creative Caste

The term “creatives,” which I use interchangeably with “creative professionals,” is one that is inextricably linked to urban planner Richard Florida, and his controversial theorization of the “Creative Class.” In his many explanations of the concept, the basic premise is that in the post-industrial economy, not only are immaterial forms of goods and labor central to economic output, but a large portion of production is also located among workers in the creative sector. These include coders, architects (both real and virtual), urban planners, and artists, as well as educators, healthcare professionals, and those working in business and finance policy, among others (Florida 2002, 2005a, 2005b, and 2012a). For Florida, “creativity has become *the* principal driving force in the growth and development of cities, regions, and nations” (2005a: 1).

He writes:

The distinguishing characteristics of the Creative Class is that its members engage in work whose function is to *create meaningful forms*. The super-creative core of this new class includes scientists and engineers, university professors, poets and novelists, artists, entertainers, actors, designers, and architects, as well as the thought leadership of modern society: nonfiction writers, editors, cultural figures, think-tank researchers, analysts, and other opinion-makers. (Florida 2005a: 34)

He estimates that thirty percent of the US workforce are members of the Creative Class, whose decisions about their own locations and consumption patterns drive the generation of civic and commerce-based institutions in “creative” cities.

Critical responses to Florida’s theories on the Creative Class include its position as a “class,” which indicates systemic barriers to entry. He claims, “Ironically, creativity is the great leveler. It cannot be handed down, and it cannot be owned in the traditional sense. It defies

gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and outward appearance” (ibid.: 5). On one hand, Florida’s application of “creativity” to colloquially “uncreative” forms of labor seems to be a gesture in the right direction. Conversely, the metrics for “creativity” in the Creative Class are produced from already raced, classed, and gendered systems that operate from the vantage point of considering only middle- and upper-middle class laborers in North American contexts. Richard Florida’s collapsing of class and race, gender, and ethnicity is steeped in histories of inequality that have designed educational and professional institutions to keep queer communities, communities of color, and Indigenous communities, among others, away from accessing the basic entry requirements to do creative work.

Florida’s Creative Class is focused in cities that are located in North America and Western Europe (see Franke and Verhagen 2005). His model surely echoes a center-periphery approach, wherein locating creativity happens in infrastructures that are framed by Euro-American modernity.⁵⁰ Florida does comment in other pieces on economies in the global South, and in India in particular. Featured in the online media outlet *Citylab*, Florida (2012b) discusses the film and IT industries in Mumbai and Bangalore respectively, as “clusters of creativity.” He writes, “India’s economic growth and development over the past decade or so has been nothing short of remarkable. The success of the country’s high-tech software industry around Bangalore (capitol of the Karnataka state) has been recounted in many places, but India’s Bollywood has emerged as the world’s largest producer of films, larger even than Hollywood.” Florida attributes the market successes of these industries to an underlying creativity that is neither explained nor nuanced in the Indian context. He barely conceals his surprise at stumbling upon these

⁵⁰ See Krätke (2011) for a criticism of Florida’s center-periphery conception of the Creative Class.

statistics—no doubt tied to the result of center-periphery thinking per Chakrabarty’s proverbial waiting room. Furthermore, the article’s tagline, “India is becoming an important global player in entertainment,” is decades late in considering the export and consumption of India’s Hindi-language cinema among its many film industries to Africa and other parts of Asia.

I share in criticism of Richard Florida’s Creative Class, especially in a seemingly paternal approach to metrics for measuring the market success of India’s most gigantic industries. Furthermore, in identifying the work of the Creative Class in North American cities, he does not acknowledge the work of those in spheres outside of the United States, who work in networks of production, distribution, and circulation of the goods, services, and media that are considered creative. What of the global publishing networks that enable print cultures to circulate throughout the world? Or, the movement of poets, artists, and entertainers who create and perform across transnational borders to continue to produce work?

Richard Florida’s Creative Class, limited as it is, does arouse a series of connections between creativity, class, and privilege in South Asia. Several scholars have and continue to theorize the blurred boundaries and behaviors of India’s middle classes, especially post-liberalization (see Baviskar and Ray 2011; Brosius 2010; Fernandes 2006; Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase 2009; Leichty 2003; Mazzarella 2005). They have pointed to these classes’ increased visibility through the 2000s because they were the primary beneficiaries of the Government of India’s liberalizing policies of the 1990s. Leela Fernandes (2006), William Mazzarella (2005), and Christiane Brosius (2010) point to the consumption habits of the citizens that construct these classes that mark them as such, which include the consumption of material goods, services, and media.

Teresa Robinson (2014) conducts a related ethnographic study on not just consumption, but leisure practices among youth in Pune who patronize cafes. She writes, “Negotiating self-realization and family obligations, the young adults of the café culture in Pune in 2008 were asserting their ‘being modern,’ ‘Indian,’ and ‘citizens of the world.’ While their intellectual and elite forefathers had undergone similar efforts in a colonial and then socialist modernity, a growing *middle class* was regenerating it in a global modernity” (2014: 9). Robinson indicates a parallel existence in overlapping environments in which her young collaborators demonstrated a commitment to the freedoms and obligations afforded by their middle class identities.

The idea of class in India is distinct from, but inextricably related to caste, which refers to the system of social hierarchy that organizes the strata of Indian society into groups that are less mobile than class identities. In what Surinder Jodhka terms the “popular textbook view,” the “ancient” Hindu system of caste constitutes a cleanly divided set of four social groups that sit in a hierarchal order atop a larger fifth group of untouchables, which determines social and professional occupation. In reality, this system is much more modern than ancient, and was revived during the British Raj (see Jodhka 2015: 1–7). Caste continues to stratify society in the guise of professional occupation, but has extreme consequences especially for disenfranchised communities in this system to access wealth, resources, institutions, communal and individual protection, and who experience acute violence and intergenerational trauma as a result. Caste is much broader than its Hindu framework, especially in the consideration of many of India’s untouchable Christians, wherein caste and religious identities are intertwined (see Gidla 2017 and Sherinian 2014).

The discourse and experience of class and caste intersect in many ways. My own interactions living with communities of transnational South Asians in India and abroad have

often led to conversations on reservations in Indian colleges, for example. A form of affirmative action, many colleges in India hold seats for members of lower-caste communities.

Some of my networks of higher-caste friends, professional collaborators, and community members, who hail from India's upper and middle classes, have commented on the system's "unfairness." In this system, they have had to work much harder to land a seat in college or medical school for a problem—systemic disenfranchisement—that was "not their fault."⁵¹ These frictions between institutional and personal responsibility reveal the embeddedness of casteism as a systemic issue in India, similar to current debates on historically systemic racism in the United States, which contour my own experience of writing this dissertation between 2017 and 2019 in Chicago.

More recently, the signifier of English has become a salient feature in discussions of class and caste. In an opinion piece that was posted in the media outlet *thescroll.in*, Sajith Pai (2018) puts forth the term "Indo-Anglians" as both a class and caste identity that operates in modern India. He describes Indo-Anglians as a group for whom English is the primary language of use and communication in public, private, and professional spaces. He offers two ways to consider Indo-Anglians:

As a post-caste community, where the traditional caste identity is subsumed under the new Indo-Anglian identity. The alternate approach, which I prefer, is to look at them as a distinct "caste" parallel to the upper castes, with its own unique cultural norms and practices. The key criteria for caste inclusion and endogamy being advanced English language skills. (Pai 2018)

⁵¹ See Chapter 5 of this dissertation for a reflection on my own class and caste privilege as a transnational South Asian in these conversations.

Sazana Jayadeva, somewhat similarly, extends proficiency in English beyond the possibility for constructing a new class or caste unto itself, stating its ability to differentiate status within the middle classes and facilitate class mobility (2018: 580).

Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase historicize the “hegemony of English” among the Indian middle classes, emphasizing its absorption into Indian society as resulting in further linguistic stratification, while creating complex relationships with Western modernity in the center-periphery model (2009: 132–33). The adoption of English can be read as the continued residue of British colonialism in India, wherein this trinket of “modern” civilization has been passed on to the ruled. Conversely, the living use of English, absorbed into the daily vernaculars of the middle and upper classes, or Pai’s Indo-Anglian class/caste, can be interpreted as a means to participate in a world in which the command of English is among a required set of stakes that are evaluated to be modern, professional, and equal participant in the circulation of global goods and services. As I continue to show throughout this dissertation, Indian contemporary dancers walk a similar tightrope in taking on forms of legible, Western modernity and imbuing them with an essential (and essentialized) rootedness in South Asian citizenship. This, in effect, creates a scenario in which “contemporary” is defined among Indian dancers, in a larger discussion of what is modern.

Many of Bangalore’s creatives demonstrate behaviors, leisure habits, mobility, and connectedness that are consistent with India’s middle and even upper classes. In many creative communities, English is the lingua franca in intersecting economies of designers, techies, and dancers, among others. These creative professionals define themselves just as such—as professionals, who are the beneficiaries of a contemporary neoliberal model that works to create capital from creative products, such as music and dance performances, graphics, print

publications, and clothing, among many others. They continue from Robinson's depiction of the iconic middle class as figure, who "is celebrated as an English-speaking, higher educated, urban white-collar worker" (2014: 16).

In portraying Indian contemporary dancers as middle-class creatives, I am often met with resistance, especially among South Asian dance scholars and in dance circles. I detect that this resistance is colored by a resentment for an inevitable elitism that permeates the contemporary dance world. Practitioners are surely steeped in movement grammars that are abstract rather than representational, and enjoy privileges of composing and defining contemporaneity from among forms and vocabularies that become legible in the process. They are self-declared intellectuals, researchers, and theosophists, whose pieces and productions are the result of time spent on creativity—a perceived luxury that is only afforded to a few.

At the same time, my collaborators emphasize their work as having activist potential, engaged in providing movement-based responses to social and cultural issues, such as Indian contemporary choreographer Mandeep Raikhy's *Queen-size*, a piece that exhibits a bold challenge to the volatile Section 377 legislation, the section of the Indian Penal Code instituted during the British Raj that banned all acts of "unnatural sex" (including homosexuality).⁵² In *Queen-size*, two men are staged to interact with each other on, around, and between a *charpai* (woven, flat bed). They are choreographed to touch and intertwine with one another in stylized, contemporary movement, while the audience looks on from all four sides of the stage.

Practitioners of Indian contemporary dance believe in the capacity for their work to effect change, and discuss the rebellious nature of their work, especially in performing in non-

⁵² Section 377 was overturned to legalize homosexuality in September 2018, but remains in place for other kinds of "unnatural sex." It remains a fixture in a long history of laws designed to legislate mores.

proscenium, non-elite spaces that enable them to work outside some of the historically confining systems of arts patronage in India (see Chapter 3). They do not consider themselves financially flush, but rather hard workers who are committed to their craft.

At the same time, contemporary dancers' status as categorical elites is inextricable from their work as creatives, and cannot be denied in the context of understanding the systems of class and caste privilege in neoliberal India. In Chapter 3, I discussed how models of Corporate Social Responsibility and social enterprises continue to arise, with the aim of supporting communities of disenfranchised rural artisans and craftspeople. These models seek to build sustainable income prospects around activities such as producing handicrafts and wares that can be bought and sold in local markets, or internationally, especially through the work of NGOs.⁵³ This is creative work, but the laborers do not identify as “creatives.” Rather, the occupation of “creative,” “creative professional,” or even the process of “creativity” is an indicator of a normalized privilege that is linked to a range of habits, lifestyle referents, and other variables that are only accessible to middle-class, elite Indian citizens.

Pallabi Chakravorty (2017) addresses issues of elite sectarianism in the dance world, and how this affects neoliberal claims to being modern among a group of aspirationally modern dancers who compete in the hyper-visible arena of televised dance reality shows. She writes:

As the [Indian] nation delves deeper into the messiness of markets and questions of democracy and modernity, a powerful message seems to radiate from the screens of dance reality shows, that can simply be summarized as: “We all want to be modern and be counted.” Here being modern translates as gaining the status

⁵³ The narrative around the disenfranchised, rural, Indian artisan is certainly exploited in transnational contexts. A local yoga studio in my neighborhood of Chicago, for example, sells handmade bracelets upon which labels are affixed with the names of the Indian women who produced them. Written in the Devanagari script, I notice that the name “Radha” appears on almost every label. While each bracelet is sold at the price of 20 USD, I doubt very much that any part of the proceeds is returned to “Radha.”

of historical actors who can no longer be denied temporal coexistence with the middle and upper classes in India and be homogenized as the unwashed masses, needing to be educated and civilized. Yet, this is a message that is not clearly heard, or, if heard, not well-received by many, including the elite gatekeepers of Indian “culture.” (Chakravorty 2017: 176)

Indian contemporary dancers are among the elite, middle-class gatekeepers of Indian culture. To be clear, during the course of my fieldwork, I did not have direct conversations on the intersectional class and caste identities of the practitioners with whom I worked. These identities are of course articulated in different ways that are surely visible, socially and culturally (see Gidla 2017). It was clear that contemporary studios offered scholarships and other kinds of support to those unable to accommodate costs for participation in this scene. My discussion on privilege, however, is not necessarily in relation to the classed and casted identities of the scene’s individuals, but the politics of how the scene operates in national and international discourses on systemic privilege, wherein the categorical umbrella of “Indian contemporary” catalyzes assumptions on the privileges of experience and mobility among its participants. The scene for contemporary dance in India can be an elite space without all of its participants inhabiting elite identities.

Creative and collaborative mobility off the dance floor helps to illustrate the systemic privilege that pervades this art world in Bangalore. As Artistic Director of STEM Dance Kampni, Madhu-didi collaborates with visual artists, designers, architects, poets, and techies not only to define contemporaneity, but also to choreograph it, engaging in partnerships off the dance floor to carry out this work. Madhu-didi is a staunch and iconic Bangalorean, committed to her residence in Malleshwaram, one of the city’s oldest Kannadiga neighborhoods, inhabited by Kannada-speaking citizens who trace their heritage through generations to the state of Karnataka. I accompanied her to various events, exposing me to many kinds of threads that make

up the fabric of the city. I watched Madhu-didi moderate a panel with contemporary fashion designer Wendell Rodricks at the Times of India Literature Festival, and accompanied her to a charity event and music concert at the Sundaram Motors Mercedes AMG Showroom. Early on in my residence with Natya/STEM, I volunteered backstage with the Kampni in their performance in a festival at Ravindra Kalakshetra, a state-run proscenium auditorium in Bangalore, following which I took my first of many trips to Koshy's Parade Café—a vestige of colonial Bangalore that was founded in 1940. These events punctuated the daily goings-on of the Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography, which hosts regular rehearsals, classes, talks, a monthly salon series, and pujas, conducted fluidly between the languages of English, Hindi, and Kannada, with punctuated occurrences of instructions, jokes, and conversations in Malayalam, Telugu, and Tamil.

Madhu-didi demonstrates a privileged mobility through many Bangalores, culturally, socially, and linguistically. It is the coexistence of this plurality of environments, ecosystems, and spaces for engagement with culture that defines her approach to constructing contemporaneity in dance, and art at large. She draws from her multiple experiences in producing creative products that help to define contemporaneity in opposition to the center-periphery version of what is considered modern, similar to the discourse on Indo-Anglians. Madhu-didi's mobility affords her a position—a stake in the larger consideration of Indian modernity, wherein she is an iconic, cosmopolitan figure.

The confluence of new, old, South Asian, everywhere-ness, middle class, elite, and cosmopolitan takes shape among communities of creatives in the *Multiple City*. It is surely the case among Indian contemporary dance practitioners, who engage in processes of innovating from existing movement vocabulary, creating new paradigms for choreographed responses to

social themes and issues. They emphasize the necessity of an Indian context for this aesthetic innovation, which Madhu-didi described to me as the “stench” of India. They call for a rootedness of their traditions in Indian forms of music and movement, which are non-Western and fresh in perspective (see Chakravorty 2017: 180). They draw on multiple inspirational spaces for choreography, which they find off the dance floor, working collaboratively in a framework that is characterized by mobile interactions with urban creatives.

Dancers and Creative Collaborators

Creative professionals in Bangalore demonstrate their mobility in collaborating on projects, crossing idiomatic boundaries, and sharing spaces that are designed for these kinds of interactions. I refer here to voices from three creatives, who work from the vantage point of three creative institutions: Archana Prasad (Jaaga), Sudeep Bhattacharya (Meeraqi), and Arpita Bajpeyi (Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology). All three demonstrate multiple mobilities: having lived in and outside India; worked in many kinds of professions; and moved through worlds as scholar-practitioners, engaging intellectually and practically in the arena of creative collaboration. I write this section in the spirit of representing the process of collaboration itself, creating a larger, poly-vocal dialogue on creative mobility.

Archana Prasad is a longtime collaborator of Madhu-didi’s, and the two even share space in the business complex “Bhoomika” in Bangalore’s Malleshwaram neighborhood. Archana is a visual artist and curator of public space and public art. She founded the ten-year-old institution Jaaga, which has functioned thus: to patronize artists in producing and exhibiting work; create an infrastructure for public histories of Bangalore; construct larger installations of art, including the

murals on the sides of the city's flyovers; and seed startup companies among Bangalore's ideating entrepreneurs. The raison d'être of Jaaga is premised in a commitment to the importance of collaboration among interdisciplinary creators.

I met with Archana in February 2018, in her eco-loft, the architecture of which reconciled for me the kind of space I imagine a contemporary, transnational creative like her to inhabit. She told me the evolving story of Jaaga, which she founded with her creative partner Freeman Murray in 2009. She stated:

I bump into Freeman, who just landed into Bangalore for a visit or conference of some kind. And he had been doing some experiments in LA before this, where he was using these pallet extractors—you saw the gate [outside my home], right? . . . He was working with the LA media co-op, and working with a group of artists and creating a space for them. And we thought it would be so cool to do something like that here, and we just needed a piece of land, and if we had a piece of land we could grow it into something and see how people used it. . . . And actually I interviewed a ton of artists—Madhu included—to find out what they thought would be needed for an artist's space. Musicians and dancers and visual artists—what were they looking for that were missing from the spaces that were already there? Or what would they really like to see? So things like: a library, cafe, rehearsal space that's in the center that people could go to with easy access like close to a bus stop or something so people weren't dependent on private vehicles or whatever. So I got a list of these things that seemed to be high on artists' wish lists. And then we launched Jaaga as an art-architecture project where we invited people to come help us dream and build a building. (Interview with Archana Prasad, 20 February 2018)

She continued:

We basically had hit a desperate need in the creatives at the time, which was a gallery space that was willing to let you hang stuff, change the walls. It was so mobile, right? You could say, "I don't want the staircase there, for my show I'd like the staircase to be on this side," and you could just unhinge the staircase and put it on this side, and suddenly you had a space that you wanted or imagined for your own work. Like Attakkalari was like within the first groups of dancers that came in and used the space that composed a choreography for the building, using the building in a different way and all of that. And you know we had art awards there, and suddenly we realized we were the hotbed for all of these kinds of fringe—not fringe but alternative practices. . . . So to everyone who interacted with us, Jaaga was something, and it may be different from another person's

opinion. So, to a dancer it might be an amazing interesting building where they could rehearse and do atypical choreography pieces or whatever, or to a coder it was a co-working space, this is where they were working everyday. So to each one it meant something entirely different, and to different people in the city it meant different things. So if you came and watched a dance performance you thought of it as a performance space, if you came for an exhibition you said “that’s an interesting gallery.” You know? (Ibid.)

From Archana’s perspective, Jaaga was born of a need that she felt was communicated by many of Bangalore’s creatives around 2009, who wanted a space that would catalyze collaboration. As such, she saw this need manifesting in a space that was multi-purpose, modular, and mobile. It could be one thing to one group, and something entirely different to another. Most importantly, it facilitated creative processes, serving a Bangalore that she and others felt required this.

Sudeep Bhattacharya is a photographer, filmmaker, composer, and the founder and director of Meeraqi, an interdisciplinary center for the arts in Bangalore. We met in 2017 at Meeraqi, when it was just a few months open. It boasts several floors of open studio space, housing photographic shoots, showcases, productions, workshops, and concerts in the trendy area of Indiranagar. First launched as an institution for the practice of contemporary dance, Meeraqi, according to Sudeep, was born of an impetus to encourage artists to work beyond their idioms. He stated:

I’m inspired by other art forms or artists, and that forces you to think differently as well. And I think this is something that I feel is going to be more and more important as time goes by, especially for any independent. To be able to design basic stuff—and we see this happening in social media for example. Everyone needs to be able to take a decent picture. And edit them. Most people still don’t understand that. But it’s important. And that is just going to expand very soon. You need to have effective communication skills, need to be able to design a decent poster or promotional material. You need to be able to speak the language of music if you’re working with some music or any professional in that realm. You need to have basic understanding of composition and storytelling to effectively do your work. It’s all of that, and I think as one sort of delves widely into these realms, they just become more informed. (Interview with Sudeep Bhattacharya, 4 December 2017)

Here, Sudeep emphasizes the importance of a practical skillset for artists to subsist as “independents” in their larger economies. Ironically, it is collaboration, or an institutional framework that supports artists coming together—that facilitates artists’ independent work. He elaborated further on this notion:

I think one of the reasons why I sort of even felt the need and the impetus to want to do something like that was wanting to connect with people. And not being able to have one unified one place where I could go. I had different things happening, in India. And that was a challenge for me, and I spoke to musicians, filmmakers, and everyone, you know because I worked across the gamut of industries, and everyone I spoke to resonated with that. And so sure enough, what ended up happening is that as I got deeper and deeper into the things I did, and though I sort of went through different industries, from music to sustainable design to writing to film of course, but every time I got deeper into the practice, the doors would close. And I would feel very isolated in not being able to access those things just purely because of the lack of time and space. So I think I got to a point where I said, “you know what? Time, I can sort of try and manage, but there needs to be a space.” . . . How [Meeraqi] evolves is going to be a very interesting to see. I know that it’s got a lot of potential, and people approach us for doing things, because they like that it’s live, the fact that it’s open to all arts—that in itself is something people find great and unusual. And the fact that you know we’re very D-I-Y, and we can be a lot more intimate and together, yet not make that the identity. The identity is very much about coming together. What the space feels like is secondary. Just the fact that there is space and that it’s open and accessible, and we are here to support one another. I think that’s what drives it. So I’m very interested in seeing how this grows. (Ibid.)

Similar to Archana, Sudeep expressed a desire for a space that serves many artists and their creative needs. He theorized the space of collaboration as one creative community.

Until very recently, Arpita Bajpeyi served as a faculty member who taught history courses at the Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology in Bangalore. Located in Bangalore’s Yellahanka neighborhood, it is away from the city’s center, while connected to it in ways that help bolster its collaborative projects with other institutions. From Arpita’s perspective, the privately-funded Srishti Institute serves young students with the aim of

developing the hard and soft skills required to nurture budding professionals in the many industries that coalesce around “design.” These include the design houses and firms that populate Bangalore, as well as companies in visual communication, and publishing, among others. Most of the students hail from elite backgrounds from across India, and less so, abroad. On the experience of being at the Srishti Institute, Arpita explained:

I think in part it comes from the faculty as a whole wanting their students to be exposed to these kinds of topics and the thinking tools—even something like “ecologies,” let’s say, gives you to think about the world. To shift your paradigm a bit, and not just to think about the world as you would experience it in an urban center, but what is it like for a frog on the outskirts of a village, you know? To just sort of decenter them a little from how we all experience the world in our late teens and early twenties when we’re the center of everything. But just generally, people who end up working at Srishti are often people who are hungry and thirsty for learning new things and conversations and seeing what comes of it. There’s a lot of eagerness and openness to find out what your colleague is doing. And there are some bubbles that exist and some closed circuits. But generally if you meet someone who has worked at Srishti for three years, and you’ve never met them before, and you start finding out about what they do, it’s usually a conversation that lasts for a large chunk of time, and both parties are typically interested, which is really lovely, actually. (Interview with Arpita Bajpeyi, 22 June 2018)

Arpita expressed that the ethos of the Srishti Institute, similar to those of both Jaaga and Meeraqi, is committed to producing students-turned-professionals who are pushed intellectually in a holistic approach to the study of design. This exercise is premised in the process of collaboration—with disciplinary perspectives, faculty, and other students in both curricular and extra-curricular projects.

I represent Arpita, Sudeep, and Archana’s perspectives here to show how their own work as creatives, which extends to the work they do among their respective institutions, is tied to a belief in creative collaboration. Each expresses how individuals’ mobility through creative idioms contributes to a larger whole, seemingly “better” than what can be achieved without it. This better whole relates to an inherent belief in the many possibilities afforded to mobile

creatives, who can and must produce work that is socially engaged, rendering transparency to issues that are entrenched in the experience of a specifically Bangalorean urban experience.

Mobility, possibility, and responsibility become intertwined in the acts of working

collaboratively, and are graphed onto the work done by creatives in the city. For Archana, Jaaga served Bangalore's creatives. She recounted:

We had this building and let people use it in different ways. This was our service to the community. . . . And the other thing I realized, which was a stroke of good luck for me, was that the Rangoli Metro Art Station had just opened [in Bangalore], and the program director for that was Surekha, who I both trusted and respected deeply. She was one of the senior artists in our contemporary arts circle, and she really knew what she was doing, and she had a damn good bone in her body. Like the arts community—the visual arts community that I most care about—was going to be well-supported by her. Like this kind of contemporary arts—all this funny blur between visual and performance—all of these people that don't fall into these categories, they would be well supported by her, and the facilities at Rangoli Metro Art Center, because it had everything that we had. It was finally an arts center that the city didn't have earlier. So I felt that it was okay. If Jaaga shuts its doors today, then it's okay, because there is a city facility that was reasonably priced, and literally had everything. And it was city central, you know. So I felt like “great, I don't need to feel like I'm abandoning a community,” or anything. . . .

So Jaaga DNA [Design, Networks, Arts] by then had started to do some pretty big public art projects. And what I realized is in fact we don't need a space of our own, we had the city. So how would Jaaga help artists engage with the city and its spaces? Certainly not by providing space in a private space. So Jaaga DNA would live on the street, Jaaga Study would go off and live on the organic farm, and Jaaga Startup had this spectacular penthouse and a business model and it was basically a membership model, and Jaaga Community would be these three things, so we would let go of the city arts center part of it. So that's what we've done since 2014 to 2018. (Interview with Archana Prasad, 20 February 2018)

Similarly, Arpita emphasized the need for social awareness and responsibility to be worked into the curricula among the Srishti Institute's design students. On the institution's collaborative projects, Arpita stated:

So there are a couple of projects that do work out in the city. Art in Transit is one of them, and they're located mostly at the metro stops. And they have a partnership with the city, and they're currently located at three or four metro

stops. There's Blank Noise that deals with gender violence, not just in Bangalore. They do work outside in other cities as well. And there's probably a few other projects as well. But I think for the most part, maybe with the exception of Blank Noise, I don't know much about the project to be honest, but Art in Transit for sure, it reaches a wide audience in part because of where it's located. But how much it actually pushes you to think beyond who their user might be potentially, in terms of someone that mirrors them or really does not come from a similar background, I think that would be up for debate. I think Srishti does some interesting work and asks some interesting questions, but it often sort of stops at the end of that bubble. That's my feeling at least. (Interview with Arpita Bajpeyi, 22 June 2018)

Upon my asking examples of these "interesting questions," Arpita responded:

I suppose "what does it mean to provide an unusual artistic experience in a really unexpected place?" So Art in Transit also does these small festivals every once in a while, and so some of the artwork that they showcase is performative. So there's poetry readings and things like that. So some of those—they're called Festivals of Stories—so sometimes there are thematic questions that frame how these festivals are curated. A lot of the time it's around identity, and "what does it mean to be Bangalorean?" To live in a city that's so full of migrants. But because of a few recent additions to faculty, there's been more work that's been done in Kannada, say, but beyond a point again, there's not a large dialogue with the northeastern community in Bangalore, or the Tamilian or Telugu. So it goes so far, and that's in part because of the human resources that we have. So they ask questions around gender, identity, but they don't often go to caste, which is another issue. (Ibid.)

Arpita saw the importance of Bangalore in a larger conversation on creative training at the Srishti Institute. She elaborated:

And Bangalore being such a cosmopolitan and also transient city in some ways, I think it's an interesting experience for students. Also because they're not in the center of town, they're in Yellahanka, right? But the city is in some ways at their doorstep, and it's constantly changing. People are always coming in to start projects, or wrapping up projects, or are just part of a project here, so they have a lot of access to different kinds of ideas, different kinds of creativity, different art forms, and different contexts, to an extent, as well. And I think Srishti has done a fabulous job of building its brand around the city. Not necessarily physically within the city, but sort of within the idea of Bangalore. I think Srishti has really capitalized on that. . . . [Bangalore is] a tech center, but it's, you know, got this cantonment history, it's booming now, but it has slightly older roots, and it draws in a very, very mixed crowd of people for very different reasons too. And Srishti fits in with that, in terms of students and faculty I would say. (Ibid.)

Both Archana and Arpita cited Indian contemporary dancers as ideal collaborators in their institution's models. For them, contemporary dancers are movement-based creatives whose membership in larger creative communities is a logical contribution to achieve the larger goals that both Jaaga and the Srishti Institute expound.

Similar to Archana and Arpita, Sudeep emphasized the importance of creative work to be in service of something else—something bigger, aware, and socially responsible. He returned to the topic of Indian contemporary dance to expand on the form's capacities for encouraging this kind of work. He explained:

I think [Indian contemporary dance] lends itself to collaboration the best. . . . There is no rigid structure to work within. I think also it's so vast. You can't get it all from one area. And there's so much of innovation happening. All of these different practices: you take in influences from yoga, from aerial work, and you get it to apply it in a contemporary context. So I think that's also something that I particularly find interesting as well. It's interesting to watch how art can be sort of re-interpreted and be more modern, or more well-informed, and therefore the purpose of art to express, but also educate and inform and to communicate, and I think if you want to communicate something that's relevant today in today's times, if you want to make a commentary on something, that you feel strongly about, that is happening in the present, it's a lot easier to do than something that's entirely formal. (Interview with Sudeep Bhattacharya, 4 December 2017)

Sudeep's statements echo the creative mobilities of Indian contemporary dancers, who not only move through idioms in processes of collaboration, but are unbounded by form in movement.

This, in Sudeep's opinion, offers a better path to commentary, which is the responsibility of the Bangalore creative.

Bengaluru Fantastic

I conclude this chapter by recapitulating the work of STEM Dance Kampni, working on an unconventional dance floor once again, this time in the festival Bengaluru Fantastic in December 2017.

The lights dim, as I take my seat on the floor in the front row of a long alley. I've passed by Rangoli Metro Station so many times, but never really entered the space. It's noisy. The cars zip by in a constant whir behind, just beyond the barrier that separates us and MG Road—seemingly the busiest street in Bangalore, and certainly the most difficult road to cross. It's a relentless reminder of the space's setting in the city's center—a most exciting, most fitting, most impossible setting for a tech-arts festival.

The wide but shallow stage looks like it was both meant to and not meant to house performances. Mobile in function, perhaps. The painted wall directly in front of the audience—an unavoidable backdrop to the performance we are about to see—is jarring: the head of a panther, royal blue in color, is painted next to the head of a tiger, which stares back at me while I wait for something to happen. There are other images, but the tiger draws my eye.

Madhu-didi walks onto downstage right, with a wireless mic, surely about to introduce STEM's pieces. "We're really happy to collaborate with Jaaga for this. The piece is called 'Jangam.' Jangam is the Kannada word for momentum, and of course it has some profound philosophical connections, which we're not going to talk about now. . . I think the piece speaks for itself."

The stage is gradually bathed in a blue wash of light, as the track begins with a wall of digitally produced sound that I know was created in the Logic interfaces of

Praveen Sir's recording studio. The dancers enter from stage left, all on electronic unicycle hoverboards, with single yellow headlights that beam through the almost impenetrable blue wash that obscures the dancers bodies. They zig-zag, in snake-like curved lines across the stage, back and forth a few times. In the front row, I can see the subtle weight shift between the right and left feet that straddle the objects upon which they balance. A subtle weight shift, similar to the feeling of turning a bicycle. A lean in. An impulse left or right. An invisible, but perceptible steering.

Jana quickly becomes the center-center focus, while the others continue to snake in lines around the stage. He glides along on his unicycle hoverboard, tracing large circles, almost like one does to trace circles on a piece of paper with the aid of a mathematic compass.

Bending at the waist, engaging his core and quads, he raises his arms slowly arch-like above his head to create a straight line—movements that are gradual but sure. This section moves into a choreographic sequence, first with four, and then five dancers. They keep the momentum of the unicycle's smooth, continuous motion, while moving into individual freezes, sometimes holding poses of the body while maintaining the motion of the technology between their feet, and other times stopping movement altogether as the unicycle becomes a prop.

Freeze: The limbs are spokes, creating shapes from among the body's capacity to make lines and planes.

Freeze: Kalari animal stance.

Freeze: Back-bend bridge onto the unicycle, now a prop on the floor.

Freeze: Two bodies contour a tableau: one right-side-up, maintaining the motion of the unicycle; the other upside down, grasping the first body around his middle, as they hold their bodies taut, supported.

The above vignette, continuing from the method that characterizes many of the vignettes in this dissertation, is written from the perspective of my experience as an audience member at STEM Dance Kampni's performance at Bengaluru Fantastic. Their first piece, "Jangam," was newly choreographed repertoire on battery-powered unicycle hoverboards (see Figure 24). After finishing their performance of "Jangam," STEM continued with repertoire that I had seen,



Figure 24: STEM Dance Kampni performs "Jangam" at Bengaluru Fantastic. Photo taken by the author (December 2017).

learned, and even performed, incorporating and adding bodies on unicycles to existing pieces as a choreographic thread throughout.

Bengaluru Fantastic took place over two days in December 2017. Curated by Archana Prasad and her team at Jaaga, the festival gathered practitioners from among the tech, arts, and cultural sectors in a series of lectures, workshops, film screenings, and performances at Rangoli Metro Art Center in Bangalore (see Figure 25).



Figure 25: Snapshot of programming curated into the festival Bengaluru Fantastic, which took place from December 15–17, 2017.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ See <https://befantastic.in/>, accessed February 25, 2019.

The point of the festival, communicated via its promotional material, was to show and encourage engagement with the meeting points of tech, art, and culture. The resulting program highlighted practitioners who work between these three discourses, as mobile creatives.

Continuous with previous accounts of creative work that are represented in this chapter, Bengaluru Fantastic was underscored by a commitment to exhibiting the possibilities for social impact in generating the festival's program. Archana discussed the festival in our February 2018 interview. She stated:

So I came from the art world and really valued tech. [Freeman] came from the tech world and really understood and valued art, and we wanted to together create that space where both communities would sit comfortably. And use well. And our hypothesis was that these two worlds would start bumping into each other, and the more they bumped into each other, the more possibilities would open up. Which is what happened, really. And that opinion, basically, I had no reason to change that opinion. And what I did realize, that because of the state of the world at this moment, a festival model would provide a) a way for us to invite large numbers of public that just a single space like Jaaga wouldn't or couldn't do, b) give that excuse to larger groups of creators to bump into larger groups of techies, and c) it would actually create a platform where both could show off to each other the best of what they did...imagining [the festival] as a city-level international invitation to the community of the best of tech artists and just the best of [what's] to come, would just set a bar. Like it would show especially the community that I cared most about was kind of this funny creature that cared about arts practice but also how technology could influence and amplify and integrate it into their work. (Interview with Archana Prasad, 20 February 2018)

Archana's sentiments echo important connections between creatives, collaboration, the tech sector, and the post-liberalization, cosmopolitan, modern Bangalore that I have discussed earlier in this chapter. From my conversation with Archana and my attendance at Bengaluru Fantastic, I read the festival as seeking to show: 1) creatives collaborate to produce interesting results; 2) these results have larger social impact; 3) there is productive space for collaboration between the tech and arts sectors in particular; and 4) Bangalore is the ideal city to house this kind of work.

On the importance of Bangalore in facilitating collaboration among creatives, Archana elaborated:

But I think the city [of Bangalore] has that—that talent pool, because all of these universities and colleges and young kids coming out, there’s a really strong contemporary arts scene that is not driven by market nowadays . . . And you have a whole bunch of these performance and visual art spaces that the rest of the country doesn’t have. And that’s what’s special. And the fact that it’s not a gallery-ist thing. Like Delhi is very gallery-ist, Bombay is very media driven. Everything is Bollywood, and that’s what they’re serving. Because Bollywood is where the money is, and where the money is, that’s where people will go. And then Bangalore has this long history, no money of [the same] kind. But now with the tech sector opening up, there’s more chance over time that the tech sector will fund projects that bring culture to the people. (Ibid.)

Archana emphasizes the importance of the tech sector as a bridge between people and culture.

Madhu Nataraj sees her work with STEM Dance Kampni as having a similar role, especially in reviving an interest in Indian culture and heritage through contemporary dance among citizens who exhibit otherwise (see Chapter 3). Madhu-didi sees her work as inciting action, driving dialogue, and educating younger generations of dancers to do the same, moving on and off the dance floor to do so.

Concluding Thoughts

The idea of collaboration off the dance floor recalls the histories, texts, and imagined spaces in which dance is not just movement. Scholars of the reinvention of Indian classical music and dance in the wake of political modernity, have described the space of the courtesan’s salon, for example, as one of an artist’s mehfil, wherein dancing girls played, recited poetry, moved, and entertained between the porous boundaries of creative idioms (see Chapter 1). The Indian classical text *Natya Shastra* describes systems of rasa, for example, in which an affective whole

is created from the sum of theater, dance, and music (see Rangacharya 1996 [1986]). In the context of dancers who work off the dance floor in Bangalore, collaboration is conceptualized differently. At the same time, the porous boundaries between idioms and a creative whole that can be constructed from many parts have precedents in the multiple histories that make up the history of Indian dance. Among dancers as creatives in Bangalore, the necessity to work off the dance floor continues from cosmopolitan pasts, while articulating a contemporary ethos that is located in the city and its urban realities today.

In this chapter, I have illustrated the impetus to collaborate among Indian contemporary dancers, theorizing it as a mobility off the dance floor, through spaces of interaction with other creatives. I began with a case study of STEM Dance Kampni's piece "Kalpavriksha," and Madhu-didi's collaboration with visual artist SG Vasudev and the National Gallery of Modern Art. I discuss Bangalore as the ideal setting for this kind of work, especially in the post-liberalization era, in which the city is partly defined today in its development as a tech hub in national and global economies. While this kind of cosmopolitanism is one among multiple, I demonstrate that Bangalore's creatives draw on the tech reality to carry out their work. I refer to Richard Florida's notion of the Creative Class to contour a discussion on class, caste, and systemic privilege in India, especially in the perception of Indian contemporary dancers as middle-class elites. I move off the dance floor to create a dialogue between three creatives in Bangalore, who collaborate with dancers to produce socially engaged work that serves its communities. I conclude this chapter as I began, with a focus on STEM Dance Kampni's performance of a new piece in the tech-arts festival Bengaluru Fantastic.

Indian contemporary dancers exhibit mobility in processes of collaboration with other creatives. As one kind of mobility among many in this dissertation's plural approach to

mobilities, I turn in my last chapter to restrictions on mobility in transnational interpretations of Indian contemporary, contemporary Indian, Indian, and contemporary dance. As creatives push, pull, bump into each other, and collide in the multiple city of Bangalore, where and when do they stay still?

Chapter 5

Moving Transnationally: Indian and Contemporary Bodies between Borders

I made my way to the nearest immigration counter—not without a sense of anxiety—where I encountered the stare of a middle-aged officer wearing a Gandhi cap. A rigid pencil moustache gave him the suggestion of a military look. He peered at me from behind a grille of grimy metal bars which did not quite extend all the way across the front of the counter. For a moment I felt a little confused. It was *déjà vu*. I had seen such an immigration counter in South Africa as a child and could faintly recall the smell and the insidiously threatening air. I had to adjust to presenting myself to a person in authority who was not White but an Indian like me, who had the power either to let me into his country or to deny me entry. It was a strange, disorienting feeling. How could this brown man, who could have been a relative of mine, have such power? The colour of his skin was not right. He was on the wrong side of the counter.

—— Mohamed Keshavjee, *Into That Heaven of Freedom* (2015: 2)

The sun's signature on my skin and how the contrast of tan lines carried merit. That I was expected to feel virtuous was strange to me. I tanned fast. Brown to dark umber in a matter of hours. But what struck me was this: it was as if my white friends were wearing their tanned skin—bathing in it—as opposed to living in it. The thrill of becoming temporarily dark was, for them, an advantage. It would take me a decade or so, longer even, to consider or be faced with what dark skin means in the world and how my relationship to my skin is further complicated by how fair it is and the access it allows me, and oh, what a luxury to be allowed a decade or more of girlhood in the first place.

—— Durga Chew-Bose, *Too Much Not the Mood* (2017: 182–3)

This closing chapter is both the easiest and most difficult to write. I present the final mobility—transnational mobility—that I investigate in my study of Indian contemporary dance. I recapitulate some of the discussions that I arouse in previous chapters: on the mobile bodies that define and invent forms of Indian dance (Chapter 1), codes that contour contemporaneity on the dance floor (Chapter 2), the movement of dancers through systems of patronage (Chapter 3), and

the porosity of idiomatic borders that is available to the cosmopolitan, contemporary subject (Chapter 4). As I will show in this chapter, transnational mobility brings into focus a kind of mobility that dance practitioners are afforded, but must navigate as they cross the borders of real and imagined India.

The bulk of this chapter is a series of excerpts that are transcribed from a conversation I had with two fellow dancers, collaborators, peers, and friends. Preeti Veerlapati and Kinnari Vora are Indian dancers who live and work in Chicago. Both classically trained, Preeti and Kinnari move between dance forms, drawing on different kinds of movement vocabulary to make work. They take on the genre identifiers “contemporary,” “classical,” “folk,” and “Indian” in self-contested ways. They navigate professional worlds for dance, participating in systems of patronage between the United States and India, through grant applications, workshops, and international tours that allow them a sustained place in overlapping economies for Indian dance. Both born in India, but having migrated to the US at very different points in their lives, Preeti and Kinnari offer perspectives on what it means to be transnational Indian dancers, contributing to the production of transnational Indian citizenship and contemporary dance as they progress in their careers.

This chapter is my attempt to best represent the process of my ethnography. I have described elsewhere in the dissertation that I conducted fieldwork between January 2017 and February 2018 in Bangalore. While this is true, my entrance into research on Indian contemporary dance began when I started my own study of kathak dance in 2007 with Joanna-ji in Toronto. As I will demonstrate, I cannot separate this project from a growing consciousness of my own participation in moving communities of transnational South Asians in Canada and the

US. This chapter, on transnational mobility of and in Indian contemporary dance, contours a mobility that I have inhabited as a researcher, practitioner, and community member.

Feminist scholars have advocated for a kind of scholarship that comes close to what it means for women to do fieldwork, calling into question the futility of objectivity in the interpretive processes and partial truths of speaking for others. Feminist scholars of color in particular locate a scholarship that not only approximates the uneven experience of the female ethnographer, but also that her subjectivity is a colonized one. Dána-Ain Davis and Christa Craven (2016) summarize a lineage of this scholarship. bell hooks calls for unconventional ways of writing ethnography to destabilize structures of power that become the self-perpetuating structures of evaluating success in the academy (2015 [1990]: 200–3). Trinh Minh-ha (1989) ruminates on different experimental forms of writing “the woman” into scholarly work, providing examples along the way. Judith Stacey’s provocative question in her article, “Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?” (1988), resulted in a series of responses that consider similar issues in doing feminist ethnography. While Lila Abu-Lughod argues that feminist ethnography must be poly-vocal in nature, in “a decolonization on the level of text” (1990: 11), Priya Kapoor describes the need within feminist and postcolonial inquiry “to reinstate the words and voices of the narrators to create primary texts” (2017: 66). Ethnomusicologist Deborah Wong (2004) makes similar gestures. She recognizes her informants as producers of [critical] theory, acknowledging the roles of cultural workers as public intellectuals (Wong 2004: 317–18). These feminist interventions result in the fictive potential of anthropological scholarship as something between autobiography and ethnography (Visweswaran 1994), addressing head-on the intersectional subjectivities of the fieldworker.

Here, I offer an experiment in my own feminist ethnography. I represent a typical conversation between myself, and collaborators Preeti and Kinnari. It mirrors several of those we have had in the past, discussing our work, work that we see, and the transnational Indian dance scene. I select excerpts from our several-hour conversation that demonstrate four larger themes, which contour how three practitioners perform and encounter Indian contemporary dance. In the process, I reprise discussions on these themes from other chapters in this dissertation. This is a poly-vocal account from the field, in which my collaborators' perspectives *are* theory, destabilizing the centrality and neutrality of my authorial voice. I prepare my reader for this kind of poly-vocal writing in Chapters 2 and 4, in which I present different modes of ethnographic writing (Chapter 2) and place the perspectives of discrete field collaborators into one dialogue, on what it means to collaborate creatively in Bangalore (Chapter 4). In this chapter, I present one conversation between multiple collaborators. I provide annotations and interpretations to make connections with existing scholarship and the other chapters of this dissertation. I show that the themes I discuss in my scholarly research happen alongside the kinds of conversations on “Indian” and “contemporary” among transnational practitioners.

Translocality, Transnationalism, Diaspora

Arjun Appadurai (1996) introduces the term “translocality” in his theorization of the globalized world. For Appadurai, “translocal” bodies become deterritorialized, or what I consider plurally territorialized in ethnoscapescapes—the shifting networks of people with whom we interact (1996: 33). This provides a departure point for my discussion of transnationalism, with respect to Indian contemporary dancers, and the politics of taking on the terms “Indian” and “contemporary”

transnationally. The paradigm of translocality activates my own position as a researcher in this project. Manja Stephan-Emmrich and Philip Schröder write that translocality “emphasizes that [mobile and translocal] subjectivities emerge out of mobile actors’ simultaneous situatedness both ‘here’ and ‘there’” (2018: 28). Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen concur, stating, “Translocality . . . more generally aims at highlighting the fact that the interactions and connections between places, institutions, actors and concepts have far more diverse, and often even contradictory effects than is commonly assumed” (2010: 5).

I inhabit several translocalities in this chapter, and in this project. As an Indian dancer between Canada, the United States, and parts of South Asia, I serve the role of “practitioner” in the scholar-practitioner model. The qualifier “Indian” in my work as a dancer is the result of both my practice of an Indian dance form, and a nod to my heritage. This heritage is the result of two migrations—from British India to parts of East and South Africa in the early twentieth century, and from Africa to Canada in the 1970s. I am an active member of the transnational Ismaili Muslim community, whose members originate geo-culturally in parts of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. The combination of religious, ethnic, and citizenship identities that I live illustrates my own reach to belong in the various locales, or trans-communal groups, with which I affiliate through the process of this project.

Inherent in a discussion of translocality and mobility are the concepts of transnationalism and diaspora. Ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman coalesces the criteria for identifying the term today, which draws from the dispersion of Jews through centuries of migration (see Bohlman 2008). Bohlman defines diaspora as “a condition of placelessness,” resulting from the “need to leave a place that is regarded as a people’s own” (2002: 115). The result is a series of migrant, or migrating communities who relate to a homeland and hostland. One of the most colloquially

recognized instances of diaspora is a product of colonialism, in which Africans were forcibly moved to parts of the Americas during the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, when their bodies were traded capially as slaves (see Gilroy 1993).

Scholars of transnationalism offer multiple perspectives on how the term converges and departs from diaspora. Many identify transnationalism as signifying a series of activities that diasporic communities and their constitutive members perform to maintain translocal citizenship, who relate to places of previous or imagined belonging through repeated, ritual practices (see Ben Rafael and Sternberg 2009; Dahinden 2010; Grewal 2005). These activities are formed from a continuum of techniques and desires necessary to negotiate local and translocal citizenships, civic belonging, ethnicity, race, culture, and the reasons for [continued] migration. Thomas Faist (2010) posits that diaspora and transnationalism are “dance partners,” which can be, but are not always bound to each other. Steven Vertovec (2009) also argues for an ontological separateness, in which diaspora describes the conditions for engendering community. In short, transnationalism implies a set of active connections that are performed to maintain diaspora.

Scholars of Asian diaspora and transnationalism offer other kinds of imagery that help us understand the particularities of Asian translocals and their mobilities. Aihwa Ong (1999) attributes the term “flexible citizens” not just to members of diaspora, but to people who must maintain different kinds of civic membership in their homeland and hostland communities. Anna Tsing (2005) explains that transnational, translocal, and flexible citizens experience “frictions” in performing the ritual activities that maintain their transnational citizenships, as they negotiate homeland connections, hostland citizenships, and the liminal processes between. She writes, “As a metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power” (Tsing 2005: 5). Transnational, flexible citizens

experience frictions in how they maintain their mobilities and attain access to civic resources in the many communities that they express membership. These mobilities are controlled, restricted, and precarious, in what Monisha Das Gupta terms the “condition of migrancy” (2006: 4).

Scholars of the South Asian diaspora offer different case studies in the kinds of mobilities required for transnational communities to take on this category. Murari Kumar Jha (2009) posits that the first modern iteration of the South Asian diaspora was founded in capitalism. He describes that this took shape among Gujarati merchants in the seventeenth centuries, who left India to establish trade routes with the stakeholders that were antecedents of the first modern corporation in the region (see Chapter 3). Susan Koshy and R. Radhakrishnan (2008) term the South Asian diaspora a “neo-diaspora,” since it follows the Jewish and African diasporas described in the previous paragraphs, to the travel of indentured servants from India to the “West Indies” in the nineteenth century. These discussions on the South Asian diaspora prompt me to consider versions that are pre-capital, pre-colonial, and pre-modern, such as in the network of trade routes on the Silk Road, or the spread of Islam from the Perso-Arab world into South Asia in the eleventh century. I imagine the mobile citizens who moved in the building of these paths, navigating connections and transnational activities along the way (see Greenblatt 2010).

The South Asian diaspora, though conceived rhetorically as one unified community, is diverse, unequally produced, and imagined (see Appadurai 1996; Brown 2006). Nevertheless, negotiating South Asian belonging is a reality among globally dispersed communities of Indians, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Nepalis, Sri Lankans, Afghans, Maldivians, Bhutanese, and various hyphenated communities such as Indo-Fijians and Indo-Caribbeans. These processes of negotiating citizenship, ethnicity, and belonging are reflected in the expressive forms that are produced by these transnationally Indian, or “transregionally” South Asian citizens.

The conversation I had with my dancer-peer-collaborator-friends Preeti Veerlapati and Kinnari Vora renders transparent what it means for dancers to be transnational Indian citizens on the dance floor. I represent the conversation in fragments, to point to a whole in which Indian dancers in North America reach to real and imagined ideas of both Indianness and contemporaneity to be transnational through dance. The practitioners with whom I worked in India are also transnational citizens. They engage with the global circulation of goods, services, and media especially, and negotiate them into choreographies and productions (see Chapter 2). They travel transnationally, to stage work in contemporary dance. While I was in Bangalore, I spoke with administrative members at Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts, who were preparing for an upcoming tour of the company's work in Canada. The same was true, coincidentally, for the dancers at Mumbai's The Danceworx, following my interview with Artistic Director Ashley Lobo. In March 2019, STEM Dance Kampni began a tour of their productions "Kalpavriksha" and "Rhapsody" in the UAE (see Chapter 4).

My fieldwork in Bangalore and other Indian cities has led me into many conversations on the plight of transnational mobility for Indian citizens in the current political climate. At the time I write this dissertation, the United States is more than halfway through President Donald Trump's administration. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has held office in India for five years, which may or may not change depending on the outcome of the 2019 Indian general election—currently underway. Both right-wing governments have effected new, charged dialogues and policies on the restricted mobility of people in and out of American and Indian borders. The "Muslim Ban" and rhetoric on "undocumented workers" in the United States has resulted in an even more stringent policing of its borders, which has cast a wider net for violence directed at profiled, transnational citizens with renewed racial prejudice. In India, the explosive debate on

territorial borders with Pakistan, Bangladesh and the region of Kashmir continues, resulting in regular, atrocious episodes of militarism throughout the subcontinent. On Easter Sunday in 2019, the capital city of Colombo in Sri Lanka experienced its worst episodes of violence since the country emerged from a civil war just ten years earlier, at the hands of religious nationalism.

My field collaborators in Bangalore and Mumbai who work in the arena of Indian contemporary dance have expressed that today's political climate has resulted in restrictions to access transnational travel, especially to the United States and parts of Europe. In contrast to their unfettered travel through the idiomatic borders that I describe in Chapter 4, they experience hindered mobility in geopolitical border travel. As contract workers, dancers must attain visas to tour their work abroad, which in many cases, proves to be an administrative nightmare. They expressed particular difficulty in attaining the elusive P-1 visa to travel in and out of the US—a hub for hegemonic exhibitions of Euro-American contemporaneity in dance in which these Indian practitioners cannot be present (see Chapter 2). Meanwhile, Indian dancers in the diaspora interpret and perform contemporaneity in exhibitions of Indian heritage, broadly. Sitara Thobani (2017a) argues that this work, by Indian dancers in the United Kingdom, and more generally, abroad, contributes to economies for dance in India (2017a: 8). She outlines the transnational system for masterclasses and workshops, in which British academies and studios that train transnational dancers patronize Indian teachers to hold short residencies for their students.

Ananya Chatterjea (2013) presents the other face of this transnational movement of “masters,” in which Euro-American contemporary dancers are invited to India to offer residencies and short intensives for Indian contemporary dancers. She warns against the notion of “sharing space,” arguing that this allows hegemonic modernities to persist in discourse on Indian dance (2013: 13–14). Janet O’Shea (2007) makes the compelling argument that

bharatanatyam, though recognized as an epitomical Indian cultural form, has always been a transnational form. She recognizes the work of dancers who maintain active careers *between* multiple locales, such as Hari Krishnan, to which I also add Lata Pada, Astad Deboo, and Anita Ratnam, among others. This narrative is also inherent in the work of Indian modern dancers like Uday Shankar, whose work was always transnational (see Erdman 1987, 1996). Ajaya Sahoo and Johannes De Kruijf (2014) point to how the movement of media online, beyond creative work, creates open pathways for Indian transnational citizenship that is defined among mobile bodies who do not remained fixed within the geopolitical borders of India.

I continue the conversation on Indian transnational citizenship in fragments of my discussion with Chicago-based dancers Preeti Veerlapati and Kinnari Vora. We present distinctive takes as transnational Indians and dancers who maintain our identities and belonging through work on the dance floor. We discuss not just the bodies that move through borders, but also the concepts “Indian” and “contemporary,” which change shape, frictively, along the way.

1. Inescapably Indian

I arrived at Preeti’s place on March 3, 2019, at her newly renovated home in Chicago’s Ukrainian Village neighborhood. We had all met just the night before, at the last showing of Akram Khan’s *Giselle* at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance in Chicago.⁵⁵ I had arranged to

⁵⁵ Incidentally, I first met Kinnari in 2013, at a rehearsal for our first professional gig in Chicago, also presented at the Harris Theater. Just a few months later, I lent my kathak ghungroos to Preeti for an evening performance that served as a fundraiser for Kalapriya Center for Indian Performing Arts. We were all brought together and introduced to dancing in Chicago by Pranita Nayar, who served then as Kalapriya’s Artistic Director.

have a conversation with Preeti and Kinnari after their own morning rehearsal. They run a Chicago-based dance collective, Ishti, which stages productions that they co-direct and choreograph. Trained in kuchipudi and bharatanatyam respectively, Preeti and Kinnari agree that their classical training underscores the foundation of their identities as dancers. They also work in other movement vocabularies, such as kalaripayattu and folk dance forms that Kinnari describes as Gujarati and Rajasthani.

Kinnari moved to the US from Ahmedabad, Gujarat in the early 2000s to pursue a postgraduate degree in Physical Therapy. Today, she remains in the US, as an H1-B visa holder in Chicago, and works at a private clinic in Indiana. Having trained as a dancer in Ahmedabad, she sought new avenues for continuing to dance in the US—first in Iowa, and then Chicago, where she performs in regular appearances with Ishti and Surabhi, a world music ensemble that recently toured Portugal, Spain, Vietnam, and Senegal. Preeti was born in Hyderabad and raised in St. Louis. She began her study of kuchipudi from a very young age, in a model that many first-generation Indian-American families pursue for their daughters (see Srinivasan 2012). As an undergraduate at Indiana University, she joined clubs and teams in other dance forms, including West African traditions and hip-hop. Following her degree, Preeti pursued a career in management consulting, which she left to work full-time as a dancer and arts administrator. She continues this work today, at a reputable granting foundation in Chicago.

Preeti, Kinnari, and I have been collaborating as dancers for several years. We have bonded on and off the dance floor, performing, rehearsing, and taking class together; sharing costumes; volunteering at each other's shows; doing each other's makeup in green rooms; and facilitating quick changes in the wings during a performance (see Figure 26). As we have done

on countless occasions, we began our visit in March 2019 by preparing food together. We had just debriefed the night before about Akram Khan’s choreography of *Giselle*, and I figured we



Figure 26: Preeti Veerlapati, Komal Shah, Ameera Nimjee, and Kinnari Vora (left to right) perform at India Independence Day celebrations at the Chicago Cultural Center, August 2014. Photo courtesy of Kinnari Vora.

would continue where we left off. This time, however, they knew I was recording our conversation to include in my dissertation. As Kirin Narayan (1993) has demonstrated, the “native” anthropologist is plagued by an outsider status by sheer nature of framing research questions from the culture that we, as practitioners and community members, produce. I

resonated with Narayan's theorized outsidership during the first few, awkward minutes of our conversation.

I began by explaining how I was going to frame this chapter, in the larger context of my dissertation. I continued, asking Preeti and Kinnari their thoughts about the terms "contemporary" and "Indian contemporary." This rather formal opening echoed the interviews I conducted with other collaborators, which I represent in previous chapters. As we progressed, we settled into our regular conversational tone, interrupting one another, finishing each other's sentences, and prompting and prodding each other along in a poly-vocal expression of opinions. I try to mark particularly salient instances of this conversational mode through each of the excerpts. I underline speech emphases, and use italics to communicate a moment of gesture, something non-rhetorical, or a note to the reader that provides context for how to read the transcribed excerpts.

Ameera Nimjee (AN): So what does it mean to be an Indian dancer versus a contemporary dancer in the US, and what kinds of pitfalls or even doors does that open?

Preeti Veerlapati (PV): I don't know. I find myself sometimes segregating myself as well.

[Preeti murmurs in agreement throughout the following statement.]

Kinnari Vora (KV): I feel that no matter what I do, I will still be an Indian dancer first, before I am a contemporary dancer. Or will I ever be there? I don't know. Do I even want to be there? I don't know. Because who is defining "contemporary?" It's not someone who grew up watching Indian dance. It is someone who grew up watching ballet as a dance. Those are the people who are defining contemporary. So anything different than ballet, and a little bit rooted in it, that thing is going to take precedence over, you know, other dance forms. So I think no matter how contemporary it is, the fact that . . . "Indian" is always going to come before "contemporary." And it's not just me. Even talking to someone like Tuli.⁵⁶ Even when her training has been ballet, her having Indian roots, or

⁵⁶ Tuli Bera has been a regular ensemble dancer in Preeti and Kinnari's collective, Ishti.

having that brown skin, or having a little exposure, or I shouldn't say "little," but exposure to Indian dance, that Indianness comes before "contemporary."

AN: Why do you think that is?

PV: (Whispers) White supremacy. (laughs)

[We all laugh.]

PV: I mean a lot of it is that, the whole change and codification of bharatanatyam was because of colonialism. It was a direct "oh, we need to compete with ballet, and what the Europeans have. So we need to make this a strict and rigorous dance form. So we can show to our colonial leaders that hey, we too have codified. . . ."

AN: We have our own. . . .

PV: Right. (laughs) So there's that, but I see it even in the theater world. There's a difference between what people consider community and social, versus ones who have gone through professional training. Like you have to have gone through school and university to be considered "ah you are trained." So the example I have is Free Street Theater here in Chicago. They build their art . . . their artists don't necessarily have previous training. But I went to see their show, and I was going to cry. It was just that moving. And some of my most powerful pieces I feel like I've seen in the past few years have been community art. [But] they don't get reviewed. Theater critics don't review them.

AN: Because they don't have this quote unquote training. It's interesting, because when I look at BFAs in Dance, places that I'm looking right now to work in, in a Dance Department let's say. I think about it, and I couldn't have done a BFA in dance; none of us could. Because they don't offer the facilities and resources to train you further in the dance that you already have.

PV: No, I would have had to go into modern, if I wanted to do that at IU.

AN: Correct.

KV: But I feel like that's what I'm getting to. So who is writing all this?

AN: Yes. . .

PV: Mmmm. . .

KV: People who are versed in this language. So anything other than that is going to be defined as something different. But is it because that's what majority is? Here? Then if you go to India and I want to do a BFA in modern dance, will I be able to?

PV: Hmmm. . .

AN: That's a good point. . .

KV: No, you'll only be offered a BFA in bharatanatyam, kathak, this or this. So how is that different? I sometimes feel that the diversity I'm getting, there's no way I can get this diversity in Ahmedabad. There's no way! Growing up in Ahmedabad, I had seen only two dances that were non-Indian that came, and that's because of Darpana.⁵⁷ I don't know if you want to call it white supremacy to what extent, or it's because that is what the majority is, and that is what has been written or codified. I'm reading *Bhagavad Gita* and I'm getting to a point where now I need someone else's interpretation. And I was like, "okay I give up, and now I'll read a white man's interpretation," because that's what's available. There are other things, but they're not in a language I'll understand.

AN: Wow.

KV: So that's what I'll read and listen to now.

Preeti and Kinnari emphasized the inescapability of being Indian dancers *first* in how they navigate economies for dance in the United States. This was a thread that wove its way through the entirety of our conversation. They touched on what I present in Chapter 2, in which audiences for Indian dance cannot see past markers of Indianness. In patronizing Indian dance performances, they expect exhibitions of Indian culture.

This is not a new debate. Choreographer Shobana Jeyasingh, who works between contemporary dance, bharatanatyam, and others in the UK, explains, "Bharata Natyam⁵⁸ came to be valued chiefly as an example of its culture and religion and Bharata Natyam dancers came to be valued as race relation officers, cultural ambassadors, experts in multiculturalism,

⁵⁷ Darpana Academy for Performing Arts, based in Ahmedabad, is a contemporary and bharatanatyam institution that was founded by Mrinalini Sarabhai in 1949, and continues today under the direction of her daughter Mallika Sarabhai.

⁵⁸ The term "bharatanatyam" translates from Sanskrit to "Indian dance" in English. Some choose to keep the transliteration literal, as Jeyasingh (2019) does here.

anthropological exhibits—every-thing save as dance technicians” (2019: 188).⁵⁹ Sitara Thobani (2017a, 2017b) describes that British-Indian dancers must work to distance themselves from classical, traditional, and Indian categories, which take on particular meaning in multicultural rhetoric of “visible minorities”—vocabulary I encounter in Canada also. Thobani states, “For not only are Indian classical dancers constructed as static, facing the burden of having to prove their own contemporary subjectivity in the postcolonial/multicultural state, India is itself identified as the source of this cultural stagnation (‘tradition’) in the transnational arena” (2017a: 61). These accounts make reference to how visible minorities and brown bodies navigate economies for Indian dance in the US and the UK.

My own dance training, with Toronto-based Joanna de Souza, adds another perspective into the mix, on the politics of white bodies that perform Indian dance.

AN: But there’s something of a friction between what you guys were talking about: growing up here, and what it means to be doing dance, compartmentalized, what it means to be a dancer here and being identified first as an Indian dancer and not anything else, because of what you look like. Or that in combination with the dance form that you bring to the table, right?

KV: Well, off topic, when you come across people, are you identified as a woman first, or as brown?

AN: Here in the US? Or Toronto, Canada, whatever?

KV: North America. Does your brownness precede your womanness?

AN: I don’t know. Growing up in Toronto, as you know, visiting very much, Toronto has now become this . . .

KV: Brown capital.

⁵⁹ At the beginning of her chapter, Jeyasingh states that it was revised from an earlier version, which was published in 1995. She had been vocal about the issue of Indian dancers as cultural ambassadors in the West in the 1990s.

AN: Yeah! . . . So I don't know, I think it changes city by city, in my opinion. But to sort of relate this kind of, and bring another thing into the mix, Joanna-ji's studio. . . . What she practices is kathak, and that's the dance form she learned since the '70s with [Pandit] Chitresh Das in California. But because she's white doing it, she's a contemporary dancer. Not a contemporary dancer like modern-contemporary, but she's doing contemporary kathak. And I find that so surprising, because to me she is *pakka* (real). . . .

KV and PV: Yeah.

AN: . . . but because she's white, this is what she's doing. Plus, then she puts a few different kinds of instruments in there. . . .

KV: . . . but is it because she puts in a few different instruments? Or is it because she dances on "Hotel California" or whatever her song was?

AN: "Georgia on my Mind." Yeah. So she did that abhinaya piece to "Georgia."

KV: Does that make it a contemporary? Would you call that piece contemporary?

AN: I don't know. . . . It's her; it's so her to me. But at the same time, Toronto Tabla Ensemble is what we've been working with since years gone by, with Ritesh Das. And all it is, is using different instruments and taal. That's it. . . . I think it's interesting because the perception of us as brown people in this part of the world and doing the things we do is very different than the perception of a white person doing what they do.

KV: I like how you brought in her example.

AN: . . . you know the whole question of appropriation has been something that's been placed on her over the years. On a lot of other white dancers doing world forms. . . and it's hard to figure out where to land. It's so rich, this conversation. It's full of layers. I don't know. I think it's very interesting. I think what people are looking for in this part of the world is authenticity. And maybe that's why they see you as an Indian dancer first, because you can reconcile in their mind of what they imagine you to be. They're looking for a true experience. "If I'm going to see this show, it better be an Indian person doing what's traditional, and this is what is traditional, and therefore I see an instrument and I know what it's going to sound like, and I see the costumes, and they work like this." So immediately you change the costumes, and you wear something else, and it's all of a sudden different.

PV: You know, this also comes down to marketing. Because I remember the conversation we had with Carlo. He does Spanish guitar—he can do anything. But he calls it Spanish guitar. And he was telling us, you know, "call it what it is. Call it Indian dance. That's what you guys do, that's what's going to bring people in the door." . . . And I think we grapple with that too. How do we promote ourselves by staying true to what we feel we're doing, but at the same time reach and get people in the door. Because I think once

we are able to get people in the door, they'll see, and feel, and make up their own mind. It won't matter what they say.

KV: *[interrupts]* It's up to them.

PV: . . . So then the question is if you continue to market yourself as Indian dance, are you then perpetuating "this is Indian dance." And therefore leading people to say, "oh, I just want an Indian dance piece here." Without real thought. But it also depends.

KV: *[interrupts]* . . . or most places where they have not had us for one particular piece. They have said "we want you to perform, and this is the event." Then we have chosen what to present where.

PV: That's true. All of the gigs that we've gotten, they haven't been saying, "this is what we want you to perform." But every time we do get a gig, we always say, "alright. Is this something a) that we should be doing, but b) if we do do this, what can we be bringing to the table? And curate it so that it's ours."

KV: And how can we still make it so that, you know, so yes we know that presenting *Prakriti* won't work at Navy Pier for Holi event. But how can we still put an intention to what we are doing?

AN: And that is understandable. It's nice, it's empowering to get that you have a twenty-minute set, and you can do with it what you want. But the reason for picking Ishti over picking Deeply Rooted. . .

PV: *[interrupts]* is because we're Indian dance.

KV: They want Indian dance.

PV: They want Indian dance at an Indian event. I mean Navy Pier and that Holi thing, it's all going to be Indian dance groups.

Taking on the qualifier "Indian" signifies differently to different bodies. From one perspective, the brown, transnationally Indian bodies that perform Indian dance are held to certain expectations for exhibiting tradition and exhibiting culture. Preeti and Kinnari wrestle with this issue in not just our conversation, but also how they negotiate contracts and gigs. The

reconciliation of non-brown bodies creates a different set of conditions with which to understand dance.

Joanna de Souza remains one of the most influential figures in my life. Not only did she initiate me into the world of dance; she nurtured my own consciousness of being transnationally Indian when I began my study of kathak in 2007. Joanna-ji is a senior disciple of the late Pandit Chitresh Das, who first established kathak in the Bay Area of the United States. He joined several influential Bengali transplants from Kolkata, among Ustad Ali Akbar Khan (“Khan Sahib”),⁶⁰ Pandit Swapan Chaudhuri (Swapan-da), and Ustad Zakir Hussain, among others, who set up shop in California from the 1950s onward. This resulted in the establishment of the first formal institution for Indian classical music in the United States—the Ali Akbar Khan College of Music, first in Berkeley and then in Marin County.

Joanna-ji began her training with Guru-ji in 1978. Joanna-ji joined many of her white peers in a rigorous guru-shishya system, studying kathak with Guru-ji, Hindustani music with “Khan Sahib,” and rhythm with Swapan-da. Her early discipleship was facilitated by an immersive community of students, teachers, accompanists, performers, and guests that created instances of “communitas” (Turner 1969), through performances, tours, trips, and ritual rites of passage in a kathak dancer’s life. These include the ritual of “tying strings,” which bonds one to their guru as an initiated disciple; and many informal rituals, such as accompanying dance sessions from “the rug” on the floor at the front of class, keeping taal on *manjira* (hand cymbals), harmonium, and/or tabla. In addition to her time in California, Joanna-ji spent some years in

⁶⁰ I refer to “Khan Sahib” in quotations, since I never met him. In Hindustani music culture, it is considered disrespectful to refer to a revered teacher by a more familiar name, without being asked to do so directly. Joanna-ji, having studied with “Khan Sahib,” referred to him as such. I quote her experience in this section.

Kolkata, living with Guru-ji's parents. She had by then married Ritesh Das—Guru-ji's younger brother and tabla disciple of Swapan-da. Though they have since separated, Ritesh-da and Joanna-ji established the M-DO Centre for World Music and Dance in Toronto in the early 1990s, which they co-directed until 2012. Joanna-ji continues to teach and oversee an active academy for kathak dance in Toronto while choreographing and performing internationally. It is difficult to encounter practitioners, administrators, or enthusiasts in the kathak or Hindustani scenes in Canada who have not passed through Joanna-ji's doors.

Ethnomusicologist Sarah Morelli (2016 and forthcoming), who studied with Guru-ji two decades later, describes the demographic, pedagogical, and even choreographic changes that his institution has undergone since the early days in the 1970s, when his students and company were almost all white women. These women remain his earliest disciples, who continued the tradition.⁶¹ Today, the institution, with satellite affiliations in Boston, Mumbai, and Toronto, as well as offshoot companies and collectives, consists largely of *desi* (those with Indian heritage, broadly) dancers. Morelli states, “[U]nlike understandings of whiteness in the United States, whiteness was constructed as an absence of South Asian culture or ancestry [in Guru-ji's classes]” (2016: 356). She explains that in the 1970s, Guru-ji sought to create his white dancers as masters of rhythm and athleticism in kathak, so that the dance form could stand against critiques of dance that were more legible to Euro-American audiences, rather than the subtleties of *khubsurati* and *nazaakat* (grace and subtlety that draw from the affective systems of *rasa* and *abhinaya*). Morelli describes further how Guru-ji would push the *desi* students to work harder in mixed classes of non-*desi* and *desi* students in the early 2000s. He did so to ensure that the *desi*

⁶¹ Joanna-ji's *guru-bahen* (fellow female disciple) is Gretchen Hayden-Ruckert, who, along with husband and ethnomusicologist George Ruckert, teach Hindustani music and dance in the Boston area.

students did not rest on any sense of entitlement or natural inclination toward the dance form (Morelli 2016: 358).

In January and February 2018, I was among a team of eleven, directed by Joanna-ji, that toured the production *BARDO* in India. The piece was a choreographic collaboration between Joanna-ji and Regina-based Canadian contemporary dancer Misty Wensel. It featured nine dancers—all from Joanna-ji’s Chhandam Dance Company. Toronto-based musicians Ian de Souza (also Joanna-ji’s husband) and Santosh Naidu joined us on tour, as composers and technicians. We presented *BARDO* in five Indian cities, premiering at the National Center for the Performing Arts in Mumbai, and sponsored by local arts institutions in each city we visited.⁶² The dance vocabulary in *BARDO* was designed from kathak and Euro-American contemporary idioms. We performed to a track, composed by Ian and Santosh, which drew from a variety of world music genres. We wore costumes that were monochromatic, minimalist versions of *shalwar-kurta* (South Asian outfit consisting of a pair of trousers and tunic). Supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, the work was billed as “contemporary,” and “Indian,” but not “Indian contemporary.” It sought to demonstrate the vitality and tradition of Indian dance in Canada, wherein the dance draws on Joanna-ji’s own training and experience of kathak in California and Kolkata, while also collaborating to produce new repertoire and productions during her thirty years in Toronto with musicians and dancers from among many of Canada’s transnational traditions.⁶³

Each city’s performance of *BARDO* was followed by a short artist talkback, in which Joanna-ji and Misty invited the audience members present to ask questions of the piece. In

⁶² Our Bangalore performance was presented by Madhu-didi and her team at the Natya Institute.

⁶³ See Wagh (2018) for a review of the Mumbai premiere of *BARDO*.

almost every talkback, Joanna-ji was asked how the piece fit into her career as a *contemporary* kathak dancer. While the piece was experimental, and drew from Misty’s contemporary toolbox, I continue to wonder what makes Joanna-ji a contemporary kathak dancer. Her training is quite traditional, especially in the context of modern conservatory systems for studying expressive forms that coalesced in the first half of the twentieth century (see Chapter 1). Her movement vocabulary is soft and graceful, while at the same time athletic and precise—especially in kathak’s larger ecosystem today. It has evolved differently from the lineage of movement that has been passed down to California students through the generations. It is Joanna-ji’s kathak style. Her style, though, signifies differently than what I heard as “contemporary” among our audiences.

I posit that white dancers in Indian forms reside as “contemporary” in these economies, because they are not brown bodies. This rhetoric complicates conversations on traditional versus contemporary; culture versus innovation; brown versus white. At a time when “cultural appropriation” has taken such a hold of social discourse, and in social media in particular, non-desi bodies are interpreted to appropriate forms of desi cultural knowledge in these economies for Indian dance. This does not capture the whole story. “Indian” dancers are both practitioners who are transnational Indians *and* non-desi dancers who perform in Indian traditions of dance. The performing body matters.

These conversations carry in other contexts, in which brown bodies are privileged to inherit forms of knowledge that white bodies do not. I hear this kind of rhetoric among “heritage speakers” in university programs in the study of South Asian languages, for example. White students learn, while brown students access, or tap into cultural knowledge that they know, or should already know. In dance, the terms “contemporary” and “Indian” are appended to the

bodies that perform and reconcile who can be modern, rather than are transnational ambassadors for Indian culture, to borrow from Jeyasingh (2019). Wherever one lands in the conversation about tradition, Indian, culture, contemporary, and appropriation, these conversations continue to have currency because of externally imposed ideas of modernity and culture (see Chapter 2).

2. Communities, Professionals, and Immigrant Shame

AN: It's my opinion, so feel free to disagree, that when I see the lay of the land of all of the South Asian art companies [in Chicago] . . . let's say it goes past dance into vocal and these things. Some of them exist for the reason of continuing Indian culture here...

KV: Mmhm. . . .

PV: And that's great. . . .

AN: And that's most of the suburban ones. We think of Company A⁶⁴. . . .

[Preeti begins to count taal in the Karnatak system in an exaggerated sort of way.]

AN: Exactly, exactly. Counting taal so rigidly, and you have to do it this way, and this is what it is. And if you come to me, I'll make sure your children grow up like good Indian children. That's my imagination a bit. And I guess, for some reason, in Chicago, I've found such a small amount of companies who want to work beyond that idiom.

KV: . . . but I feel that everyone is doing that.

PV: Maybe it might even just be our own culture as well. . . . So when I go to India, I don't feel like I belong. When I grew up here, I didn't feel like I belonged. And so therefore, a lot of the kids that grow up here, feel like they need to be super rooted to the traditions, otherwise they don't belong. And it is challenging, to break free of that. And I don't think any of the dancers that I grew up with, they're either no longer dancing, or only dancing in that tradition. I don't know a dancer that I grew up with in St. Louis, that is doing what we do. That is deciding, "let's take this tool that we've worked on, and build something else. Build what we want to build." I don't know too many. I will agree

⁶⁴ I use generic pseudonyms in references to existing institutions and productions in Chicago—an economy in which Preeti, Kinnari, and I continue to operate. I prioritize our relationships with these institutions, and as a result, safeguard their anonymity.

with that. Company B is [another] group that I know that calls themselves Indian contemporary. But if you were to look at it, you might think they're a bit more Bollywoodized contemporary. . . . I don't know.

KV: *[interrupts]* Yeah, but that's still contemporary . . . that's still. . . .

PV: Yeah, but it's still contemporary, because their subject matter was still very much about the feminine power, and *devi* and everything like that.⁶⁵

KV: See, I feel the other way, in terms of the ratio, you know? Like Company C, she's doing Indian contemporary, and is doing beautiful contemporary work. . . .

PV: Beautiful, she's pulling in jazz, and improv.

[Preeti repeats and agrees with Kinnari's perspectives through the next statement.]

KV: Like what Company D did with *Production* was contemporary, what Company E started . . . that was contemporary. So out of the five, out of the ten that I know, five are doing something in that field. Now this work started in India long ago. It takes a while, because you have to go back to the root to break out of it. So people here are going back to the root, that takes them twenty years before they break out, and now they're breaking out, versus that process happens faster—you are bombarded with that [in India].

PV: That's a good point. I wonder if I did college and post-college more in the '90s, would it be the same fact? Would I still be creating like I create now, but if I had grown up a couple decades earlier?

AN: Yeah, I totally resonate with your experience of being here, and not feeling like I belong here, not feeling like I belong there. So what's your [Kinnari's] thought on this, if you have come from there? And you are so rooted in that your ethnicity matches your national identity?

KV: You know, it didn't for a while. And that's because I didn't grow up confused. I came when I was already established as Indian, you know? And I still am, so there's no confusion in that way. No matter where I went, yes, I'm Indian. I only have one identity. I'm not Indian-American, or this. But in the past, it's been over twelve years now in the country. And especially in the past six months, what effects bothers me, or you know, what I've been feeling is more in terms of I feel the loyalty . . . it's to Chicago. I feel like I belong to Chicago. Chicago has been my home. So especially touring, when I get asked the question, "where are you from?" "Yes, I am Indian. But did you actually mean where I am from, or where I am traveling from?" What is it about India that affects me in my

⁶⁵ Devi is the word that refers to a "goddess" in Hinduism. Preeti demonstrates here that the designation of contemporary dance has to do with experimenting philosophically with a piece's subject matter.

daily life? No. What comes across to Matt, the environment that he has to deal with, it's the same environment that I have to deal with. I wait in the same grocery line wherever, as any other person who is American. I deal with the same rules, I deal with the same taxes, I deal with the same politics. That's what affects me. It's not the politics in India that affect me. How does it matter where I am from? Well I think the way I react may be a little different than the way someone else reacts. But what I am encountering is the same. You know? So when I'm touring, and when someone like Bob—he is from Chicago. So for example, he has been in Chicago for ten years, and he has a problem when he is introduced as someone from Indiana. Because he wants to be introduced as from Chicago. Chicago is home. Then I should be the same, because I have spent the same amount of time in Chicago. "I feel the same affinity to Chicago as you do." That's the past few months, especially. And being with Bob has made me realize more of my Indianness than it did before.

AN: How so?

KV: I don't know if it's the circle, or it's the travel part. Even when we were in Colombia, people would see we were together, as a couple. But people would still ask, "where are you from? And where are you from?" Dammit, I'm from the same place! I have been from the same place for nine years now. So I have this argument [with Bob] that "you have a problem that you're being introduced from Indiana and not from Chicago, but for me, I'll always be from India, I'll never be from Chicago."

PV: And here I am, I've lived all of my life in the US, and I'm still from India. I will always be asked, "where are you from?" and they say "no, where are you really from?" It's like what do you answer to that?

AN: Totally. I feel the same, and it's always this weird thing, because until I started going to India in 2009, 2008 maybe, I'd never even been to India. So then "where are you from? I guess I'm Indian, but I've never even been there." Even my parents have never even been to India. Sometimes I wonder, because this whole diversity debate is a hot one right now.

Preeti, Kinnari, and I share our evaluations of institutions in Chicago that work in a continuum between "community" and "creative" work. The former, community institutions revolve around academies that teach Indian cultural forms among transnational South Asians, and to children in particular. From my experience inhabiting these communities, they exist, in part, to preserve

practices of Indian heritage, to support the active processes of enculturating and nurturing transnational Indian citizenship. Examples of these include academies for the continued practice of classical dance, which Srinivasan (2012) describes in her monograph. She states that this began in the United States during the mid-twentieth century, among the wives of H1-B work visa holders, whose labor statuses in the US precluded them from working “on the books.” As a result, they opened institutions to teach bharatanatyam, educating generations of daughters to learn these forms as exemplars of respectable cultural practice. These pedagogical spaces, which were often makeshift dance spaces in unfinished basements or garages, became imbued with privately shared practices of being transnationally Indian—wearing Indian clothing, cooking and consuming Indian food, and performing religious rituals.⁶⁶

On the other side of this continuum lie institutions in which the teaching and continued performance of Indian music and dance traditions are upheld as toolkits for creative work, among professional-quality productions. In the cases of Indian dance in particular, this results in structures that follow Euro-American dance company models, wherein dancers are trained to be innovators. I argue in Chapter 4 that creativity is a space of privilege afforded to Indian contemporary dancers. This is reified in transnational instances as well, wherein Indian dancers in Canada, the US, and the UK distance themselves actively from the “community-minded” institutions that seek to preserve and exhibit heritage. Anusha Kedhar explains that this creates a division between those who innovate and those who do not, the latter experiencing decreased access to national funding for their work as a result (2014: 27).

In my experience, transnational institutions work somewhere in the middle of the community-creativity continuum. Income is often derived from an academy, which,

⁶⁶ See Chapter 4 of Srinivasan (2012) for a detailed account of her argument.

undoubtedly, first-, second-, and third-generation students attend to continue active connections as transnationals. For many institutions that exist in city centers in particular, academy incomes facilitate the production of creative work, in which dancers mine their Indian movement vocabularies to produce choreography that can be considered creative, and “contemporary.” This is similar to the kinds of fiscal acrobatics that contemporary dance practitioners do in India in navigating corporate shows, which enable them to create work and other programming (see Chapter 3).

Thobani (2017b) describes that the creatively oriented Indian dance practitioners are synonymous with a new genre category in the UK landscape for Indian dance: Contemporary South Asian Dance. Practitioners in this form work from similar vantage points as contemporary dancers in India, choreographing thematic content that relates to South Asian philosophy and topical issues, while exploring the “contemporary potential” of their Indian movement vocabularies. In doing so, they continue to prize choreographic approaches and bodily training that are emblematic of Euro-American contemporaneity (Thobani 2017b: 176). Chatterjea describes this to be a kind of ventriloquism, “where contemporary Asia finds its voice through the signifiers of the Euro-American modern/postmodern, the latter passing once again as the neutral universal, which is able to contain all difference” (2013: 11).

Thobani creates an analogy between the modern projects of Indian classical and contemporary dance, which she argues:

[are] premised as they were/are on the twinned actions of continuing a perceived historical legacy as well as breaking with a specific historical moment. Both projects also drew/draw on the elite positionalities of their architects; while classicization ensured the norms of the patriarchal and Brahmanical upper-middle class shaped the contours of classical performance, so too do the cosmopolitan locations of present-day Contemporary South Asian dancers (Thobani 2017b: 178–9).

I make the same argument in Chapter 1, in which I describe that the process of contemporizing has already happened in Indian dance. Preeti makes a similar comparison in the previous section, in which she states that Indian parties expressed a need to codify bharatanatyam during the twentieth century, to “compete” with Western dance forms. In this comparison, practitioners and stakeholders look westward to contemporize, while grounding essential differences in traditions that are diametrically non-Western (see Chapter 2). This is true of transnational Indian contemporary dancers.

During my conversation with Preeti and Kinnari, we often returned to these issues against the backdrop of what it means to be immigrants off the dance floor. Our respective immigration stories are very different. Kinnari holds Indian citizenship, and lives in the US as a visa-holding member of its professional work force, which she attained as an adult following her completion of a post-graduate degree in New York. Preeti identifies herself as Indian-American, and holds dual (Indian and American) citizenship. Her family migrated to the United States in the 1980s following the milestone 1965 Immigration Act, which removed quotas on the immigration of people of specific national origins that had resounding effects for Asians in particular (see Lee 2015). This was a checkpoint in a history of South Asian immigration into the US, both documented and undocumented (see Srinivasan 2012). I depart from both of these narratives. My heritage is plurally South Asian, and the result of multiple migrations through three generations. My history joins multiple waves of migration into Canada that began with the movement of Punjabis as laborers to parts of British Columbia in the early twentieth century, followed by policy changes in the 1960s that enabled the entry of Indo-Caribbeans, Pakistanis, and many other transnationals to settle in Canada.

PV: So I think that it's almost like this whole era of divisiveness and Trump, it's about who are you listening to and are you an echo chamber? I know I was telling you [Kinnari], I feel like this year I've finally gotten over feeling like I have a split. I've finally decided there is no split, this is just who I am. . . .

AN: Meaning Indian and American.

[Ameera punctuates Preeti's next statement with exclamations of "right" and "mmhmm."]

PV: Yeah, East-West, you know, the ability to code-switch, all of that stuff. For growing up here, it's always been kind of shameful. I remember in elementary school, I used to live in North St. Louis, which isn't too far from. . . I lived and grew up in Hazelwood, Missouri, which wasn't too far from the shooting and the riots [in Ferguson]. . . And I used to get the question, "what are you? Are you black or are you white?" Because there was nothing in the middle, where I grew up. And then in third grade, my parents moved us to West County, St. Louis. White as hell. And all of a sudden I didn't fit in with anyone. I didn't have friends. All of a sudden, whatever friends and groups of people that I had when I was in North County didn't exist.

AN: Because it's a binary here. . . .

KV: And I think it's the history that makes it that kind of perception, because for me, at work, being in a predominantly white community [in Indiana], or in my therapy department of twelve, I'm the only Indian. And that's how I've been. Even in school at Ithaca when I went, every place I've worked, but I've been proud of that. I've been super proud of that. You know? So it's the history that goes with it. Like yes, I have also been a minority for the past twelve years. . . .

PV: *[interrupts]* But you've never been shamed for it.

KV: . . . I've never been shamed for being the minority.

AN: *[interrupts]* Yeah, your coworkers come to your shows.

KV: They come to my shows. They crave for my food. They will ask, "can you ask Grandma what's the home remedy for this," and I will call India and ask Grandma, "what's the home remedy for this?" You know? So I've been in an environment where it's been uplifted. My Indianness has been uplifted.

AN: Yeah. It's so interesting, because living with Matt now, I think you'll [Preeti] totally get this, immediately. Sunday mornings at home growing up, my parents would cook. And I'd get up and smell the *tarka* (spiced oil), and immediately run to just close all the

doors, because you know that you're going to get made fun of at school. No one's going to sit with you because your clothes smell. And now, being with Matt, he says "whatever! Who cares. I would love to smell like delicious food." And I say, "Yeah." . . .

PV: *[interrupts, laughs]* "Yeah! You say that now!" . . .

AN: Exactly. That's a nice white liberal talking, who wants to smell like *aloo gobi*?⁶⁷

PV: *[interrupts]* Oh for sure. Things changed when I went into college too. The first guy I ever dated said, "oh I love Indian food." And I said "who are you?" . . .

AN: *[interrupts]* Yeah!

PV: "What is this?" So growing up here, and I guess coming back to dance, it's always been a struggle. No one knew I danced kuchipudi. No one knew I danced in my school world—my other world. So growing up, I always kept everything separate. . . .

KV: *[interrupts]* But even here, till last year, you were keeping your work, or your friends separate too.

PV: But that's because I had always grown up. . . .

AN: *[interrupts]* It's a habit.

PV: . . . keeping things in their separate components, and never should they meet, because who knows what could happen. Yeah.

AN: Because also, if somebody knew you danced, they'd say, "oh what dance do you do?" And because it's kuchipudi, and it's not legible to them, they'd say, "what's that weird dance that you do with those weird costumes?" Right?

PV: Right.

AN: It's not dance, it's ethnic culture, right? And yeah, I totally resonate with that. Because I think part of the immigrant experience here is growing up learning how to compartmentalize. I'd be so embarrassed about celebrating Eid, or all of those things.

PV: *[interrupts]* Not in public.

AN: Yeah!

PV: We would always do our *Ganesh Puja*⁶⁸ at 6am, and then my mom would send me off to school at 7am. 7:30 or whatever.

⁶⁷ A South Asian dish made from spiced potato and cauliflower.

KV: Versus for me, even my patients they will ask, “oh what kind of dance do you do?” And I say, “it’s rooted in traditional Indian dance.” And a lot of times they will say “oh, like bellydance?” And sometimes it would get to my nerves, and now it’s an opportunity to just invite them, and say, “hey come check it out!” When you haven’t seen any dance, forget about Indian dance. . . .

PV: *[interrupts]* A lot of it’s a mental shift and just unlearning.

KV: They’ve never seen a dance before. They’ve never been to Chicago. They live thirty miles from here. These are the people who plan for a week to come to Chicago. But yeah, just share. That’s how they. . . .

PV: *[interrupts]* And that’s where I’ve gone too as well this past year. It’s really been a mental mind shift of unlearning all the bad habits that I grew up learning. And I do think things are changing. You know, Indian dance is all over the place now. It’s not a home name or anything like that, but it is getting a lot more recognition than I ever remember getting as a child.

KV: I think media has also. . . . Something as silly as Nick and Priyanka’s wedding.⁶⁹ But people. . . .

AN: *[interrupts]* Totally. It’s not silly!

KV: . . . in northwest Indiana, they know every ritual about the wedding. So they wanted to compare that to Dhara’s (Kinnari’s cousin) wedding now. Like, “oh, did you have this? Did you have this?”

AN: It’s true. The moment it gets into popular culture, I mean you have these moments in TV sometimes, where they’ll bust into this Indian-Bollywood thing. I think. . . .

PV: *[interrupts]* *So You Think You Can Dance?* has the worst pieces of. . . .

AN: But at the same time, doesn’t it feel validating? In this weird way?

PV: I feel like maybe. Sometimes I wish I could have been validated on my own terms. Versus when Gwen Stefani made it cool to wear a *bindi*.⁷⁰ So then it was like, “Oh, so white people are doing it now, so it’s cool.” You know what I’m saying? So there’s still that. But that’s where I have to change my mind of how I’m perceiving things. Because if

⁶⁸ Ritual ceremony performed in devotion to Lord Ganesh in Hinduism, known to be the god of good fortune.

⁶⁹ American popstar Nick Jonas and Bollywood and Hollywood actress Priyanka Chopra were married in a highly publicized series of ceremonies in India in December 2018.

⁷⁰ A *bindi* refers to a colored or decorative dot worn in the middle of the eyebrows to signify the circle of the universe, or the third eye *chakra* in interpretations of many South Asian religions.

I keep toward that negative attitude, then I'm stunting myself. I'm holding myself back from what Kinnari was saying. Make it a learning opportunity. . . .

Preeti in particular provokes discussion on the necessary compartmentalizing that the first-generation, transnational citizen does in navigating their translocales (see Bakrania 2013; Raj 2003). She brings up a crucial point in this debate, about the public-private binary that must be upheld to keep transnational citizenship in play. Certain immigrant-only spaces become safe spaces, in which it is okay to perform rituals that are particular to one's background. Priya Srinivasan describes dance basements or garages as being full of secrets that are not taken to an outside stage (2012: 118). Miliann Kang (2010, 2018) deconstructs the space of the Korean nail salon, in which issues on migration and the "model minority" interact. These salons are spaces in which one expects to hear Asian languages, which mediate the soundscape of this safe space, along with non-Western music, television shows, and films.

On the issue of religion in public, Kathryn Hansen (2010) refers to Ashis Nandy's (1988) theory of "accommodative secularism," in which he describes that in modern, "secular" South Asia, practices of ritual and religious heterogeneity are not only visible, but accepted parts of social life. This is not the case for Preeti or my childhoods in the US and Canada, wherein the ritual observance of non-nominally-Christian traditions was to be concealed. Monisha Das Gupta describes this as the "condition of migrancy," which she explains is "a constellation of risks, crossings, in-betweenness, fragmentations, otherness, insecurities, survivals, resistances, and creativity" (2006: 4). She labels her condition of migrancy by drawing on Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) theory of border consciousness, in which migrant citizens must juggle an awareness of

these precarities.

This habitual practice of compartmentalizing engendered instances of recognition in my childhood, in which visible practices that were associated with these otherwise private spaces of my life became public—on the bodies of other people. I refer to moments on popular television shows, or in films, when even a stereotypical nod to Indian culture was validating. I vividly remember watching Heather Graham dance a Bollywood item number in *The Guru* (2002). This public display of my private life continued in films like *American Desi* (2001) and *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002), which featured narratives about inhabiting Indian transnationalism. Seeing these performances of what I claimed as *my* culture on television was revolutionary. Seeing these performed by white bodies was the ultimate validation. Today, I know that this was an internalized colonialism that I inherited and learned, which Preeti rightfully acknowledges must be unlearned.

Durga Chew-Bose (2017) wrestles with a similar experience of what it means for her skin to tan in the summer in the second epigraph that opens this chapter. She articulates the difference between white bodies that “bathe,” as opposed to brown bodies that “live” in brown skin. She refers briefly to colorism in South Asian communities, by acknowledging how her relatively “fair skin” relates to the lived experience of having brown skin. Colorism continues to plague South Asian communities worldwide, which has bolstered the beauty industry for skin lightening aids in India especially. The charged existences of “being” or “getting darker” undergird the vicious intersection of racism and casteism, in which darker skin is inflicted with violence. This extends to racism directed outside South Asian communities, wherein colorist attitudes frame interactions between South Asian and Black communities, especially in the United States. As bell hooks argues:

We often forget that many Third World nationals bring to this country the same kind of contempt and disrespect for blackness that is most frequently associated with white western imperialism. While it is true that many Third World nationals who live in Britain and the United States develop through theoretical and concrete experience knowledge of how they are diminished by white western racism, that does not always lead them to interrogate the way in which they enter a racialized hierarchy where in the eyes of whites they automatically have greater status and privilege than individuals of African descent. (hooks 2002 [1990]: 343)

hooks demonstrates that marginalized subjectivities also oppress, which Naheed Islam (2000) depicts in racist and anti-black rhetoric among Bangladeshi Americans. This is another residue of coloniality, wherein non-white communities ventriloquize historically white practices in sustained performances of attempting to approximate socially stable statuses. I borrow the term “ventriloquize” from Chatterjea (2013), in which she argues that Indian dancers inhabit Euro-American modes of movement to become contemporary. In the case of Chew-Bose’s reference to skin tanning, whiteness has been a prize to safeguard among many South Asian communities, in its multiple meanings of skin color, subjectivity, and social status. It is no wonder that in my childhood, the performance of Indian traditions upon white bodies was, at first reaction, prized.

3. Indian Transnationalism | South Asian Transregionalism

Until this point in our conversation, I resonated with most of what Preeti and Kinnari had to say. We shared perspectives and challenged one another, as we have done in past conversations too. I admit frustration, however, at what I seem to encounter in talking to many other transnational Indians. There is a normative understanding of what it means to claim transnational Indian citizenship while living elsewhere. The criteria revolves around the central idea that one’s connection must be modern—that one must be able to hail from the India that was drawn after

1947. The British Raj ended with two major events in the subcontinent: India was granted political independence and the region was divided into two—India and Pakistan, that began a series of unresolved issues on borders that continue today. These include the birth of Bangladesh following a war in 1971, this time further partitioning the region of Bengal into West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh (previously East Pakistan). Civil unrest continues in the region of South Asia, resulting from recent natural disasters in Nepal, the legacy of ethnic and religious nationalisms in Sri Lanka, and violence that persists at the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The region of Kashmir is undoubtedly one of the most vulnerable in South Asia. Origins of this instability lie in the wake of independence-partition-Pakistan negotiations in the mid 1900s.

It is often the case that economies for Indian dance in the United States and Canada—though less so in Canada, in my experience—are normatively Indian, and normatively Hindu. They rest on a kind of transnational Indian, or transnational South Asian, whose links are current. Activities to upkeep connections with the region and its translocal sense of citizenship mean travel back and forth between what has been geographically determined as India today. This means that the homeland of post-1947 India must precede migration to respective hostlands, which is built on a nation that is majority Hindu-identifying. Designations of “Hindu” transcend active practices of the religion. Rather, proximity to a nominal Hinduism is built into the active connections and practices that mediate transnationalism among dispersed citizens.

In dance, this shows up in the mythological stories from Sanskrit epics that are continually staged in classical dance-dramas, or the cosmological philosophies that become the themes of contemporary exploration. As Srinivasan states:

While practicing Hinduism in and of itself is not a problem, what can become problematic is the insidious links to the religious, fundamentalist, and right-wing Hindutva movement that has spread to the diaspora. Gurus may not always be

aware of the claims that the Hindutva movement makes on the diaspora and unwittingly participate in many of its fundamentalist tenets. The costs of this subservience to Indian patriarchy, particularly as it relates to model minority discourses, remain hidden. (Srinivasan 2012: 129)

An internalized Hindutva (right-wing Hindu nationalism) is built into the conversations I have with many Indian transnationals about Pakistan in particular.⁷¹ Pakistan has been edified as the “other” of modern India (see Chapter 1). It is a subtle shift, but I can detect it immediately when attitudes toward Pakistan—both in its concept and citizens—are performed by transnational Indians to be unfamiliar, discrete, or dangerous. I often encounter Hindi speakers in the United States or Canada, who pronounce “Pakistan” not as paa-ki-STHAAN, but PEH-ki-stehn. The term is a word in Hindi and Urdu that means place (“sthaan”) of purity (“paak”), drawing from both Persian and Sanskrit cognates.

The movement toward a divided vernacular of Hindi and Urdu has been the effect of national movements and religious politics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which have resulted in Hindi signifying India and Hindu, and Urdu symbolizing Pakistan and Muslim (see King 1994; Rai 1992 [1984]; Rahman 1996). I imagine the same is true of concerted efforts to separate Bengali and Bangla, the latter signifying a Muslim Bangladesh (see Kibreah 2019). The historical establishment of Hindi in India has also had the effect of creating a national identity that is based in northern, Indo-Aryan linguistic culture that has colonized the Dravidian languages and dialects in the Indian South.

Embedded in the participation of Hindutva transnationally is the denial of an accepted syncretism of Indian culture. The behemoth cinema industry that is Bollywood today is a shining

⁷¹ There are also many right-wing, fundamentalist Muslim movements in Pakistan, which “other” Indians, Hindus, and Sikhs. The legacy of Partition continues on both sides of the India-Pakistan border.

example of cultural syncretism, in which film conventions rest on origins in Islamicate praxis and Urdu aesthetics (Chadha and Kavoori 2008). Bollywood films, which are exported as emblems of nationally Indian popular culture, draw on traditions from among many referents today, larger than what is considered Islamicate. Here, Islamicate refers to associations with cultures and civilizations that have been shaped among Muslims, rather than tied to the theological tenets of Islam. The poly-cultural, poly-ethnic, and poly-religious makeup of Indian society at large transcends the Hindu-Muslim debate. Nevertheless, the Hindu-Muslim divide is a symptom of everyday Hindutva, and is articulated transnationally in an attempt to separate Indian (Hindu) and Pakistani (Muslim) affiliations, even in something as seemingly benign as a mispronunciation.

I have become acutely aware of normative performances of transnational Indian citizenship because my own claims to this citizenship are not normative. My parents settled in Canada in 1975, among many Shia Ismaili Muslims from parts of East and South Africa, following the expulsion of Asians from Uganda in 1972. My Indian heritage is derived largely from my great-grandparents, who left parts of Gujarat and Bombay in the early twentieth century to pursue economic opportunities in East and South Africa. My maternal grandmother, however, was born in pre-Partition Peshawar, Pakistan and lived most of her life in Aligarh, India. Upon Partition, she and her Punjabi family traveled across the border to Karachi, among many other North Indian Muslims. She spent only a few years in Karachi before she was married to my grandfather in Nairobi, but continued to maintain her nascent Pakistani citizenship and national identity until the end of her life in 2011.

Figure 27 depicts my mother's father's parents—my great grandparents, who left India around 1910 to found the Nairobi-area town of Eldoret, or so the story goes. This painted

photograph (see Allana 2008; Dewan 2012) was taken in Bombay, at the photo studios of Shapoorjee Hormusji, at which many of the portraits in the ROM's courtesan album were taken (see Chapter 1). Waves of migration of Ismaili Muslims to Africa came at the advice of the



Figure 27: Portrait of Allibhai Nurmohamed (seated) and Motibai Allibhai Nurmohamed, the great-grandparents of the author. Image courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM 2012.11.1).

previous Aga Khan, the hereditary spiritual leader of the transnational Ismaili Muslim community, whose lineage is accepted by believers to date back to the Prophet Muhammed. Reasons for the recommendation to migrate communally resulted from insurgent Hindu-Muslim

uprisings in Gujarat that would destabilize the safety of Muslim communities for generations to come (see Engineer 2002).

Indian communities in East and South Africa operated largely as merchants during the twentieth century. Punjabis, Gujaratis, Bengalis, Tamils, and others had migrated at different points in history as tradesmen, as well as slaves and indentured laborers of the British Empire. Many authors of fiction, such as M.G. Vassanji and V.S. Naipaul, provide accounts of the lives of various Indian communities, who lived in segregated colonies in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and South Africa. In 2015, I visited the previous colony of my father's family in Marabastad, Pretoria. During the 1950s, the colony included Indian and "coloureds"—the latter an official designation that signifies people of multiracial backgrounds, who have lived in South Africa for multiple generations.

I open this chapter with an epigraph from a recently published book by my uncle, Mohamed Keshavjee, who is my father's cousin. His book traces the migration and history of our family from India to apartheid-era South Africa. The epigraph describes Keshavjee's experience of entering India for the first time, in which a brown man, like himself, determined whether he could enter the country that his grandparents left, two generations ago. He also comments on the presence of a brown man in a position of power, which was not typical for brown subjectivities in South Africa. I interpret these experiences against the backdrop of conversations with my normatively transnational Indian friends, who determine what it means to be "really" Indian.

PV: For me, being Indian is predominantly because I was born there, and my skin color. But more and more, I came back from this last India trip, and I was like, "I'm okay not

going back.” There’s no one there. I’d only go back for my grandmother. . . . If I go, it’ll be going on tourism, or for workshops, but I’m not going to India for India anymore.

KV: What is “for India?” Like for the family?

PV: For the India that I know. I’m not going there for that India anymore. And my India has only ever been family. People used to be like, “you go to India all the time. How amazing!” All I know is people’s homes. What India do I know? I know nothing of India. And I didn’t realize how little I knew until I met Kinnari. And I was like, “I absolutely know nothing of this India. Like zero knowledge.”

AN: Amrita⁷² tells me the same thing. Because I remember when we were in India at the same time, I said, “come visit me, I’m staying in Delhi.” She said, “my parents won’t let me.”

PV: Yeah. I wouldn’t have been able to either.

KV: Yeah, I feel bad for most of my cousins who grew up here, because for them India is a) it’s through their grandparents’ eyes.

AN: Right, right.

KV: And b) it’s just social. Going from . . . or visiting temples.

PV: For me, it has been the dance form, which does come from India, that I was rooted in. But for who I am, I don’t know. Every year passing, I feel less Indian.

AN: That’s a really interesting point. Because you know, when I was growing up, I had friends like you [Preeti], who spent their lives going back and forth, back and forth. So there was some sort of reconciliation between my customs, the clothes I wear, the food I eat, and the languages we speak at home, and this place. This imagined place, that I’d never even been to. And my parents don’t have any interest in going to. Can you imagine that? So I was always so jealous of friends like you who could say, “I’m going to visit my family. I have family in Chandigarh and family in Gujarat, and I have family here, and there.” And I always so badly wanted that. And I wanted so badly to reconcile this thing that was my ethnic identity, and this place that was my imagination. And so I started going to go and find. . . . I think it’s why I do what I do, and have studied what I study, because I was looking for it.

PV: No, what you’re saying isn’t too different than what Tuli has said. I don’t feel like it’s too different. It is different in that her family still goes to India. No! She only went to India for the first time in like nine years.

⁷² Amrita Mukhopadhyay is a friend and fellow dancer, whose extended family lives in Kolkata.

KV: There was a time where she didn't. But they speak Bengali at home. Her parents are.
...

PV: [*interrupts*] What do you guys speak at home?

AN: Gujarati.

PV: I speak Telugu at home.

AN: But it's different . . . my parents are. . . .

KV: But her [Tuli's] parents are very . . . Indian. Like she's first-generation. Her [Ameera's] parents have not been to India ever.

PV: Ever. Yours are like third-generation removed.

AN: They're third-generation outside of India. Like my grandmother was born in Peshawar, and lived her life in Aligarh. So that's maybe a little different. But it's amazing, my mom speaks seven languages, five of which are Indian languages, and. . . .

PV: Has never been there.

AN: Has never been there. And I'm talking fluent, fluent, fluent. Like code-switching, in and out, no problem.

PV and KV: What languages does she speak?

AN: Gujarati, Kutchi, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, and grew up in a Pashto-speaking household, part of the year. Because she would go part of the year to Pakistan. And also Swahili and English.

KV: So your mom has been to Pakistan.

AN: She has been, yeah. Yeah, so she grew up going to Pakistan. But my dad, never. His father lived in India post-Partition, which is why I can get an OCI or whatever that's called.

KV: You can?

AN: I can, because it was post-Partition that my grandfather's family, which is the same last name as me, could do that.

PV: Lineage. . . .

AN: Yeah. But it's different, because of this whole East Africa, it's a different transplant.

PV: I had a friend in high school, Hrishikesh. He would call himself African.

KV: They wouldn't call themselves Indian. Mmhmm.

PV: He would say, "I'm not Indian, I'm African. We're literally from Africa."

AN: And same, but going to visit family in Africa couple years ago, you're not African there either. You're *muindi* ("Indian" in Swahili). You're Indian, it's different.

KV: But that's like people from here come to the Indian-Americans, who come to India, and say, "I'm not Indian, I'm Indian-American."

AN: America means white. That's why people ask you "where are you really from?"

PV: Trevor Noah said that. But in the US, you're Indian-American. You're African-American, you're Asian-American, you're this American. You're never American-American.

AN: And American means white.⁷³

KV: Caucasian.

AN: And so for us, in Africa, the Indians were a community that were transplanted there, were transient, there for business opportunities, which was my family, from Gujarat. But I don't know, I also don't identify myself as totally Indian because I have this South Asian family that's not. . . .

PV: [*interrupts*] Did your family know Gandhi?

⁷³ "America means white" deserves nuance here. Of course, the landscape of American citizenship is much more diverse than bodies who inhabit white identities. At the same time, the colonial history of making the United States was built on conceiving a hierarchy in which migrants from certain European territories experienced full access to the privileges of American citizenship (see Roediger 2006). The Black laboring bodies that built the nation fought to be considered American citizens through the American Civil War, the Civil Rights movement of the mid-twentieth century, and other historical events. This fight continues today in violence that is inflicted upon Black and Latinx bodies at the hands of white institutions like the police, customs agents and immigration officers, and civic officials. South Asian, immigrant brownness fits somewhere in the middle of rhetoric on black-white Americanness, having entered the conversation later than the beginning of racial politics at the formation of the modern American nation. The result is that brown American citizenship is constructed as in relation to white American citizenship, because *some* of the politics of exclusion at claiming American citizenship apply to these brown bodies.

AN: Yeah, my family worked with Gandhi in South Africa. Part of my family, my family who had a law firm and they worked with him when he was a lawyer in South Africa. Like it's also that India was not the India that it is today, post-1947 when my family was there. So there's that too.

PV: India's not even the India that my parents know, and that was 1987. *[laughs]*

KV: 2006. It's not the same India either.

PV: It's evolution. And I mean things are going to evolve. And we continue to try and put barriers and terminologies and compartmentalize, but I feel that humans have always been nomads, and we need to acknowledge and own into it, recognize it. Be okay with it.

AN: I think the "be okay with" is important. Because it's amazing how much resistance there is to having these conversations. Especially about what's real and what's not. I find that all over the dance world. "Oh that's not real contemporary. Oh that's not real kathak. Oh that's not real this." And I'm just so sick of that conversation.

Here, Preeti and Kinnari negotiate the criteria for claiming "Indian" in language, kin, and travel. In my case, they arrive at the possibility of a hyphenated identity—perhaps an Indian-African, similar to Indian-American in the US. I try to emphasize, though, that the events during and following the creation of the modern nations of India and Pakistan in 1947 was a paradigmatic change for what it means for families like mine to claim transnational Indian citizenship. My family left an India that no longer exists. Preeti posits that evolution is natural, meaning that the India of today is different than the India of the 1980s, per her parents' experience. I argue that the events of 1947 incited not just natural evolution, but a rupture, resulting in decades of new policies on restricted transnational mobility and citizenship. These include the institution of visas and applied designations, such as the recently ended Person of Indian Origin (PIO) and Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) that policed *who* can travel to and from India. Most of these require applicants to prove no affiliation to Pakistan especially, but also to Bangladesh and other

neighboring countries, post-1947.

For these reasons, many members of the Ismaili Muslim community cannot travel to their homeland of India. Papiya Ghosh concurs, stating that “the politics of defining the *mulk* (homeland) for the *pardes* [transnational]—has changed from the time of the indentured laborers to continuing processes of South Asian-state-making” (2007: xxxi). South Asian Ismaili Muslims, though not normatively transnational in their Indian citizenship, have subsisted for generations in Indian ways of life—living in colonies in which they conducted their daily lives in Indian languages, wearing Indian clothing, eating Indian food, and participating as producers of Indian culture transnationally. Naheed Islam (1993), Prema Kurien (2003), and Sandhya Shukla (2005) have argued that this has created slippages between claiming transnationalism (Indian) versus transregionalism (South Asian), wherein the latter was first used to combat regional racisms in diaspora between South Asian identities. These practices of regional sectarianism have roots in Partition (Ghosh 2007 xxxvi). Islam writes, “The use of the term ‘South Asia’ has become interchangeable with the term ‘India’” (1993: 244). In this framework, normative versions of transnational Indian citizenship prevail nonetheless.

In my experience, to be a transnational Indian dancer means claiming a citizenship that is normative, which is premised in mobility and access to today’s India. This has also related to claims of contemporaneity in transnational contexts that draw from normative Indian citizenship. The process of “contemporizing” has been performed among bodies that have been trained in Indian movement vocabulary, whether in classical dance forms, martial arts, or—more contentiously for my elite collaborators—popular traditions, like Bollywood. These bodies train simultaneously in Euro-American forms, but draw on Indian/Hindu philosophies as points for thematic exploration. It has been difficult for me to parse how the transnational contemporary

body cannot also be normatively Indian, in the many significations of the term.

4. Contemporary Alternatives

I joined Preeti and Kinnari, as well as my partner Matt and Kinnari's partner Bob on March 2, 2019 for the US premiere of choreographer Akram Khan's *Giselle*. Performed by the English National Ballet, it opened to rave reviews in London in 2016, and was lauded similarly in Chicago. The production is a newly staged, newly interpreted narrative of the 1841 ballet, which remains a staple in the canon. In Khan's version, the story's protagonist, Giselle, is a member of a community of factory workers, who are separated from society by the all-encompassing presence of a wall. Giselle is in love with an aristocrat, Albrecht, who disguises himself as a factory worker to visit her there. He is betrothed to another aristocrat, Bathilde, whose community of Landlords turns up at the factory from behind the wall, which swivels hydraulically during the production. The aristocrats kill Giselle just before Act II. The second act features activities of the supernatural and many staged battles, eventually ending with the departure of Giselle into death, and Albrecht into life, among the ghosts of female factory workers.

The production represents a milestone in Khan's career, as a British-Bangladeshi contemporary dancer, trained in kathak. Royona Mitra's monograph (2015) is the first to study Akram Khan's work ethnographically, as a kathak dancer and Bengali herself. She and others source his origins in the intercultural wave of British theater, as a performer in Peter Brook's *Mahabharata*. Intercultural theater refers to a movement in the 1980s in which British theater

directors sought to draw from non-European traditions of theater to create new possibilities on the British stage (see Norridge 2010).

Akram Khan is celebrated today as one of the most influential choreographers and dancers in the British contemporary scene. Mitra (2015) and Norridge (2010) explain that reviews of his productions are often couched in the multicultural work that he does, on representing “India,” and “Asia” in dance. Mitra argues that Khan protests this minimizing and homogenizing rhetoric in his work, which lies in what she proposes is his “new interculturalism,” wherein it is impossible to consider the political and the aesthetic as distinct from one another (Mitra 2015: 7). Khan is a British-Bangladeshi Muslim man, whose transnationalism is part of his choreographic toolbox. Though he studied institutionally in European contemporary dance, his training in kathak takes shape in the ways he explores rasa, and traditions of staging Sanskrit epics in traditions of Indian theater. Mitra argues that this results in a “queering of normative understandings and expectations of his diasporic South Asianness, of South Asian arts and of contemporary dance” (2015: 29).

Khan’s non-normative South Asian transnationalism, multiple trainings and embodying of the concepts “Indian” and “contemporary” inform my own analysis of *Giselle*. The production’s dramaturg Ruth Little writes in the production’s program notes that Khan was drawn to reconfigure the narrative of the canonical story to be focused in a garment factory, which is an ode to the many Bangladeshi garment factories that continue to support the transnational industry for clothing production. This is not only a nod to his heritage as Bangladeshi, but critiques global industries that rely on “third-world” subjects as migrants and laborers.

While I watched the production, I could not help but look for where Khan's kathak training showed up on the bodies of the English National Ballet cast. I saw and felt the return of sequences to end on sam, creating a particularly classical relationship between the dancers' movement and the music produced by a composed track and the live orchestra (see Chapter 4). I observed a focus on circles—turns, pirouettes, and in group choreography. Perhaps this was the inimitable kathak chakkar (see Chapter 1), or an attention to Bengali/Bangla folk dance. What remains with me was delivered in Act II, featuring a slew of female dancers—the ghostly factory workers—performing every piece of choreography on pointe, for almost twenty minutes. Khan reconfigured one of the most iconic pieces of technique in ballet, as a tool to create a visually and kinesthetically different world. As the dancers' bodies shuffled and vibrated on pointe, they felt creature-ly and ghostly. I interpreted this as an emphasis on creating characters through qualities of movement, which can be located in the character-choreographing traditions of rasa and abhinaya in kathakali and other Indian classical dance forms. I certainly saw an attention to abhinaya in the performance of battle, struggle, and death.

KV: Yeah, my frustration was more because the last couple applications I was interested in, they required ballet or contemporary background. And I'm like "okay."

PV: And that was the Akram Khan application.

KV: The Akram Khan application—the summer intensive. You had to have ballet and/or contemporary. Why can I not apply? I feel like if they teach me, I can learn it. It's not like, his company work—how much of that is ballet?

PV: Well Mavin Khoo is the rehearsal director, and he's based in ballet and bharatanatyam.

KV: Well, it depends on what productions, you know? I was just shocked, when you come from this background, when you are a kathak dancer. And when you talk about. . . .

PV: Separate. I think you should write a letter to them. I wonder if they would respond.

KV: You're talking about, why are you excluding? You are creating a barrier.

PV: I think you should apply, and you should include it with a letter.

KV: I am going to apply next year, I've decided.

AN: You could also just take some open classes in modern-contemporary.

KV: And I did think about it. And when Bob said, "well you've taken some classes."

PV: Yeah, because you took some Deeply Rooted classes.

KV: That's not training, that's taking a workshop. Training is spending fifteen years—that's training. Or is there a certification? How do I prove that I'm trained in bharatanatyam?

AN: Because you've had an *arangetram* (debut recital).

PV: I didn't.

KV: Yes I do, but how does she prove she's trained in kuchipudi?

AN: I can't prove that I'm trained in kathak either, unless they ask you to get on the dance floor.

PV: Then how do you apply to something?

KV: Then how do I apply to it?

PV: You see it.

KV: That's what I'm saying. So people will say they are trained in contemporary, what route have they gone?

PV: What does contemporary dance training look like? I actually don't know.

AN: It's, at least from the little bit that I took in Bangalore. . . .

KV: *[interrupts]* But that's Indian contemporary that you're talking about.

AN: It's Indian contemporary, but it's based. . . .

PV: *[interrupts]* It's still rooted in ballet.

AN: Right. So if I stayed a year, I could maybe get up to a point that I could never have imagined now. And stay a year, I mean eight hours a day, doing it all the time, substantiating it with yoga and kalaripayattu, and all of these other ones, right? It's hard. And I guess it's an interesting thing that you bring up. Because that is Indian contemporary—what Akram Khan is talking about.

PV: Although he will never call himself that.

AN: But he'll call himself a contemporary dancer.

KV: But he did go to school for contemporary dance. Like he went to university for contemporary.

PV: *[interrupts]* Who's defining the programs?

AN: Exactly. And those programs have been defined here, or in London, or. . . .

PV: I will say a lot of what I've seen with art is it's almost always defined by academia. Who I see making it, and it could be that because they have the four years with that university, but I also think that being with that university, they've created connections and they've been able to network. I rarely see a dancer who's not connected with a university, be somewhere. Unless you. . . .

KV: *[interrupts]* But the book of contemporary, none of them were connected with university.

PV: No, I'm talking about here. Here, in Chicago specifically, I don't know a lot of mainstage performers who are not connected with a university.

KV: Like Joffrey?

PV: Yeah, but Joffrey's an institution. So either you're academia or you're institution. Like Ginger Farley comes from Hubbard. And that's an institution. So only if you've somehow reached these people, and you have the money [or] the words to use . . . to get the grant.

Kinnari recounts her feelings of frustration at not being able to apply to the Akram Khan Company's 2019 Summer Intensive. Designed as a six-day, immersive, "ashram-style" retreat,

the Intensive is open to dancers “with a contemporary and/or ballet background.”⁷⁴ The website includes a link to a publicity video that advertises footage from the previous year’s Intensive. In it, bodies perform in contemporary movement vocabularies, while a studio-produced audio track plays over the silent footage. The track features synth with a sampled voice that performs a repeating phrase of rapid solkattu bols. The sampled bols ornament movement that is decidedly not South Asian.

I exclaimed earlier in my conversation with Preeti and Kinnari how validating it was to see Akram Khan’s *Giselle*, knowing that a transnational South Asian, kathak-trained dancer was behind a mainstream, sold-out show at Chicago’s Harris Theater. Contrary to the first theme of this chapter, titled “Inescapably Indian,” Khan’s choreography of this canonical ballet was not successful because it was South Asian. It stood on its own, devoid of an otherwise inescapable cultural referent. Mitra (2015) argues that this is what is revolutionary of Khan’s work. In his “new interculturalism” she explains that his work is unapologetically South Asian—in aesthetic, critical of history, and imprinted with a formative and long training in Indian dance that takes shape in his approach to the dance floor. All the while, he presents a mastery of the idiom of European contemporary dance that is otherwise irreconcilable with a brown body. She writes that Khan’s “ability to lull the mainstream into thinking that he conforms to their whiteness makes his destabilization of white mainstream culture from within a powerful intervention” (Mitra 2015: 26). For transnational Indian dancers like myself, Khan becomes a hero in achieving mainstream success while dancing South Asia.

In doing so, Khan also communicates exclusion to transnational dancers who dance

⁷⁴ See <http://www.akramkhancompany.net/get-involved/summer-intensive-2019/>, accessed April 13, 2019.

South Asia, but not using Euro-American contemporary idioms. Kinnari—a bharatanatyam dancer without contemporary certification, or what she herself terms as “training” in Euro-American contemporary dance, cannot apply to his Summer Intensive. Perhaps it is unfair to put this responsibility on Khan, to serve as one of only a few transnational South Asian dancers who must lift up an entire ecosystem. Khan has succeeded, in part, by mastering and innovating from *their* terms of success. He builds his own terms of exclusion through the institutionalization of knowledge that contours how he approaches the training of other dancers.⁷⁵

Preeti, Kinnari, and I discuss this institutionalization, which has been located to the guru-shishya parampara in Indian classical dance. Modern conservatories like Kalakshetra and Kathak Kendra (see Chapters 1 and 3) still draw on the guru-shishya system to enact training. In Indian contemporary dance, its institutionalization has begun to show up in the many diplomas, degrees, and even postgraduate degrees offered by companies, academies, and universities throughout India (see Chapters 2 and 3). The politics of accreditation seem to be joining the ranks of becoming and producing the Indian contemporary dancer, which has larger implications for accessing resources and grants to create work transnationally.

Concluding Thoughts: Intersecting Subjectivities

My conversation with Preeti and Kinnari touched on other themes further than the four I describe in this chapter. I select these four overlapping themes to show that conversations about

⁷⁵ In the days following the defense of this dissertation, it was announced that Akram Khan Company will be holding a classical workshop for kathak and bharatanatyam dancers in November 2019. See <http://www.akramkhancompany.net/get-involved/classical-intensive-2019/>, accessed May 15, 2019.

negotiating transnational Indian citizenship are already built into discourse among practitioners of Indian dance, broadly. The descriptor “Indian” is inescapable among transnational practitioners of Indian dance, especially in supporting exhibitions of culture in the “multicultural” societies of the US, Canada, and the UK. “Indian” stands in for “traditional,” especially in the context of brown and white (read: non-brown) bodies that perform Indian dance, who are contemporary as a result. At the same time, tradition signifies the performance of culture to maintain community among transnational Indians—an activity among several that construct transnationalism.

Maintaining community through dance is placed in a continuum with endeavors that are professional and creative in nature. Here, Indian dancers are not community-makers, but artists who use their tools in Indian vocabularies to produce work. The community-creativity continuum contours experiences of inhabiting Indian transnational citizenship that are imbued with learned practices of compartmentalizing, safeguarding private acts of being Indian that are separate from public, civic life. Lived experiences of marginalization, however, are repeated in sectarian behaviors that result in a normative version of Indian transnational citizenship that is almost interchangeable with “South Asian.” This normative citizenship works out on the dance floor in coded ways, wherein “contemporary” means innovating from Indian, and often Indian classical dance—expressive practices that are modern and can identify with a post-1947 Indian ontology. Akram Khan provides an alternative to this narrative, as a non-normative South Asian who is “unapologetically” so, to quote Mitra (2015). Having achieved a mainstream success, his institutionalization of his version of South Asian contemporary both continues and offers alternatives to inhabiting contemporaneity that may exclude the transnational Indian dancers who strive to become contemporary.

This chapter has shown that the terms “Indian” and “contemporary” are nebulous in meaning, but have real effects on how dancers procure work and negotiate transnational citizenship. I return to the dissertation’s central issue of mobility. While I have described how transnational Indian citizenship is not homogeneous in claims to South Asian heritage, the same is true of experiences of caste, class, and gender. Preeti, Kinnari, and I are upper-middle-class, transnational Indian women. Our class-privileged experiences of dance are similar to many of our peers, who compose the majority in economies for Indian dance in the US and Canada. Preeti and I, having grown up in North America, share some experiences of inhabiting South Asian culture as middle-class citizens. While I compartmentalized practices of South Asian citizenship in private during my childhood, it became increasingly acceptable to integrate these, as I joined multiple communities of South Asians in other parts of my life.

During my undergraduate degree, I joined the South Asian Alliance at the University of Toronto, similar to the local South Asian Students’ Association (SASA) at many US colleges and universities. I attended Bollywood movie nights, formals, dinners, talks, and the Ontario-wide South Asian Culture Show. The performance of expressive forms, and dance especially, is central to a sustained participation in South Asian communities at the collegiate level (see Shresthova 2008).⁷⁶ Student dancers in college SASAs were mostly dispersed between *raas* (Gujarati folk dance), *bhangra* (Punjabi folk dance), Bollywood (a gloss for Indian popular), and classical groups. Some of these were teams that competed in regional and national circuits, and made home-coming appearances at their colleges’ annual South Asian culture shows. These dance categories, which continue to hold true in SASAs today, reflect South Asian student

⁷⁶ The institution SPIC MACAY is another that engenders South Asian community through arts programming in the United States in particular.

demographic majorities, among Gujaratis, Punjabis, and bharatanatyam-trained, upper-caste, middle-class women.⁷⁷ Further, having grown up in Canada in a third-generation Indian Muslim family, I bypass having to negotiate issues of caste and caste violence that are reified in North American contexts.

As India headed toward 1947, middle-class women were tasked with protecting and preserving the essence of the nation in postcolonial India (see Chatterjee 1989). This resulted in upper-caste, respectable women becoming the modern students of Indian classical dance. Today, this dialogue continues to be relevant among transnational Indian dancers. Women like Preeti, Kinnari, and I perpetuate the notion that spaces for Indian dance are normatively high-class and high-caste—and in my case, no-caste. Our conversation in this chapter outlines the byproducts of our transnational citizenships, as empowered, high-class subjects who dance because we determine that there is space to do so. We move through these spaces freely, while our work performs South Asian heritage. We are able to engage professionally in dancing this heritage, even as part-time dancers, moving back and forth between dance and our “other” work. Our voices represent three among a sea of perspectives on dancing South Asia transnationally, which come from particular subjectivities, histories, and mobilities.

⁷⁷ South Asian collegiate a cappella groups, and the resulting South Asian a cappella circuit, is another avenue for performing transnational Indian citizenship through expressive traditions in college. All-American Awaaz is a national competition that features performances from among these regional collegiate groups.

Epilogue

On April 7, 2019 the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) aired the fourth episode of its American reality television show *World of Dance*, titled “The Duels.” Having just aired its third season, *World of Dance* is a global television franchise, in which dancers from across the world are invited to audition in “any” world dance genre, accompanied by studio music tracks. Once selected as participants on the show, the dancers compete with each other, performing self-choreographed pieces in a series of sudden-death rounds that are evaluated by a panel of judges. The participants’ choreographies are presented with the aid of highly produced lighting and technical design, directed by the show’s teams of behind-the-scenes professionals. NBC’s *World of Dance* in the United States grants the winner of each season a one-million-dollar (USD) cash prize. American celebrity Jennifer Lopez serves as Executive Producer and one of the show’s three judges.

During the April 7 episode, participating dance teams competed for a spot in the next round, “The Cut.” The winners of Season 3, Mumbai-based the Kings United (the Kings), performed a self-proclaimed “Bollywood-style,” one-minute-long choreography that featured an array of tricks, flips, and gymnastics. Throughout the season, the Kings presented athletic, cinematic sequences that were lauded by the judges and the Kings’ fellow competitors. In the April 7 episode, the Kings’ team of fourteen male dancers performed to an excerpt of singer Vishal Dadlani’s playback recording of “Malhari” from the Hindi film *Bajirao Mastani* (2015). The victorious anthem features a layering of male voices whose entrance toward the beginning of the song performs the Hindi lyrics, “*Bajne de, dhadaka, dhadaka, dhol taashe thadaka thadaka,*

bhandara jhidaka jhidaka, Malhari” (Let the drums play, let the cymbals ring, let the songs of [raga] Malhari resound).⁷⁸

The Kings’ performance, also published on NBC’s *World of Dance* YouTube channel, demonstrates a choreography that reconciles the song’s powerful imagery with movements that are strong, crisp, athletic, and full of a sense of male bravado. The Kings ornament this choreography with moments of Indian signifiers, among the iconic “hip pop” that is so characteristic of Bollywood dance, and a momentary freeze on dancing an iconic image of



Figure 28: Screen grab from the Kings United performance of “Malhari” in Season 3 of NBC’s *World of Dance*.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Though the song makes reference to raga Malhari, the melody of the song does not conform to that of the Malhari mode. This is evident in the first vocal line, featuring a komal Ga in the Indian *sargam* (scalar) system. Ga is not typically a part of raga Malhari (see Bor 1999).

⁷⁹ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65Yp2x4FVTo>, accessed April 19, 2019.

Krishna,⁸⁰ using the hands and fingers to visualize his flute (see Figure 28).⁸¹ The performance was met immediately with thunderous applause and cheers from the show's live audience, and unequivocal praise from judges Jennifer Lopez, Derek Hough, and Ne-Yo. During the few minutes of judges' feedback, Lopez described the piece as a "five-course meal" that displayed "things we had never seen before." Hough exclaimed, "The KIIIIIIINGS! The acrobatics! I love the cultural integration. What is that, bhangra? Bollywood? I love that. It's so effective, and it's so you. The identity, the look, everything. Y'all are the kings."⁸²

The Kings United troupe is based in the Vasai northern suburb of Mumbai, and was founded by choreographer Suresh Mukund. The Kings explain that their dance style hails from "street dance," Bollywood, and hip-hop (see Bhavani 2019). Their Instagram account @kings_united_india, with over five hundred thousand followers, features posts that advertised their activities as *World of Dance* competitors while the show aired in the US until early May 2019. They teased photos from backstage and on set. These appear among posts that cover everyday activities at their dance studio in Vasai. They advertise classes, workshops, and visiting residencies in the styles of Bollywood, hip-hop, krump, breaking, "urban choreo," "lyrical choreo," and contemporary. In contemporary dance, they offer a contemporary diploma program, which they label as "certified" (@kings_united_india, March 10, 2019).

The Kings' studio offerings in contemporary dance among so many other forms demonstrate their vernacular mobility through multiple movement traditions. Their signification of contemporary dance also presents continuities with its framework in the field of Indian

⁸⁰ An avatar of the Hindu deity Vishnu, Krishna is a central figure in Hindu mythology and practice. He is central to the story of the *Mahabharata*, and is invoked as a character in Indian classical dance, along with his consort Radha.

⁸¹ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65Yp2x4FVTo>, accessed April 19, 2019.

⁸² Transcribed from the video performance (ibid.).

contemporary dance that I have explored in this dissertation. I suspect that practitioners in the latter case—the multiple voices that contour this dissertation—would not embrace the Kings as Indian contemporary dancers. Similarly, the reverse would probably be true: the Kings would likely not associate with the discursive goals of the field. Nevertheless, the Kings’ contemporary diploma and an emphasis on training the body to become contemporary demonstrate a framework for understanding contemporary dance in overlapping ways.

This dissertation has synthesized some of the mobilities that are at play in the field and idiom of Indian contemporary dance. I have demonstrated that practitioners and other stakeholders navigate plural mobilities to remain relevant, active, and working. I present an historical case study of framing mobility in dance in Chapter 1, in which I present courtesans as immobile—or complexly mobile—practitioners of early classical dance forms. These women connect in lineage and analogy to Indian contemporary dance today. I begin my ethnographic focus on the city of Bangalore in Chapter 2, in which I study the kinesthetic mobility of the body on the dance floor. I move through movement vocabularies, systems of training, and choreography that produce flexible practitioners. Chapter 3 explores fiscal mobility through systems of patronage, and corporate patronage in particular, wherein dancers engage in contracts to perform in the neoliberally produced “corporate show.” I continue my trajectory off the dance floor in the fourth chapter, wherein practitioners demonstrate collaborative mobility with other creatives to produce fresh and interesting work across idioms. I conclude my posited plurality of mobilities in the last chapter, in which I investigate forms of transnational mobility that elide with how “Indian” and “contemporary” are inhabited by transnationally dispersed bodies.

Throughout the dissertation, I have tried to frame multiple mobilities in parallel. Movement on the dance floor becomes a metaphor for how practitioners move off the floor to

subsist in their larger economies. I have attempted to represent the process of my way into the ethnographic field, in which I am simultaneously a researcher, practitioner, community member, and collaborator. I do this through different modes of ethnographic writing (Chapter 2), the framing of larger dialogues from among interview excerpts (Chapter 4), and fragmented transcriptions of a poly-vocal conversation, in which I am a participant (Chapter 5). In doing so, I represent my subjectivity and process of conducting research, and demonstrate that practitioners of Indian contemporary dance form the field from different perspectives and vantage points. Moreover, the idea of claiming contemporary is itself in constant motion.

As winners of NBC's *World of Dance*, the Kings do not claim their identities as Indian contemporary dancers in the same way as other practitioners in this dissertation. They do, however, describe their work as "contemporary," and have done so in their appearances on the show. The Kings' interpretation and staging of "contemporary" is hyper-visible on the bodies of dancers who circulate through commercial networks of popular media, such as network television shows, both in the United States and India (see Chakravorty 2017). Participation in *World of Dance* is continuous with the kinds of representations that the Kings use to build their brand online, via Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The infrastructures of these social media networks continue to change, almost daily, in how users interface with their larger publics. Instagram Stories, for example, allow users to post videos and photos as they are happening. These short videos expire just a few seconds after they are clicked by their followers. This model is similar to the structure of Snapchat, which does the same. Instagram and Snapchat present scenarios in which connection to a temporal live-ness is not only fleeting, but something to be chased and coveted, as producers of culture build mobile connections with their publics.

In the preceding chapters, I have argued that practitioners of Indian contemporary dance define, demonstrate, and are held to a series of mobilities that moderate the field. In considering the Kings United on Season 3 of *World of Dance*, who interact with many commercially visible moving bodies, I add to this list a media mobility, in which practitioners navigate how they circulate through media networks. In Chapter 4, I analyze STEM Dance Kampni's production of "Kalpavriksha" via a Facebook Live video. I continue to observe the ways in which STEM and other practitioners produce work online, posting behind-the-scenes content, videos, links, quotes, photographs on Instagram and Facebook. They even use their social media platforms to solicit submissions of content from their transnational publics, contouring the possibilities of how a determinedly concert form of dance lives between networks of images and other media.

I often find myself in conversations on what I term "the Bollywood debate" among practitioners of Indian classical and contemporary dance. The questions and conclusions are usually the same. "Is it dance?" "It's not just one style. It's the motley of styles that are choreographed to Bollywood songs." "Of course it's dance, but we don't do Bollywood." "I can enjoy it, but I don't have to *do* it." It has always felt to me that practitioners of Indian classical and contemporary dance create aesthetic separations between their work and the "lesser" commercial forms. At the same time, it is undeniable that the Hindi film industry has and continues to imprint itself on the production of Indian culture at large. Rachel Dwyer argues that Hindi cinema does not reflect society, but imagines it, playing "a highly significant role in creating a way of comprehending the way society is and how it should be. This way of thinking about Hindi cinema is also a way of looking at India" (2014: 8).

The Kings United present a version of Indian contemporary in hyper-mobile, hyper-visible networks for circulating how they and other agents represent their bodies. This has

consequences for those who work in contiguous frameworks, for staging other kinds of contemporaries in Indian dance. Not only do these consequences include the presentation of media mobility as one that moderates participation in the field, but they beg consideration of the Kings' subjectivities as male bodies that circulate. In politically modern India, women's bodies were tasked with preserving and performing culture, both at home and in transnationally dispersed contexts (see Chapter 1, Chapter 5). Radhika Parameswaran (2004) argues that in post-liberalization India, the woman was re-tasked with embodying a different kind of "hybrid" femininity. She explains:

The hybrid subjective space of the 'New Indian Woman' in media discourses accommodates simultaneously elements of tradition/modernity, femininity/feminism, and conformity/liberation. . . . Popular culture's creatively fashioned hybrid idioms of the modern nation fused with the elastic and flexible feminine render 'globality' into a digestible and reassuring local motif for Indian audiences. (Parameswaran 2004: 352)

Women continue to do the affective work of performing culture, but signify that this culture is, in essence, hybrid.

Royona Mitra (2015) concurs with the performance of culture having been located among women's bodies. In her study of the work of Akram Khan, she posits that his case, as a non-Indian, British-Bangladeshi man, queers this model. This is partly due to his gender identity as heteronormatively male, in addition to his translocal, South Asian-but-not-Indian, and choreographically "unapologetic" body (see Mitra 2015: 28-30). The most mobile practitioners of Indian contemporary dance have been both men and women (see Katrak 2011; Deboo and Katrak 2017). The significations of how the gendered body moves and inhabits mobilities to be contemporary, however, warrants further study.

The participation of the Kings United on NBC's *World of Dance* provokes me to consider the future of this project, on the plural mobilities that Indian contemporary dancers encounter and enact on and off the floor. The Kings demonstrate a quintessential media mobility, in which they move through commercial networks and articulate their version of Indian contemporary in the circulation of images online. Indian contemporary dancers engage similarly online, and respond by building their brands through the technologies that enable live connection with their publics. The Kings' performance of their subjectivities as male invites questions on what it means to inhabit contemporaneity in gendered ways. And further, how gendered practitioners connect with corresponding significations of Indian contemporary as their bodies circulate through media networks. These overlapping issues of media, mobility, gender, and commercial economies for Indian contemporary dance create new choreographic possibilities for the movement of bodies through the politics of mobility.

Glossary of Terms

<i>abhinaya</i>	Aesthetic practice of expression in the Indian performing arts; colloquially understood as “mime” in dance
Aga Khan	Title designated to the hereditary spiritual leader of the Ismaili Muslim community; lineage is traced to the Prophet Muhammed
Akram Khan	British-Bangladeshi dancer-choreographer, trained in kathak and European contemporary dance
<i>alaap</i>	Unmetered, improvised melody that is most associated with Indian classical music
arangetram	Debut recital in bharatanatyam specifically, in which a dancer is presented by their teacher as a soloist; many interpret the arangetram to be a graduating recital
Ashley Lobo	Indian contemporary dancer-choreographer; trained in Australia and Artistic Director of Mumbai-based The Danceworx
Astad Deboo	Indian contemporary dancer-choreographer with training in kathak and kathakali
Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts	Bangalore-based institution for Indian contemporary dance and related programming; Artistic Director: Jayachandran Palazhy
<i>bansuri</i>	Bamboo flute used in many South Asian music traditions
<i>BARDO</i>	Production choreographed by Joanna de Souza and Misty Wensel that toured in India; the author was a dancer on this tour
<i>Basant Panchami</i>	The fifth day of the Spring season in the Hindu calendar
<i>Bhagavad Gita</i>	Part of the story of the Hindu Sanskrit epic <i>Mahabharata</i>
<i>bharatanatyam</i>	Form of South Indian classical dance, and the most ubiquitous classical style performed in and outside of India
<i>bhava</i>	Loosely translated as “emotion,” but also refers to the codified sets of emotion that are described to help produce rasa in the <i>Natya Shastra</i>
<i>bols</i>	Onomatopoeic vocables that index rhythm in practices of Indian music and dance

British Raj	Official period of British colonialism in India, from 1857-1947
<i>cartes-de-visite</i>	Photographic studio portraits, which were printed en masse, traded, and consumed during their “craze” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries
Chandralekha (1928–2006)	Indian contemporary dancer-choreographer, who worked between the idioms bharatanatyam, yoga, and kalaripayattu
<i>chhau</i>	Bengali movement idiom described as martial art, folk, and classical dance
<i>choli</i>	Loosely translated as “blouse,” it signifies the visible, tightly fitted garment that is worn under a sari
<i>Coke Studio</i>	Coca-Cola-sponsored television show and popular music franchise in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and other countries in the world
<i>desi</i>	Signifying someone “Indian” or of Indian heritage, especially in transnational contexts; translated from Hindi as “of the country”
<i>darbar</i>	Visit with dignitaries, commemorated with ceremony
<i>filmi</i>	Of, about, from, or in Indian films
<i>gat</i>	Particular composition in Hindustani instrumental repertoires and kathak. In kathak, gat refers to either gat-nikaas, a series of bols, or gatbhav, which is similar to abhinaya
<i>gatbhav</i>	Also referred to as “bhao,” refers to a usually seated performance of abhinaya, especially with reference to courtesan performance
Gati Dance Forum	New Delhi-based contemporary dance institution, which features various programs, including an annual festival (<i>IGNITE!</i>); Director: Mandeep Raikhy
<i>gharana</i>	Style that comes about from continuing the hereditary lineage of a particular family, or kinship of musicians/dancers
<i>ghungroo</i>	Ankle bells used in kathak and other Indian dance traditions
<i>Giselle</i>	Canonic ballet that was re-interpreted by choreographer Akram Khan for the English National Ballet in 2016

<i>guru-shishya parampara</i>	Translated from Sanskrit as “master-disciple tradition”; system of apprenticeship-based tutelage in the Indian performing arts. Fellow students of a guru refer to each other in kin relationships of guru-bhai and guru-bahen (brothers and sisters)
H1-B visa	Authorization to work in the United States, tied to one employer
harmonium	Portable organ played by pumping bellows, used across South Asian music traditions
<i>Hindustani</i>	Refers generally to “North Indian classical music” but it is a music culture that is most prominent in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal
Hindutva	Right-wing political movement of Hindu nationalism in India
Irmgard Bartenieff (1900–1981)	Dancer, choreographer, and dance therapist in Euro-American contemporary dance; student of Rudolf Laban who extended his work on movement analysis
Isadora Duncan (1877–1927)	Formative figure in American modern dance, who is known for performing to works of Western classical music
Ismailis	Transnational community of Shia Muslims led by the Aga Khan
Jaaga	Bangalore-based institution that supports and seeds artistic, creative, and activist work in the city; founded by Archana Prasad
Janardhan Raj Urs	Principal dancer and a Creative Director at Natya/STEM Dance Kampni; teaches the contemporary batch at the Natya Institute
Joanna de Souza (Joanna-ji)	Toronto-based kathak dancer and choreographer; the author’s teacher; Artistic Director of M-DO Kathak Toronto and Chhandam Dance Company
<i>kalaripayattu</i>	Martial art form from the South Indian state of Kerala
Kalapriya Center for Indian Performing Arts	Chicago-based institution that programs Indian performing arts; founded by Pranita Nayar (then Pranita Jain) in 1994, who served as Artistic Director until 2014
“Kalpavriksha”	Production and choreography performed by STEM Dance Kampni that premiered in September 2018 at the NGMA

Kannadiga	Kannada-speaking people with heritage that dates back through generations to the state of Karnataka in India
<i>Karnatak</i>	South Indian classical music culture that is most prominent in India and Sri Lanka, as well as transnationally
<i>kathak</i>	Form of North Indian classical dance, known for rhythmic improvisation, characteristic pirouettes, and mimetic storytelling
<i>kathakali</i>	Form of Keralan dance-theater. It is recognized by the Government of India as a form of Indian classical dance
Keerthi Kumar	Principal Dancer and Projects Head at Natya/STEM Dance Kampni; supervises many curricula programs for the Institute’s Diploma in Choreography
Kinnari Vora	Chicago-based bharatanatyam dancer; friend and collaborator to the author
<i>kirtan</i>	sacred vocal tradition in ritual practices among Hinduism and Sikhism
<i>kothas</i>	Courtesan salons and residences
<i>kuchipudi</i>	Form of South Indian classical dance that is most associated with the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh
<i>kutiyattam</i>	Tradition of Keralan theater, in which practitioners perform Sanskrit epics and narratives
Labanotation	System of notation for transcribing movement developed by Rudolf Laban
Madhu Nataraj (Madhu-didi)	Bangalore-based Indian contemporary and kathak dancer, Artistic Director of STEM Dance Kampni; daughter of kathak dancer Maya Rao
Mandala Arts	Chicago-based institution for bharatanatyam and the programming of South Asian performing arts; directed by Pranita Nayar
<i>manjira</i>	Hand cymbals used in North Indian music traditions
Martha Graham (1894–1991)	Pioneer of American modern dance, whose lineage continues among students who study “Graham technique” today
Maya Rao (Maya-didi; 1928–2014)	Indian choreographer, kathak dancer, and guru; disciple of Pandit Shambhu Maharaj; founder of Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography and pioneered an ecosystem for kathak in South India

Meeraqi	Bangalore-based, interdisciplinary arts institution founded by Sudeep Bhattacharya
<i>mehfil</i>	Intimate gathering at which poetry, music, and/or dance is performed
<i>mela</i>	Translated from Hindi as “festival”
<i>mudra</i>	Codified hand gesture in Indian classical movement traditions
National Centre for Performing Arts	Mumbai-based premier institution for the Indian performing arts; houses the Symphony Orchestra of India; funded privately
<i>natya</i>	One of three types of dance as described in the <i>Natya Shastra</i> , referring to movement that is signifying in nature
<i>Natya Shastra</i>	Sanskrit classical text attributed to the sage Bharata Muni between 500 BCE – 500 CE, and can be read as a manual on Indian aesthetics
Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography	Bangalore-based institution for the study and programming of the performing arts, established by Maya Rao in 1964 in New Delhi
nautch	Attributed by the British to refer to dance performed by Indian courtesans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries
NGMA	National Gallery of Modern Art [in India], which has branches in New Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore
<i>nritya</i>	One of three types of dance as described in the <i>Natya Shastra</i> , referring to movement that is symbolic in nature
<i>nrtta</i>	One of three types of dance as described in the <i>Natya Shastra</i> , referring to movement that is neither signifying nor symbolic, but purely movement
Pandit Chitresh Das (1944–2015)	Kathak dancer and choreographer responsible for establishing the dance form in the US
Pandit Shambhu Maharaj (1910–1970)	First kathak guru at the Sangeet Natak Akademi’s Bharatiya Kala Kendra (dance school); taught Maya Rao
<i>Prakriti</i>	Production in Indian dance by Chicago-based dance collective Ishti

Preeti Veerlapati	Chicago-based kuchipudi dancer; friend and collaborator to the author
<i>puja</i>	Ritual ceremony that commemorates a Hindu occasion
<i>pung cholom</i>	Manipuri tradition of music and dance, featuring drumming and movement together
<i>qawwali</i>	South Asian Sufi music tradition featuring repeated, sung phrases in devotional expression; accompanied by harmonium, tabla, and clapping
<i>raga</i>	System of mode in South Asian musical practice; also refers to a melody that is modal per this tradition
Ramya Nagaraj	Assistant Director at the Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography; lead teacher of its kathak batches; coordinates programs for the Institute's Diploma in Choreography
<i>rasa</i>	Translated from Sanskrit as “mood,” but also refers to “essence” and “flavor”; refers to the circulation of particular affects among performers and audience members
<i>riyaaz</i>	Ritualized system of practice in Hindustani music
Rudolf Laban	European contemporary dancer, choreographer, and theorist; developed widely circulated, codified theory on movement analysis and dance notation
Ruth St. Denis (1879–1968)	Pioneer of American modern dance who collaborated with Ted Shawn to form the Denishawn institution for modern dance. Ruth St. Denis famously choreographed traditions of global and “eastern” dance forms into her work
<i>sam</i>	Beat 1 in the system of Hindustani cyclical taal
<i>sangeet</i>	Translated as “music,” but signifies music-dance in emic understandings of Indian traditions
Sangeet Natak Akademi	Established by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India in 1952, it is India's centralized, national institution for the performing arts
<i>sarangi</i>	Bowed string instrument played in South Asian music traditions, and typically associated with Hindustani music

Section 377	Section of the Indian Penal Code enacted during the British Raj, which bans all practices of “non-natural” sex; was upturned in 2018 with reference to homosexuality
<i>shalwar-kurta</i>	South Asian outfit consisting of a pair of trousers and tunic
<i>sitar</i>	Fretted, plucked string instrument played in South Asian music traditions, and typically associated with Hindustani music
<i>solkattu bols</i>	Language of vocables that index percussive or danced compositional material, affiliated with South Indian music
Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology	Private, degree-granting institution in Bangalore for the study of design
STEM Dance Kampni	Bangalore-based contemporary dance company under the aegis of the Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography; acronym for Space Time Energy Movement; Artistic Director: Madhu Nataraj
<i>taal</i>	System of rhythm and meter in Indian classical music, dance, and theater
<i>taalam</i>	Loosely translated as “curriculum” in Hindustani music culture
<i>tabla</i>	Set of two pitched drums used across South Asian music traditions. The <i>dayan</i> is pitched higher, and typically played with the right hand, and the <i>bayan</i> covers the bass register, and is played with the left hand
<i>tawaif</i>	The highest class of North Indian courtesan during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, who entertained nobility
<i>thumri</i>	Genre of Hindustani vocal music that features poetry on the topic of love; is associated with courtesan performance
Uday Shankar (1900–1977)	Operated during the mid-twentieth century as an Indian modern dancer; toured his “Oriental Dances” with the Ballet Russes, among other companies
Ustad Ali Akbar Khan (1922–2009)	Sarod musician and teacher responsible for the establishment of the Ali Akbar Khan College of Music in California—the first institution to teach Hindustani music in the US

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