UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

The Institutional Formation of Contemporary Indian Dance from the Twentieth Century to the Present:

The Patronage of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, Max Mueller Bhavan, and Gati Dance Forum

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Culture and Performance

by

Arushi Singh

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in Culture and Performance

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Professor Anurima Banerji, Co-Chair

Professor Susan Leigh Foster, Co-Chair

Contemporary dance, a field distinctly known for privileging innovation and experimentation, has had a rich century-long history in India and is one of the four major dance genres officially recognized by the Indian government, along with classical, folk, and tribal dance. At crucial historical moments, the Indian state has strategically deployed contemporary dance to advance a multicultural and modern image of the subcontinent to the world at large. Despite holding special significance in Indian political discourse, contemporary dance, compared to classical dance, remains under-theorized within Indian performance scholarship. Additionally, existing literature on contemporary Indian dance predominantly focuses on individual artists,

delineating their aesthetic sensibilities, dance making techniques, and choreographies in response to social and political discourses circulating in the subcontinent since the early 1900s. My dissertation is the first study to analyze institutional actions that contributed to the formation and consolidation of contemporary Indian dance from the twentieth century to the current moment when the practice evolved into a global phenomenon.

My dissertation investigates three institutions that have centrally engaged with contemporary dance in India: the Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA), the Max Mueller Bhavan (MMB), and the Gati Dance Forum (GDF). I employ multi-sited ethnography, archival research, choreographic analysis, and discourse analysis to ascertain these cultural entities' interventions in the field of contemporary Indian dance. I mainly investigate the following actions mobilized by these institutions to enable the genre's development: policy-making, curating and hosting seminars, conferences, festivals, artistic residencies, and educational programs, conferring awards and honors, and furnishing monetary resources for dance training, creation, performance, and research. In examining these actions, I argue that the three institutions shape the contours of contemporary Indian dance discourse and practice by continually redefining the category and its stakes in line with evolving institutional missions and contingencies. I track what ways these institutions support contemporary dance in relation to the larger cultural, political, and economic changes experienced in India in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—most notably due to India's shift from a socialist planned-economy to a neoliberal one. My assessment of how the three institutions form the conditions of possibility for contemporary Indian dance builds on a long tradition of critical theory that has generated frameworks for a materialist analysis of cultural production. I also draw from previous scholarship that conceptualizes how the norms,

standards, and mechanisms of arts institutions augment and constrain a dance or performance field.

Across my three dissertation chapters, I explore the national, bilateral, and local scales of contemporary dance production in India over the last six decades, which covers the time when each institution actively mediated the field. In my first chapter, I probe how the Sangeet Natak Akademi, a performing arts organization founded by the Indian state, assimilated contemporary dance to realize the latter's vision of promoting India's diverse cultural heritage and innovative capacity to compete globally. In my second chapter, I attend to the Max Mueller Bhavan, a network of cultural institutes established across India by the German Federal Foreign Office to facilitate diplomatic relations between the two countries. I interrogate how the MMB "developed" contemporary dance to justify and perpetuate the influence of the West in India. In my third chapter, I assess how the GDF, a performing arts non-profit constituted by contemporary Indian dancers, enabled the practice and ecosystem for experimental choreography by centering on the creative and professional needs of dance exponents. In investigating the above case studies, my dissertation offers critical new insights into the institutionalization of dance modernity in India by evaluating the politics of dance patronage.

The dissertation of Arushi Singh is approved.

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Introduction

Contemporary dance, a field distinctly known for privileging innovation and experimentation, has had a rich century-long history in India and is one of the four major dance genres officially recognized by the Indian government, along with classical, folk, and tribal dance. At crucial historical moments, the Indian state has strategically deployed contemporary dance to advance a multicultural and modern image of the subcontinent to the world at large. Despite holding special significance in Indian political discourse, contemporary dance, compared to classical dance, remains under-theorized within Indian performance scholarship. Additionally, existing literature on contemporary Indian dance predominantly focuses on individual artists, delineating their aesthetic sensibilities, dance making techniques, and choreographies in response to social and political discourses circulating in the subcontinent since the early 1900s. My dissertation is the first study to analyze institutional actions that contributed to the formation and consolidation of contemporary Indian dance from the twentieth century to the current moment when the practice evolved into a global phenomenon.

My dissertation investigates three institutions that have centrally engaged with contemporary dance in India: the Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA), the Max Mueller Bhavan (MMB), and the Gati Dance Forum (GDF). I employ multi-sited ethnography, archival research, choreographic analysis, and discourse analysis to ascertain these cultural entities' interventions in the field of contemporary Indian dance. I mainly investigate the following actions mobilized by these institutions to enable the genre's development: policy-making, curating and hosting seminars, conferences, festivals, artistic residencies, and educational programs, conferring awards and honors, and furnishing monetary resources for dance training, creation, performance, and research. In examining these actions, I argue that the three institutions shape the contours of

contemporary Indian dance discourse and practice by continually redefining the category and its stakes in line with evolving institutional missions and contingencies. I track what ways these institutions support contemporary dance in relation to the larger cultural, political, and economic changes experienced in India in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—most notably due to India's shift from a socialist planned-economy to a neoliberal one.[1] My assessment of how the three institutions form the conditions of possibility for contemporary Indian dance builds on a long tradition of critical theory that has generated frameworks for a materialist analysis of cultural production.[2] I also draw from previous scholarship that conceptualizes how the norms, standards, and mechanisms of arts institutions augment and constrain a dance or performance field.

Across my three dissertation chapters, I explore the national, bilateral, and local scales of contemporary dance production in India over the last six decades, which covers the time when each institution actively mediated the field. In my first chapter, I probe how the Sangeet Natak Akademi, a performing arts organization founded by the Indian state, assimilated contemporary

[1] The first Prime Minister of independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru, possessing socialist faith in an interventionist state and contempt for consumerism, attempted to transform India into a powerhouse of heavy industry. Thus after achieving independence from the British, India adopted a system combining a Non-Aligned stance and a socialist, centrally-planned economy (see footnote 46 in Chapter 1 for a detailed explanation of the Non-Aligned movement). This system was a compromise between the polarities of capitalism and communism, amalgamating select elements of the West's democratic framework with the economic planning models of China and the USSR. This resulting doctrine was, by and large, followed by the country until the late 1980s. But as a response to an impending balance of payment crisis in 1991, the Indian government, under the leadership of the then Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao, was compelled to take out a foreign loan which required a gradual opening up of the Indian economy. The reforms implemented by the Indian government in the same year under the pressure of the International Monetary Fund led to the unleashing of forces of globalization and export markets, foreign and private investment, and imported consumer goods into the subcontinent. Overall, it led to the deregulation of business and market, and the Indian government introduced a reform on taxation and welcomed the privatization of state-owned Public Sector Undertakings in many sectors, including culture. To read more about this shift to neoliberal governmental policy, see Sunil Khilnani (1997), Stuart Corbridge and Johan Harriss (2000), Akhil Gupta and Aradhana Sharma (2006), and Srirupa Roy (2007).

[2] To name a few examples, the scholarship of following authors has informed my analysis: Antonio Gramsci ([1891-1937]1971), Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer ([1947]1972), Michel Foucault (1969), Raymond Williams (1977), and Pierre Bourdieu (1993).

dance to realize the latter's vision of promoting India's diverse cultural heritage and innovative capacity to compete globally. In my second chapter, I attend to the Max Mueller Bhavan, a network of cultural institutes established across India by the German Federal Foreign Office to facilitate diplomatic relations between the two countries. I interrogate how the MMB "developed" contemporary dance to justify and perpetuate the influence of the West in India. In my third chapter, I assess how the GDF, a performing arts non-profit constituted by contemporary Indian dancers, enabled the practice and ecosystem for experimental choreography by centering on the creative and professional needs of dance exponents. In investigating the above case studies, my dissertation offers critical new insights into the institutionalization of dance modernity in India by evaluating the politics of dance patronage.

What is Contemporary Indian Dance?

Within the subcontinent, the emergence of contemporary dance in the twentieth century is often connected to a specific historical period, going by the existing literature on the subject. In 1984, a dance conference called the "East-West Dance Encounter," organized by the MMB in Mumbai, catapulted into the spotlight dancer-choreographer Chandralekha, whose original production *Angika*, academics suggest, declared the arrival of the Indian "contemporary." While in some sense, this was a significant moment in contemporary dance history, I agree with scholars Aishika Chakraborty (2008), Urmimala Sarkar Munsi (2008) and Prarthana Purkayastha (2014) that the recurring citation of this event as a watershed for innovative dance in India artificially delinked the modern dance experience (dated between the 1900s and the 1970s) from the contemporary (1980s onwards).[3] These scholars have offered an exhaustive analysis of how

[3] Additionally, some scholars would argue that Chandralekha's aesthetic intervention, for its investment in reclaiming and recovering a national-cultural past, relates more closely with the concerns of dance modernism.

artists like Uday Shankar, Rabindranath Tagore, and Shanti Bardhan, among others, were already pushing the boundaries of Indian physicality and dance well before the 1980s, a phenomenon that they believe most literature on contemporary dance has failed to address. What constituted early modern Indian dance and why the above erasure occurred will be the explored in my first chapter.

But for now, I want to state that I see modern and contemporary dance as part of the same continuum of innovation, constituting its different modalities and stakes in response to the cultural and political-economic discourses and conditions of Indian society in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Dance scholar Ramsay Burt (2004) writes that much of dance historiography tends to delineate distinct periods in dance development as if each new period altogether undoes the aesthetics of its predecessors, without glancing back, and thus is considered cutting-edge for the time.[4] Art historian Sonal Khullar (2015) makes a similar critique about narratives concerning the emergence of contemporary art in South Asia post-1989. Khullar notes that often contemporary art is considered a complete rupture from visual art modernism that preceded it as a way to narrate India's break away from a socialist past and entry into neoliberal economic reforms and the global economy. In contrast, she advocates that contemporary art's story be retold as being "haunted" by the "ruins" of modernism. This approach, Khullar suggests, exposes how today's contemporary art practices are re-animated by the ideological concerns of their modern antecedent instead of being perceived as a clean break from it.

In aesthetic terms, modern and contemporary dance in India also crystalize the above structural shift indicated by Khullar. At the same time, these dance periods are intertwined.

[4] Burt critiques how postmodern dance in the West has been understood as a complete overturning of the aesthetic preoccupations of modern dance.

Building on Burt and Khullar's persuasive arguments, I suggest that contemporary dance, to a certain extent, has recycled and advanced the artistic imperatives of Indian dance modernism. Moreover, I argue that the way national patrons like the SNA ascertained the worth and function of modern dance in the early part of the twentieth century continues to have cultural and material implications for contemporary dance today. Furthermore, the terms "modern dance," "contemporary dance," and other designations like "creative dance" "experimental dance" or "new dance" are often synonymously used in the Indian context. Throughout my dissertation, I alternate between these nomenclatures when the three institutions and artists claim them. But otherwise, I predominantly use the term "contemporary dance" as it is a moniker that the SNA, MMB, and GDF commonly employ. My project concurs with scholar Ketu Katrak (2011), who argues that the usage of the word "contemporary" remains appropriate in the Indian context despite its English-language origin; it operates as a way to recognize the legacy of nearly 200 years of British colonial history embedded in Indian culture (8).

I am also careful about not equating dance innovation with modernity/contemporaneity because it erases the history of similar practices in the premodern era. Dance innovation has been a concern addressed in many Indian aesthetic philosophies and practices historically.[5] The texts and forms associated with Indian dance tend to be seen through the "heritage" prism, sidelining

[5] Experiments in movement arts has a longer history in the subcontinent. In the sixteenth century CE treatise *Nartananirnaya* by Pandarika, there is a mention of a concept called *anibandha*: a division of dance which inimitably equates to experimental, improvisational choreographies (Bose 1992). Adapting extant music literature, this text delineates two new categories of dance—namely *bandha* and *anibandha*—referring to formulaic and non-formulaic approaches to structuring performances. According to Mandakranta Bose's interpretation of the theory of *anibandha*, it signaled a widening of the dancer's technical and aesthetic horizons and corresponded to the growing strength of new forms (3). She notes that in the early seventeenth century, there began a tradition of allowing a dancer considerable latitude to achieve the mimetic and aesthetic ends of performance, which was a significant departure from the tradition of requiring the dancer to rigorously follow the prescriptions of set compositions. *Anibandha* marked the flexible regimens of dancing and connoted improvisation within a relatively loose structure. In Bose's understanding, this approach provided the opportunity for artistic innovation within a secure technical framework, and as a result, contributed to the continuing vitality of dance (258).

the reality that an experimental spirit has long been part of the Indian art landscape. In other words, the lineage of experimental Indian dance precedes the modern (colonial) period. My dissertation, however, focuses on the how this form was identified and promoted by the three institutions in the postcolonial era.

Having offered these clarifications, I now present the key features, associations, and values that current scholarship has delineated about contemporary Indian dance in the modern postcolonial period. Contemporary dance in the subcontinent is not a fixed aesthetic canon. Instead, it is a fluid, mobile container for many ideas, forms, practices, styles, concepts, attitudes, and modes of choreographic being and doing that are distinctly concerned with dance innovation and experimentation. By defining contemporary dance in this way, I am not attempting to conflate dance that is contemporaneous in the temporal sense with a stylistic definition of what is contemporary. Rather, I consider contemporary dance to be a distinct performance category in India. I think adopting "contemporary" in Indian dance as a solely temporal designation opens the field to all dance practices that are "current," which as dance scholar SanSan Kwan (2017) asserts "risks giving the term no real focus of identification, no way to mark the social, cultural, or political significance of a moment in history" (48).[6] Thus in the following pages, I discuss specific elements that have distinguished the contemporary dance movement in the subcontinent.

Contemporary dance in India has generally been an urban cultural practice, performed in prosceniums and other non-traditional dance venues like public spaces, galleries, and black box theatres, with a largely cosmopolitan audience. The practice burgeoned dominantly in cities like Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai (the three institutions I study have contributed

[6] At the same time, I acknowledge the critique of claiming contemporary dance as a discrete type in the Indian context as it might seem to deny contemporaneity (in the temporal sense) to other established forms like classical, folk, and tribal dance, which have evolved in response to the prevailing material-social conditions of their surrounding contexts.

to this regional bias), although places like Pune and Jaipur are also becoming new sites of contemporary dance production. The choreographers that came to be known as notable exponents of contemporary dance have historically belonged to Indian society's upper class and caste groups.[7] While this trend continues, dancers and makers from across social and economic lines constitute this field today.

The philosophy of individualism has fueled contemporary dance in India (Coorlawala 1994, Kothari Ed. 2003, Katrak 2011, Chatterjea 2013, Venkatraman 2017). It is an area of cultural activity associated with artists seeking to articulate their distinct voice through dance. In other words, the contemporary in Indian dance is related to choreographic inquiry. It is a process that tends to involve dancers in a permutation or combination of the following: (1) experimenting with, (2) subverting, (3) interrogating, or (4) transforming the (a) syntax, (b) movement principles, (c) bodily ideals, or (d) thematic conventions and (e) performative codes of established dance traditions (most often the forms they trained in).

Contemporary dance has included a variety of aesthetic impulses. Certain individuals have shared the common goal of innovating within and extending classical Indian dance (Lopez y Royo 2003, O'Shea 2007, Chakravorty 2008).[8] Other exponents have gone beyond what they see as the restrictive norms and practices of a singular dance and displayed their "corporeal flexibility" by creatively assimilating elements or dynamics from a broad spectrum of local and

[7] Performance scholar Brahma Prakash (2016) notes contemporary dance world's complicity in maintaining and further strengthening age-old segregation along the lines of caste and class in the art and performance fields of India (135).

[8] Royo uses the word "post-classical" instead of the "contemporary" in her analysis of Indian dance experimentation since the 1970s. According to her, "post-classical" emphasizes Indian choreographers employing the same movements which belong to classical styles, but with an intention to explore the possibilities of growth, expansion and transformation of classical forms (7-8).

international dance and movement techniques (Kedhar 2020).[9] They have chosen to engage in fruitful collaborative links with world forms since the regularization of transnationalism in the 1990s ushered in my neoliberal globalization.[10] Katrak applies Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakthin's literary concept of "heteroglossia" to theorize the hybrid nature of contemporary Indian dance. Bakthin conceptualizes heteroglossia as the presence in language of a multiplicity of "points of views on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings, and values" (Bakthin [1934]1981, 291). Katrak incorporates this notion to describe contemporary Indian artists' fluid approach to dance-making by including diverse movement techniques, and cultural experiences and meanings.

Due to its cultural ambidexterity, especially with Euro-American movement techniques, contemporary Indian dance is frequently classified as a derivative of the former. However, many scholars of studying Asian performance have problematized this tendency to perceive cultural influence as unidirectional and universally flowing from the West to the East (Bharucha 1993, Sarkar Munsi 2008, Srinivasan 2012, Chatterjea 2013, Purkayastha 2014, Mitra 2015, Kwan 2017). Kwan observes the fraught temporal connotations of terms such as "contemporary" and "modern," which often get conflated with a particular geography and culture, i.e., the West (44-45). This gestures toward the institutionalization of world dance history as per a Eurocentric framework, in which Western Europe and North America lays exclusive claims over the right to

[9] Some of these include the vocabularies of recognized classical and folk dance forms from the subcontinent; the kinetic principles of Asian physical traditions like Yoga, Kalaripayattu. Chhau, Thang Ta, and Tai-Ji-Quan; and compositional and production design techniques of modern and postmodern dance from Europe and the United States (Kothari Ed. 2003, Sarkar Munsi 2008, Chakravorty 2008, Banerji 2010, Katrak 2011, Chatterjea 2013, Purkayastha 2014, Cherian Ed. 2016, Deboo and Katrak Eds. 2017, Kedhar 2020).

[10] Chatterjea (2013) observes that since the 1990s, when globalization normalizes an enormous amount of traffic across the world, dance educators and choreographers from the Global North are invited to teach in countries all over Asia in great numbers, and dancers in Asian countries encounter Western movement idioms through festivals, performances, and classes in choreography, composition, and technique (13).

modernity, urbanity, autonomy, abstraction and universality—values that characterize the white Western aesthetic (Chatterjea 2004 and 2020, Kunst 2004, Gutierrez 2018).[11] This monopoly has denied the legitimacy and authenticity of "non-Western" and "not-quite-Western" artists' articulations of these values (Vujanović 2014). The scholars I have cited so far have noted a double erasure within the overarching narrative of dance modernism: modern and postmodern dance from the West absorbs the influences of non-Western cultures to advance their projects, while the latter cannot be sites of creative experimentation and innovation. The ideological procedures of the global market and politics sequester the non-Western dancing body to the past (fixed as historical/traditional), not offering it the privilege of being present and "coeval" with its Western counterparts (Fabian 1983). It is associated with a "delayed physicality" that needs to "catch up" to the Western dancing body to achieve contemporaneity (Kunst 2004).

To counter this framework, current scholarship on contemporary Indian dance has rigorously shown how dancers from South Asia have always been generators of modernism and not merely consumers, outsiders, or "primitive" sources for contemporary Western dance theatre. Purkayastha advises that:

> we need to acknowledge that in the colonial and postcolonial worlds, cross-cultural experimentations in dance have occurred across the board, with choreographers from either side of the globe looking beyond their immediate cultural locations for different themes, forms, and modes of presentation, to inform their artistic practice (119).

Many contemporary dancers from India have marked their claim to global citizenship and the international community by pronouncing their identification with world culture. They can be identified as "cosmo-modernists"–individuals who formulate contemporary "Indian" dance through an intentional and generative dialogue with the globe, as opposed to being constrained by aesthetic parochialism (Khullar 2015). This "cosmopolitical" attitude of contemporary Indian

[11] Chatterjea (2020) asserts that "we all enter contemporary, innovation, experimentation, conceptual versus representational, and other concepts and debates in dance-making from our particular contextual lens" (271).

dancers also reveals the privilege of access and travel afforded to an elite few by mechanisms of neoliberalism (Bharucha 1999, Gilbert and Lo 2007).

Mining the "contemporary" in India has also resulted in several dance makers challenging the very premise and presentation of dance as a discipline. To do so, they have initiated interdisciplinary conversations, interfacing with the modalities of different non-dance mediums like music, theatre, visual arts, architecture, new media, and film (Chandralekha [1984] 2010, Chettur 2016, Ramamurthi 2016).[12] Some practitioners have attempted to resist the codes of spectacle and virtuosity conventionally affiliated with the performance of (classical) Indian dance in today's urban proscenium settings by preferring to produce abstract and minimalist works (Chandralekha [1984] 2010, Banerji 2010, Chettur 2016, Iyengar 2017).

Contemporary Indian dance has been characterized as "an individual's psychophysical expression in the present moment" (Sircar 1995, 259), or in other words, a "commitment to creating a dance vocabulary that can communicate the 'present'" (Sarkar Munsi 2008, 93).[13] As a practice that indexes the present, contemporary dance in India has specific connotations. Many artists associated with this field are known for engaging in cultural and socio-political critique

[12] In doing so, I suggest that contemporary dancers renew and forward the historically interdisciplinary character of Indian performing arts. During the time when *Natyasastra* is written in the ancient era (second century BCE – second century CE), dance is not seen as a distinct art, but situated within the interdisciplinary complex of dance, music, and drama known as *natya* (Rangacharya 2005). In the *Abhinaya Darpana*, dated between seventh and tenth centuries CE, Nandikesvara spells out dance as a distinct category; he distills dance elements from the *Natyasastra* and also elaborates on the aesthetic manual, but philosophically, dance is still considered as part of the same triadic formation of dance, music and drama. Later in the tenth century, Abhinavagupta further elaborates on the *Natyashastra* and introduces the idea of *rasa*-based (expressive) arts in particular as devotional, departing from its previously secular and spectacular orientations (Ghosh 1957). Influenced by the commentaries in *Abhinaya Darpana*, the *Sangita-Ratnakara* of Sarangdeva, dated to the first half of the thirteenth century CE, also envisages a composite art consisting of *gita* (melodic forms), *vadya* (instruments) and *nrtta* (dance or limb movements) (Shringy and Sharma 1996 and 2013). Whereas canonic aesthetic texts agree on the composite nature of dance as a genre, the installation of dance as an autonomous form and category is a decidedly modern formation. The category of "nautch" as an independent type seems to have consolidated in the British colonial period, starting from the 1700s, as the study of arts disciplines were partitioned in the West and Indian education systems came to adopt the new disciplinary taxonomies (Chakravorty 2008, Foucault [1975]1995, Vishwanathan 1998).

[13] In this sense, the contemporary in Indian dance can be described as a cultural practice that is "together with time" or a "comrade of time" (Groys 2009).

through their explorations of form, content, or both. Some have treated the contemporary as grounds to question and challenge reified notions of Indian dance, concepts of tradition, and Euro-American aesthetic hegemonies (Chatterjea 2004, 2013, 2020). Others have worked against patriarchal frameworks governing dance production on the Indian stage by reinventing the role of women's representation and foregrounding their collective agency (Sircar 1995, Chakraborty 2008, Purkayastha 2014). Moreover, individual artists have challenged the directives, routines, assumptions, and hierarchies of existing political and cultural institutions through their dance activism.[14]

Connecting art to life such that the former is responsive to current realities in Indian society has been a central impulse of contemporary Indian dance. Through their body-based investigations, choreographers have dealt with a whole gamut of experiences concerning India's tryst with modernity since the turn of the century, such as the violence of repressive state action, the human and environmental costs of capitalism, unorthodox themes of gender, sexuality, queer desire, and the subcontinent's secular heritage (Coorlawala 1994, Chatterjea 1998, Banerji 2010). Due to its preoccupation with critically reflecting on the aforementioned themes, contemporary Indian dance is often viewed as a progressive, countercultural phenomenon. This particular definition aligns with Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben's (2009) theorization of

[14] In her works like *Daughters of Sita* (1990) and *V is for…* (1996), Mallika Sarabhai has performed critiques of patriarchal politics and repressive state action. Despite facing severe threats by Hindutva outfits, Sarabhai has been an outspoken critic of Narendra Modi since he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat, under whose watch the Godhra carnage against Muslims occurred in the state in 2001. She even filed a Public Interest Litigation in the Supreme Court in 2002 against the state government of Gujarat, charging it with human rights violations and demanding the resignation of Modi (Chatterjea 2004, 104-105, *Times of India* 2011). In a previous case in the 1980s, Chandralekha, along with her artistic collaborator, Sadanand Menon, devised a street play as part of Skills (an organization they co-founded with visual artist Dashrath Patel), about electoral malpractices and the death of Indian democracy, which resulted in them being booked for sedition (Bharucha 1995, 119). And more recently, dancer Navtej Singh Johar was one of the lead petitioners in the Supreme Court case that sought to abolish Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, a colonial-era law that criminalized homosexuality (They won the historical case in 2018). Moreover, in response to the debate around Section 377, Mandeep Raikhy created *Queen Size* (2016), a choreography that explored themes of queer intimacy, legality, morality, and spectatorship.

"contemporariness" as a "singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it, and at the same time, keeps a distance from it" (41). At the same time, I, like performance scholar Brahma Prakash (2016), question the countercultural claim of contemporary Indian dance. In his article entitled "The Contingent of the Contemporaneity," Prakash analyzes contemporary dance's immersion into capitalist enterprise associated with Indian gallery culture. He asserts that while the field has "addressed political issues such as questions of the body, identity and subjectivity; however, it is not political in the sense that it is not perceived as a threat to neo-liberal politics" (131).[15] The failure of (contemporary) dancers to participate in the 2015 "Award Wapsi" (returning of award in Hindi) movement—the biggest protest in the post-independence era by Indian artists from diverse domains—further calls into question their apparent embrace of an oppositional politics.[16] As my dissertation chapters will detail, the three institutions have engaged with or promoted one or more of the attributes of contemporary Indian dance outlined above, adding their own interpretations to meet and advance institutional objectives.

Background on Case Studies

The three institutions I have chosen to study played a vital role in the making of contemporary dance in India, contributing to critical stages in the field's evolution between the mid-twentieth century and the current moment. They represent different forms of patronage: the SNA is a national government body for the performing arts, the MMB is a foreign cultural emissary, and the GDF was a grassroots dance nonprofit run by artists. Consequently, each has

[15] Alexandra Kolb (2013) and Jose L. Reynoso (2019) have similarly critiqued how the aesthetic imperatives of contemporary dance in the West are enmeshed within the modern market economy.

[16] In 2015, several artists protested against the current government, returning awards to the latter in response to the alarming rise in attacks on historically marginalized communities and dissentient thinkers. For a detailed analysis of the notable absence of dancers from this historic non-violent action, read Anurima Banerji (2022).

had varied rationales for being involved with contemporary dance and has sought distinct approaches to composing and enabling it.

The first government of independent India, established in 1947, launched the SNA in 1953 in the capital city of New Delhi, as part of its efforts to become a foremost steward of the subcontinent's art practices.[17] The state created the agency, along with the Sahitya Kala Akademi (National Academy for Literature), the Lalit Kala Akademi (National Academy for the Fine Arts), and the National School of Drama, to build the cultural infrastructure for the new nation. After 200 years of British colonialism, the subcontinent was confronted by the predicaments of territorial and social fracture brought on by the Partition.[18] India was also trying to break away from the imperialist influences of its former colonizer and instead recuperate its traditional inheritance to mark its unique position on the world stage. India's nation-builders and state officials saw culture as one of the major producers of national identity and an important catalyst to establish national solidarity. To foster this mission in the realm of the performing arts—to be specific, dance, drama, and music—the government set up the SNA as an apex body to preserve and promote heritage practices that were recognizably Indian and genres of expression that represented the country's regional, religious, and linguistic diversity. While this continues to be the organization's purpose, it expanded its scope to nurture practices that embodied India's

[17] The newly formed government wanted to address the decline of arts patronage from princely states, regional elites, religious communities, and the colonial state apparatus that preceded it.

[18] When the British finally quit the subcontinent in August 1947, it was partitioned into two independent nation states: Muslim-majority Pakistan and Hindu-majority India. Instantaneously, there commenced one of the greatest migrations in human history, as millions of Hindus and Sikhs fled to India and millions of Muslims departed to West and East Pakistan (the latter is known today as Bangladesh). Throughout the Indian subcontinent, communities that had cohabited for almost a millennium attacked each other in a dreadful and unprecedented burst of sectarian violence between Muslims on one side and Hindus and Sikhs on the other. Historians have reported that in Punjab and Bengal—provinces adjoining India's borders with West and East Pakistan, this was particularly intense, witnessing a significant number of arsons, massacres, forced conversions, mass abductions, and cases of grave sexual violence (especially against women). You can read more about the reasons for the Partition and its aftermath in: Khushwant Singh (1956), Bisham Sahni (1973), Anita Desai (1980), Salman Rushdie (1981), Ayesha Jalal (1994), Urvashi Butalia (1998), Gyanendra Pandey (2001), and Saadat Hasan Manto (2012), to mention a few.

proficiency in playing an active role in the juggernaut of neoliberal globalization, a goal that the government chose to prioritize starting the late twentieth century.

In the first few years of its operation, the institution acknowledged and consecrated contemporary dance as a performance category of national significance along with classical, folk, and tribal dance. This finding in my fieldwork contradicts the popular opinion in extant scholarship that claims that the state has not cared about experimental forms like contemporary dance. I also discovered that the SNA attempted to lay out the aesthetic and discursive contours of innovative dances during its 1958 "First All-India Dance Seminar," an event involving formative deliberations on the postcolonial nature and significance of Indian dancing. This made it one of the earliest cultural organizations from the twentieth century to intervene in an antecedent of contemporary dance in the country, countering the perception that the 1984 Dance Encounter was the premier landmark event for the field.

The SNA was constituted as an autonomous organization with the intention to safeguard the interests of performers in the postcolonial scenario. But because the institution has been predominantly administered by bureaucratic officials and funded by the state over the years, it has principally served as an instrument for the latter to carry out its cultural goals. The chapter on the SNA discloses that state actors have very much been concerned with the contemporary in Indian dance but selectively and for the aforementioned purposes of nationalism, and these may or may not have coincided with those of artists; in any case, it did not prioritize leadership by artmakers in the cultural space.

What got me first interested in studying the MMB was that it was the curatorial force behind the 1984 Dance Encounter, a one-of-a-kind conference dedicated to examining the status of dance innovations in the subcontinent by cultivating a dialogue between Indian

experimentalists and their counterparts in the West. While scanning brochures of experimental dance events that I attended in India over the years, I observed that, more times than not, the MMB was listed as a sponsor. I was intrigued to learn more about why a foreign institution was invested in patronizing the contemporary in Indian dance.

The MMB is the name for the Goethe-Institut in India, a cultural association initially instituted in 1951 by the German Foreign Office and which today has a worldwide network of 159 chapters. The MMB has six local branches across India, which opened between the late 1950s and 1960s.[19] It belongs to a network of embassies, consulates, and cultural arms of countries that have aimed to build solid and long-term relationships with India via the exchange of cultural forms and to support professional networking programs and capacity-building for Indian artists and cultural workers.[20] These organizations, including the MMB, have primarily been invested in nurturing different forms of contemporary art in the subcontinent through their cultural initiatives. In the face of lack of support from government cultural bodies, such institutional patrons have served as alternatives for (contemporary) art practitioners. In the case of the MMB, as its parent body, the Goethe-Institut, originally emerged during a political zeitgeist that resisted fascism and authoritarianism in the aftermath of Nazi Germany, it chose to cultivate art practices globally that articulated the values of cultural freedom, innovation, and diversity.

Since 1976, the MMB has mostly held an independent financial and administrative structure. Hence, it has managed to balance the concerns of the German Foreign Office while

[19] The six branches were founded in New Delhi (1957), Kolkata (1957), Chennai (1960), Bengaluru (1960), Pune (1961), and Mumbai (1969). The Goethe-Institut also has four subsidiary centres in Hyderabad, Coimbatore, Ahmedabad, and Trivandrum, all established in the first ten years of the twenty-first century.

[20] To name a few, these include British Council, Alliance Française, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Prohelvetia Swiss Arts Council, Instituto Cervantes, Japan Foundation, and the National Arts Council of Singapore.

also deciding on programming beyond state-sanctioned interests. Nonetheless, I observe that the institution's engagement with Indian arts, including contemporary dance, reflected and advanced the German nation's intention and approach to diplomacy since the Cold War. Although cultural diplomacy in the postwar context was meant to create "peaceful" and "mutually beneficial" alliances, this was not how it played out. Historian Gregory Paschalidis (2009) writes during the Cold War, "external cultural policy was extensively deployed for the preservation or promotion of economic and cultural ties between metropolitan and ex-colonial countries, providing an alternative, new structure of integration" (282). He further observes that despite the rhetorical flourishes of the "development mission" attached to the diplomatic practices of Western powers in this period, their retooling of external cultural policy for acquiescing or maintaining spheres of economic and cultural influence was a quintessential case of neo-colonialism. The practice of Goethe-Instituts in the Global South, including the MMB, adhered to these structuring logics until the late 1980s. The objective undergirding the MMB's cultural exchange and development programs at this time was to assert the cultural superiority of Germany (and in extension, the West) and to prescribe the assimilation of Indian modernity into the former.

The beginning of the neoliberal era brought on a dramatic redistribution of power, with the rise of a multipolar world and places like India transforming into important economic and cultural centers (Kapur 2000, Wang 2008, Dave Mukherjee et al. 2013) . These changes pushed Germany to reframe its diplomatic strategies in the twenty-first century. The country realized that it could no longer arm-twist the Global South to accept their imperialist agenda. Moreover, the only way it could benefit from the growing affluence of this region was to take on a collaborative rather than a dictatorial relation with a partnering nation. This period saw the MMB infusing their programming with the ethic of cultural symbiosis, increasingly giving agency to

artists in India to structure initiatives that reflected local cultural priorities and issues. The chapter on the MMB evaluates the actions of the institution in the contemporary Indian dance field against this backdrop of significant global geocultural and geopolitical shifts.

The GDF was a grassroots arts nonprofit from New Delhi that officially ran between 2007 and 2020. It was brought about by a collective of performing artists to build a durable ecosystem for the creation, circulation, and reception of contemporary dance in India. In their perception, the Indian state had been a conservative patron that for decades had chosen to typically nourish traditional performance forms over encouraging dance experimentation and innovation. They additionally thought government interference in the dance sphere had been more debilitating than enabling. Thus the GDF found value in creating an independent network of patronage for contemporary Indian dance outside the regime of the government. It was inspired by and grew alongside an efflorescence of professional platforms in contemporary Indian dance since the late 1990s.[21] But what was distinct about the institution was that it attempted to address this practice holistically by curating projects that focused on pedagogy, choreographic inquiry, performance, research, community and audience-building, and performance infrastructure revitalization.[22]

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[21] Here I am referring to contemporary dance companies like Nrityauta, Attakkalari Dance Company, and Natya and Stem Dance Kampani in Bengaluru, and Rhythmosaic Dance Company and Ranan Performance Collective in Kolkata. There has also been a growing number of contemporary dance festivals, such as Attakkalari Biennale, International Festival for Alternative and Contemporary Expressions, Dance Bridges, Prayatna Film and Dance Festival, March Dance, and Jugnee Festival of Contemporary Dance. A Chennai-based arts organization, Prakriti Foundation, which was responsible for curating the Other Festival in the 1990s and now runs the New Parks Festival, today confers the Prakriti Excellence in Contemporary Dance Awards (PEDCA). Additionally, there are also other organizations similar to the GDF that have been set up by contemporary choreographers to create professional structures for the field, such as Basement 21 in Chennai (est. 2011), the Kha Foundation in Bengaluru (est. 2014), and Pickle Factory Foundation in Kolkata (est. 2017).

[22] An institution from the independent circuit comparable to the GDF in terms of the variety of dimensions it has addressed for the development of contemporary dance in the subcontinent is the Attakkalari Centre of Movement Arts, which choreographer Jayachandran Palazhy established in 1992 in Bengaluru. While this organization set a precedent for the work of the GDF, I observed that for many years its activities fed into nurturing the Attakkalari Dance Company, whose Artistic Director is Palazhy. The GDF, in contrast, intended to serve the independent artist.

The GDF's capacity to manifest heterogenous projects was made possible due to the aid from a consortium of public, private, and international funders available to the contemporary Indian art world following the economic boom ushered in by neoliberal reforms of the 1990s. The institution adopted an artist-driven and artist-centered approach to patronizing the contemporary dance field. In other words, the GDF represented the goals and needs of artists. Being founded by dancers, the GDF placed artists as the primary agents in determining structures to support their cultural production, such that inputs and suggestions from them fed directly into the design and functioning of the GDF programs. The GDF consistently consulted with the members of the dance/artistic community to decide what kinds of initiatives to prioritize. And other times, they drew from their own experiences as performing artists to determine the direction of their projects. I worked with the GDF between 2012 and 2014. I closely witnessed the unique ways this institution fought for artists' perspectives and pieced together a future for contemporary Indian dance while navigating the odds of running a nonprofit devoted to cultivating experimental performance. This dissertation study, at least partly, grew from my first-hand encounter with them.

Significance and Originality of Institutional Analysis

This dissertation is the first exhaustive analysis of how the SNA, the MMB, and the GDF have shaped the contemporary Indian dance field. Though contemporary dance has been a discrete area of creative activity in the subcontinent for over a century, only a small number of

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But in light of the work that the GDF did over the years, I have also witnessed Attakkalari reframe its programming to serve the contemporary dance community at large, including emerging choreographers in the field.

articles, monographs, and anthologies are dedicated to this subject.[23] The scholarship that does exist primarily focuses on the culture and politics surrounding contemporary Indian dance through an examination of the creative processes, aesthetic philosophies, and choreographic oeuvres of artists who have become its foremost exponents. I contribute to this existing literature on experimental forms and Indian dance modernity by investigating key institutional patrons from the subcontinent's performance world that have partaken in structuring the practice, discourse, and context of Indian contemporary dance. I am guided by previous studies that have examined the central role that cultural institutions have played in the making of specific dance cultures (Ram and A.M. Khokhar 1999, Castaldi 2006, Samson 2010, Khullar 2018, Wilbur 2021). I concur with the theorization of scholars who have shown that the aesthetic and temporal signifiers that get attached to contemporary dance are in part, a result of the politics of cultural programmers and curatorial institutions on the world dance stage (Kunst 2004, Chatterjea 2013, Rastovac 2016, Kwan 2017).[24]

Moreover, my dissertation seeks to problematize the value of individualism that often gets attached to contemporary Indian dance. While carrying out fieldwork, I observed that the people who make up this field, like most artists, also vie for cultural legitimacy and professional recognition and growth, which often prompts them to tactically interface with the art world's gatekeepers, the curators, tastemakers, funders, and institutions that cull and present the dance

[23] These include: Coorlawala (1994, 1999 and 2003), Bharucha (1995), Sircar (1995), Sanjay Roy (1997), Chandralekha (1980, 1984 [2010], 1997 and 2001), Kothari Ed. (2003), Royo (2003), Chatterjea (2004a, 2004b, 2010, 2013, 2020), Tandon (2005), Chakraborty (2008), Chakravorty (2008), Banerji (2010), Katrak (2011), Mitra (2014), Purkayastha (2014), Cherian Ed. (2016), Katrak and Deboo Eds. (2017), and Tripura Kashyap (2018). You will also find essays on contemporary dance in: Sarkar Munsi Ed. (2008), Sarkar Munsi and Stephanie Burridge Eds. (2011), Sarkar Munsi and Chakraborty Eds. (2018), Chakravorty and Nilanjana Gupta Eds. (2018), Dave Ed. (2021), as well as *Indent* and *Ligament* journals digitally published by the GDF and Attakalari, respectively.

[24] For instance, Chatterjea (2013) laments that within the economy of the global stage, inevitably Indian bodies are compelled to speak a familiar language or to translate their culturally-specific engagements with form into readable (Western) presentation structures, if they aspire for their choreographies to be recognized as "contemporary."

we see. My inquiry builds on and extends a growing body of literature that challenges the modernist discourse on the autonomy of art by interrogating how intersecting social, political, and institutional economies form the conditions of possibility for dance and performance.[25] My dissertation is deeply informed by Shannon Jackson's 2012 book entitled *Social Works,* in which the author takes a decidedly performance studies approach and asserts that art cannot be separated from its context of production, especially the structures that organize and give its practitioners financial and social sustenance. Her work, in particular, drove me to consider contemporary dance's classification, creation, and dissemination in connection to shifts in the mission, constitution, patronage model, and activities of the institutions centered in my study.

Some academics have specifically examined how the aesthetic and choreographic strategies of contemporary dance align with and get shaped by developments in the political-economic systems of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Kolb 2013, Njaradi 2014, Kunst 2015, Reynoso 2019, Kedhar 2020). In tracking how the actions of the three institutions embody ideologies and conditions determined by shifts in modern politics and economics, I similarly unravel contemporary Indian dance's relationship to and interaction with the latter. In following this track, my dissertation goes against the mainstream assumption that forms of contemporary art seem to "float free of historical determination" (Foster 2009).

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[25] The discipline of dance and performance studies has foraged into an investigation of economics, with academics raising questions about relations between embodiment, choreography, labor, precariousness, infrastructure, value, and finance. To read on these developments, see: Marta Savigliano (1995), Randy Martin (1998), Jon McKenzie (2001), Mark Franko (2002), Linda Tomko (2005), Yatin Lin (2010), Judith Hamera (2011), Bojana Cvejić (2011), Jackson (2014), Laurel George (2012), Dieter Lesage (2012), Srinivasan (2012), Kedhar (2014), Tavia Nyong'o (2014), Kunst (2003), André Lepecki (2016), Katarzyna Kosmala and Miguel Imas (2016), Olive Mckeon (2018), and Susan Leigh Foster (2019). Also see articles in the 2012 issue of *TDR: The Drama Review* entitled "Precarity and Performance" and the *Performance Research* issue from the same year called "On Labour & Performance." Additionally, see the articles under the section on "Economics" in the 2020 book volume, *Futures of Dance Studies* and the 2022 issue of *Dance Chronicle* on "Critical Institutional Studies." Some of these scholars have addressed the above concepts in light of the changing political economy of work in the West under neoliberal capitalism, by engaging with theories forwarded by Marxist intellectuals, like Bruno Latour (1996), Paolo Virno (1996), Maurizio Lazzarato (1996), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000), Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2005), and David Harvey (2007).

Each chapter of my dissertation is an original offering on how the contemporary in Indian dance has been formed by the politics of performing arts patronage in the subcontinent since its establishment as a modern nation-state in 1947. Previous literature has attended to the Indian state as a modern patron of the performing arts (especially noting how its cultural bodies, including the SNA, have aided in the construction and widespread circulation of heritage practices), and analyzed the case of the SNA in the context of delineating the span and limits of Indian cultural policy before and after economic liberalization.[26] While these texts also do not exclusively address contemporary dance, they provided me the much-needed historical context to interpret how the SNA viewed and enacted the significance of dance innovation over the years. The work of performance scholar Anita E. Cherian (2009) has been foundational for me to think about the institutionalizing "maneuvers" of the SNA, especially how its delineation of dance genres vis-à-vis its awards system attempted to mirror the Indian state's goal of nationalizing performance. Cherian's article prompted me to explore other programs of the SNA from the perspective of noting how they served to strategically fix contemporary Indian dance to realize the Indian state's project of cultural nationalism, and later, neoliberalism.

A handful of Indian academics have briefly examined the MMB's influence in the sphere of contemporary Indian dance by reporting details on two critical events organized by the institution: the 1984 Dance Encounter and the 1993 workshop series titled "New Directions in Indian Dance" (Bharucha 1995, Coorlawala 2003, Sarkar Munsi 2008). However, there has been no in-depth investigation of the MMB so far, even though it is frequently associated in existing scholarship with the formal advent of the contemporary Indian dance. In my research, I found

[26] Texts by Kapila Vatsyayan (1972), M.N. Buch (1981), N.K. Prasad (1982), Joan Erdman (1983), Lloyd I. Rudolph Ed. (1984), Bharucha (1992), and Purnima Shah (2002) focus on the era of Indian cultural policy and state patronage between the 1950s and the late 1980s. Erdman Ed. (1992), Cherian (2016), and Veena Basavarajaih (2018) study the changes in these areas since the era of economic liberalization.

only one English-language text by policy scholar Annika Hampel (2017), who offers a breakdown of the history and evolution of this German cultural institute, and this book became foundational for me to understand how the MMB's approach to arts programming over the years has been affected by the bilateral relations between India and Germany. My chapter on the MMB evaluates the institution's interventions in the contemporary dance field in relation to the dynamics of postwar cultural diplomacy (Prevots 1999, Paschalidis 2009, Geduld 2010, Kowal 2010, Croft 2015). Lastly, my dissertation is the first critical study to focus on the GDF. I interrogate how this grassroots artist-led organization designed distinct initiatives for contemporary Indian dance by mobilizing creative and intimate coalitions between dancers, artists from other disciplines, cultural workers, and funders from diverse contexts. In doing so, I add to previous scholarship that has evaluated the social interdependencies underlying the making of dance and performance (Hamera 2011, Jackson 2012).

Methodologies

My dissertation fieldwork employed an interdisciplinary approach consisting of ethnography, archival research, discourse analysis, and choreographic analysis. Utilizing these methods allowed me to understand the diverse ways in which the three institutions I analyze have influenced the formation of contemporary Indian dance and how artists have mediated the vagaries of institutional support. Over the summer and winter months between 2015 and 2019, I traveled to several cities in India to conduct my research, including New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Kochi, and Bhubaneshwar. I also conducted a final round of remote research

in 2020 to gather any updates on the operations of the case studies and their engagement with contemporary Indian dance.[27]

Ethnography

My ethnographic fieldwork included interviews with (1) administrators and staff members of the three institutions; (2) choreographers with experiences interfacing with these institutions; and (3) scholars who have written about contemporary Indian dance history and were present at some of the key moments of the practice's development that I analyze in my dissertation. I also attended events hosted by the SNA, MMB, and GDF; in some cases, in the capacity of a participant-observer.

My study is IRB-approved (IRB #18-001062), and I conducted my ethnography per their research ethics guidelines. Before interviewing my research participants, I provided them with complete information about my study and got either oral or written consent on using specific direct quotes from our conversations. In some instances in my writing, I have protected the confidentiality of my research participants and the knowledge they shared with me. For example, certain people preferred not to be explicitly cited about their views concerning the current political environment in India, one of the institutions under study, or a colleague in the Indian art field. When we mutually felt that an observation or statement they made was necessary for my analysis but needed to be carefully communicated, I got their permission to paraphrase their perspective while keeping them anonymous.

[27] For instance, when I heard that the GDF was faced with the risk of closure after their source of funding was threatened by governmental regulations, I managed to telephonically speak to one of its members about the issue. I also carried out research digitally. For example, I reviewed the accommodations that the MMB was offering young makers in light of the financial repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also tried to survey whether the current government's fascist leanings was impacting how the SNA approached its patronage of contemporary Indian dance.

As dance studies scholar Sarah Wilbur (2021), among others, has shown, institutions are not monolithic, disembodied entities. Individuals make institutions, their agendas, and the direction of their programming. Individual belief systems and political identities and how they interact produce organizational cultures. Institutions come into existence when like-minded individuals decide to combine their efforts around a shared mission and are sustained by drawing in people who align with the institution's vision. Moreover, as individuals who make up the institution change, so does its investments and intended impact. Keeping this in mind, I interviewed administrators and staff members of the institutional case studies willing to speak with me.

I spoke with one staff member at the MMB: Farah Batool, a Cultural Programs Coordinator of the New Delhi branch. I interviewed the following people associated with the GDF: Mandeep Raikhy, Juee Deogaokar, Mehneer Sudan, Parvathi Ramanathan, Ranjana Dave, and Virkein Dhar.[28] Of the institutional representatives I was able to interview, I inquired about the following: What is the purpose of their organization, and how and why has it evolved? How are they funded, and how has it affected their organizational mission and practice? How do they view the role of contemporary dance in Indian society? How does their organization qualify the value of contemporary dance in connection to their particular agendas? And lastly, what are the different ways they have aided and promoted contemporary dance?

Although institutions are my main focus, I also wanted to hear from contemporary Indian dancers how the three organizations have been instrumental to supporting their practice. I assumed that speaking with them would help me evaluate consistencies and inconsistencies between institutional claims and actions. I interviewed Padmini Chettur, Ileana Citaristi, Navtej

[28] I will offer details about what roles the aforementioned individuals officially served in the chapter on the GDF.

Singh Johar, Tripura Kashyap, Bharat Sharma, and Mandeep Raikhy in his capacity as a choreographer. These artists represent different generations, sensibilities, and lineages of contemporary dance and have been supported by one or more of the institutions of my study. I engaged them with the following questions: What general challenges have they faced as experimental dancers working in India? How do their choreographic choices and creative process accommodate for the contingencies of institutional support? How have they negotiated the evaluatory paradigms of the three institutions? How have these institutions been crucial for developing contemporary Indian dance? I also interviewed scholars Rustom Bharucha, Aishika Chakraborty, Urmimala Sarkar Munsi, and the late Sunil Kothari. Their perspectives have guided my historicization of contemporary dance in the Indian subcontinent, especially the important markers that made the three institutions major players in the field's evolution.

I also relied on informal observations I made about the contemporary dance field as a whole due to my long-term involvement with the same, which exposed me to its prevailing exponents, training procedures, physical techniques, choreographic practices, and institutional agents. Over the years, I have also been a regular and keen audience of experimental dance events and performances, many of which were produced with support from the three institutions centered in my study. Most notably, I worked with the GDF between 2012 and 2014. During this time, I spoke to many dancers from different parts of the country who participated in the classes, workshops, events, and programs hosted by this institution. The dancers I conversed with had different degrees of experience in professional dance. Thus, talking with gave me an entry point into understanding the complexities of contemporary dance practice in the subcontinent and the institutional circumstances artists must navigate to make their work visible. These dancers' stories about the precarity attached to pursuing a career in experimental dance inspired me to do

this research in the first place. While working with the GDF, I could additionally observe other cultural workers and managers operating in the contemporary Indian dance field. Listening to their commentaries and interacting with them during formal and informal meetings with the GDF further offered me an inward look into how the Indian performance economy functions.

During my time with the GDF, I served as a participant-observer on one or more editions of the several projects it initiated for contemporary Indian dance. I helped brainstorm or execute some of the GDF's initiatives to different measures. I got an intimate glimpse into the approaches that this organization took to build projects. I also witnessed, first-hand, dancers create, rehearse, perform, and share remarks about their process during events enabled by the GDF. I was able to keep a finger on the pulse of the emerging contemporary dance scene being nurtured by the GDF. Additionally, I was privy to the GDF's interactions with some of its main collaborators and funders, noting how its relationship dynamics with the latter played into the initiatives they enabled together. In my position as a researcher studying the case of the GDF, I claim the identity of a "halfie-ethnographer" (Lila Abu-Lughod 1991). Abu-Lughod theorizes halfie-ethnographers as occupying a "special kind of position" while producing cultural knowledge, being "both inside and outside the communities they write about" (xv). In synthesizing and analyzing my ethnographic materials for the chapter on the GDF, I carefully balanced connections between my intimate, insider knowledge of the institution as its former employee and the critical observation and distance demanded by academic scholarship.

Archival Research

I conducted research in the archives of the SNA and the GDF in New Delhi. For gaining insights into the operations of the MMB, I visited the personal collections of dancer Ileana Citaristi in Bhubaneshwar and the library of the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA)

in Mumbai. Citaristi was a regular participant in the events organized by the MMB in the 1980s and 1990s, a critical period of the organization's engagement with the field. The NCPA has collaborated with the MMB on multiple programs that the latter organized on contemporary Indian dance. The materials I found in these two repositories supplemented my lack of direct access to the MMB archive.

To investigate the multi-layered engagements of the three institutions, at the physical archives, I excavated: (1) reports, newsletters, and brochures, which introduced me to the organizations' evolving mission statements, the proposed scope of their programming, and how they perceived the import of their interventions; (2) video recordings and program notes of the various events enabled by the institutions that I analyze in my chapters, like festivals, residencies, workshops, performances, talks, seminars, and conferences; (3) funding applications and projected budgets, which exposed me to the material politics of the institutions, how resources are allocated, to whom, and how artists are affected by these choices; and (4) newspaper and magazine reviews of performances presented or commissioned by these institutions to understand the discourse produced and publicly circulated about the "contemporary" in Indian dance. I additionally probed the data on the SNA, MMB, and GDF that are available digitally, including their websites, recordings of interviews with their staff members on YouTube and Vimeo, promotional films made on them or one of the programs they initiated, and journalistic articles that have reported on the significance of these institutions' events.

Archival research also introduced me to the various figures who occupied leadership positions in the organizations over the years and helped me understand their investment and stakes. Lastly, the archive sources were imprinted by the voices of dancers and choreographers, providing me with rich insights into how these agents interacted with the three institutions. I was

able to examine how they aligned or departed from the institutions' discursive claims about contemporary Indian dance, and how their participation in the institutions' programs influenced the latter's delineations of contemporary Indian dance as well as approaches toward patronizing the field. I cross-examined his data with materials from my interviews with artists.

Discourse Analysis

Poststructuralist thinker Michel Foucault ([1976]1990) designates discourse as a power-laden formation that establishes the parameters of language and thought. In line with this thinking, I reviewed the three organizations' textual and verbal statements that I collected from my ethnographic and archival materials to track how they discursively defined the meaning and significance of contemporary Indian dance in service of their ideological vision. According to linguistic philosopher J.L. Austin (1962), language can function as a form of social action and have the effect of change. Performance studies scholar Jon McKenzie (2001) has further shown how the discourse of institutions has tangible implications for the subjects who encounter them. Drawing on the work of these scholars, I observe the performativity of institutional discourse, noting the way it informs which artists are included in the three institutions' fold as "contemporary" and eventually supported by them. Moreover, I show how the organizations' ideological declarations influences the orientation of their programming.

At the same time, I believe that the effect of language is limited. While carrying out fieldwork, I noticed that the SNA, MMB, and GDF have authored proficiently written, politically ideal, and socially just brochures and reports about their mission, vision, and intended impact that, in my opinion, seemed impossible to execute and were perhaps designed to remain forever on paper. I observed gaps between what the institutions claimed to support and what they ended up aiding. This discontinuity was often driven by reasons such as a change in institutional

leadership that no longer considered contemporary Indian dance a priority or terminating a proposed scheme due to running out of funds at the last minute. Whatever the circumstance might have been, reading between discourse and practice allowed me to understand the complexity of each institution's intervention in the contemporary dance field.

Choreographic Analysis

My project approaches choreographic analysis differently from how the discipline of dance studies has predominantly utilizes this method. I move away from the final choreographic product as the central object of analysis by examining the conditions created by institutional patrons that made the "contemporary" in Indian dance possible. The few times that I do spotlight particular choreographic works, I interweave movement analysis with archival or ethnographic materials that reflect how the three institutions engaged with specific productions to justify and perpetuate their agendas. My dissertation applies an expansive definition of a choreographer. Wilbur (2020) broadly defines "dance maker" "to include artists, administrators, production personnel, funders, and audience members" (340). Her characterization has helped me think about the three institutions as embodied formations, constituting and interfacing with the above cited constellation of agents who conterminously work to produce contemporary Indian dance.

Chapter Summaries

I begin all chapters by delineating the origin story of each of the case studies: who founded them, for what reason, what was their inaugural mission and administrative and financial constitution, the scope of cultural activities receiving their support, how they define the value and function of dance or art, and the overall ideological basis that underpins these facets of the institutions. Drawing up these details serves as the mise-en-scène to understand the particular

ways the three institutions decided to engage with contemporary Indian dance. I then analyze their key programs, events, or schemes that were either dedicated to advancing contemporary Indian dance or indirectly impacted the field in a significant manner. These actions reflect the multiple ways that the case studies have structured contemporary Indian dance at the level of aesthetics, rhetoric, training, creation, performance, and reception. They also represent varied methods the three institutions have taken to patronize the field over the years due to shifts in one or more of the aforementioned organizational facets, most times prompted by transformations brought about by India's movement toward neoliberalism.

The institutional actions I focus my analysis around also index and respond to evolutions in the practice of contemporary dance since the early twentieth century. Artists and their practice are not at the forefront of this investigation, but, as I will show, they have critically informed institutional perceptions and procedures to different degrees. Raymond Williams (1977) asserts that while the effective establishment of a selective tradition can be said to depend on identifiable institutions, the movements in intellectual and artistic life, which he coins as "formations," also have a decisive influence on the active development of culture (117). He further notes that these formations might have a variable and often oblique relation to formal institutions.

Dancers in India have been experimenting and innovating new forms, despite navigating the inconsistencies in institutional and financial support. Moreover, as I will disclose in the dissertation, the three institutions have vouched for the aesthetic and political engagements of particular choreographers to back their prescriptions and recommendations for contemporary Indian dance. Dancers and choreographers have also actively assisted in the agendas of these institutions, in certain instances becoming their spokespeople. Conversely, dancers have

challenged the efficacy of a particular policy of the institution or the way it framed an event, leading the latter to rethink and restructure its undertakings. At other times, an institution's patronage approach warranted exponents of contemporary dance to guide its programming or even involve them in designing the same. Thus, I punctuate my chapters with descriptions of the multiple practices of contemporary Indian dance that were extant during and around the time the three institutions carried out their actions. Moreover, in my analysis of the events organized by the institutions, readers will be privy to the voices of practitioners of contemporary Indian dance, and how they were partaking in and affected by the activities of these institutions.

In ***Chapter 1***, I interrogate how the SNA has demarcated and endorsed contemporary dance to realize the Indian state's cultural and political goals since the mid-twentieth century. To explore this, I examine the following endeavors by the SNA: (1) its system of awarding and honoring individuals who have made significant contributions to the subcontinent's performing arts, most prominently the "SNA Awards" (1950s—present); (2) the "First All-India Dance Seminar" (1958), one of the first national-level seminars organized by the institution in the postcolonial context to determine the dimensions and functions of Indian dance; and (3) a series of festivals hosted by the institution between 1970 and 2015 with a sole focus on showcasing innovations in Indian dance, including "National Ballet Festivals," "Nrityanataka," and "Nrityasanrachna."

In examining the above, I make the following inferences. The SNA initially encompassed contemporary dance within its ranks, alongside previously mentioned heritage forms, to mirror the Indian state's desire to foster cultural diversity and harmony within a newly constituted nation after the retreat of British colonialism. However, it remained a reluctant or ambivalent supporter of contemporary dance until the mid-1980s, originally privileging forms that had

discrete connections to India, historically and geographically, reproducing the state's protectionist approach within spheres of culture and political economy. Of the contemporary dancers it supported up to this period, the SNA followed a similar logic: it favored those who engaged with regional aesthetics and identified the dynamism in tradition and accelerated its modernizing tendencies.

But since the mid-1980s, the SNA has embraced contemporary dance as a worthy and legitimate practice, even if it continues to grant it differential value compared to the heritage dance practices. Toward the end of this decade, the SNA also expanded its contemporary dance repertoire by accepting and supporting intercultural experiments. I note that this shift in the SNA's orientation toward contemporary dance anticipated the 1990s when the Indian state introduced neoliberal reforms which opened up the country to the global market economy. Against this backdrop, the SNA recognized that it could deploy the symbolism of contemporary dance to articulate the advance of Indian modernity (and possibly futurity) in the spheres of culture and political economy in relation to the world. My chapter on the SNA concludes by scrutinizing the organization's assistance and support schemes, like the "Grants-in-Aid." A review of these revealed that despite enshrining contemporary dance within its official performance classification and promoting it through a few showcases over the years, the institution's long-term financial support to develop the field has been discrepant, unequal, and negligible. I connect this lack of funding with the institution's inability to move beyond the vagaries of bureaucratic machinery and its gradual retreat from playing a central role in the patronage of performing arts with the setting in of neoliberalism.

In ***Chapter 2***, I analyze how the MMB has shaped and propagated contemporary Indian dance in the context of the geocultural and geopolitical dynamics between India and Germany

during the Cold War and neoliberal era. To contemplate this, I first study the following programs of the institution from the twentieth century when the two countries were making substantial efforts to cultivate mutually beneficial relations: (1) the "East-West Dance Encounter" (1984), a conference for Indian choreographers and their international counterparts frequently celebrated as a landmark event signaling the arrival of the "contemporary" in Indian dance; and (2) the workshop series entitled "New Directions in Indian Dance" (1993), organized with the intention to establish critical parameters for contemporary dance in the subcontinent. For the time, these were unique occasions for dance innovators and experimentalists in India to create community, dialogue with their peers, and envision a future for their field.

Most distinctly, these forums encouraged contemporary dancers to relate to and interact with developments in the international experimental dance scene—a dimension that the SNA had not promoted until the intervention of the MMB. But as an institution that emerged out of the power inequities structured by the Cold War and Global North-South relations, the MMB's thrust to promote an engagement with the West was guided by the neocolonial desire to perpetuate the dominance and influence of the West. The MMB's verdict during this time was that for contemporary dance in India to reach refinement, it needed to develop in the direction of the aesthetics, philosophical concerns, and standards of professionalization of Western contemporary dance.

The 1984 and 1993 events represent the two main approaches to diplomacy that the MMB has applied to its programming in India: fostering cultural exchanges between India and Germany (and, by association, other countries in the West) and extending development services to the subcontinent's cultural scene. In this chapter, I additionally examine the continuation of these two types of diplomatic efforts by the MMB that were instrumental to the efflorescence of

contemporary dance in the twenty-first century. These include the dance exchange festival called "Dance in India and Europe—New Directions" (2001) and the different forms of scaffolding support the institution has provided to exponents and institutions of contemporary Indian dance during this period. The MMB continued to facilitate a productive creative dialogue between Indian experimental choreographers and their Western counterparts and furnish resources for developing institutional structures for contemporary Indian dance.

But I show that the institution moved away from imposing preferences and demands that solely represent Germany's special interests toward giving contemporary Indian dancers and dance organizations the authority to design and orient programs that best served their creative and professional needs. I suggest that this reflects the general approach to diplomacy that Germany took toward India in the context of a multipolar world and the latter emerging as a new global powerhouse in the twenty-first century. The European nation replaced a dictatorial disposition with becoming India's vital collaborator in fostering its culture, education, trade, scientific research, and so on.

In ***Chapter 3***, I evaluate how the GDF, during its short existence, generated opportunities and an ecosystem for contemporary dance in the twenty-first century by centering on the needs of its practitioners. I investigate the only four major initiatives curated by the organization between 2009 and 2020 through which it created (or intended to make) the most impact on the field: (1) the "Gati Summer Dance Residency" series; (2) the "Ignite! Festival of Contemporary Dance" series; (3) a performance infrastructure revitalization and community development project called "Working in Research, Advocacy and Policy/Dance Union;" and (4) a university-level contemporary dance degree entitled "MA in Performance Practice (Dance)." To capture the holistic influence of the organization, in the main text and footnotes, I report on the subsidiary

programs, classes, workshops, and performance showcases enabled by the GDF, which either formed the initial basis for the aforementioned main programs or served to supplement them.

Unlike the SNA and the MMB, the GDF was not interested in prescribing aesthetic contours of contemporary Indian dance. It in fact supported a diverse mix of choreographers who engaged with a spectrum of movement traditions—from India and/or all over the globe—and even those who drew inspiration from other artistic mediums for their movement experiments. What it did prioritize was enabling dancers who wanted to create original works that explored progressive ideas and took up political subjects that might be deemed controversial by the dominant society. More importantly, the GDF simultaneously focused on building resources and structures for contemporary dance- making that would ensure its continued viability.

I show that regardless of the challenges of running a nonprofit under neoliberal and fascist conditions, the GDF was able to make contemporary dance a more feasible profession for movement artists in India to pursue. I delve into how, through its multi-layered efforts for a little over ten years, the GDF: (1) catalyzed generative contexts for movement artists to learn how to make choreography and creating new, original works; (2) produced a regular performance circuit and wider spectatorship for contemporary dance; (3) cultivated a community of dance makers who continue to share and exchange creative processes and rely on each other to resolve professional challenges; and (4) triggered other dance experimentalists to organize and establish their own institutions and collectives to work toward developing a future for their practice.

While each chapter focuses on a singular institution, throughout the dissertation, I compare and contrast the actions of the SNA, MMB, and GDF to hone in on what each enables and prevents in the contemporary dance field. As my chapters will demonstrate, the three institutions have collaborated at different points in time to develop the practice. Additionally, a

particular institution's position on contemporary Indian dance has often changed on account of the involvement of another institution. Furthermore, the emergence of an institution or the specific actions it carries out has often been in response to the dysfunction or unresponsiveness of another.

In the ***Conclusion***, I sum up the different ways the three institutions contributed to the formation of the contemporary in Indian dance, relaying the strengths and limits of each of their approaches. I end by gesturing toward the future direction my research intends to take.

Chapter 1

The Actions of the Sangeet Natak Akademi: Assimilating Contemporary Dance into the Imagination of the Nation

This chapter analyzes how the Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA), India's national performing arts body established by the government in 1953, has defined and cultivated contemporary dance since the twentieth century. I investigate the ideological, social, and economic support that the SNA offered contemporary dance through its awards system, platforms of exchange and dissemination (such as seminars and festivals), funding schemes, and policy-making. The first section of this chapter deconstructs the founding and constitution of the SNA, examining how the institution's mission mirrors the cultural and political goals of the Indian state in the aftermath of British colonialism. I also lay out the relationship the SNA cast with artists in its functioning and evolution as a patron of the performing arts fueled by and representing government interests. The Government of India instituted the SNA to rebuild and unify the subcontinent's fragmented cultural structure in the postcolonial scenario. Thus, it established the institution with the hope to foster diplomacy within domestic borders through the preservation and promotion of dance, music, and drama forms that express the country's diverse heritage practices. This founding agenda of the SNA has more or less dictated its actions over the years.

In the second section, I delineate how the SNA, in its early years, prescribed and classified dance to animate its cultural mission. I unravel how the SNA codified classical, folk, and tribal dance as emblems of Indian heritage, relating to cultural traditions of a specific region, community, or place within the subcontinent. In my research, I found that the SNA also recognized the category of contemporary dance as early as 1955. To understand what reference

points SNA might have had for this type so as to be included within its official dance classifications, I had to survey contemporary dance activity that predated the institution's establishment. The third section of this chapter thus presents a brief overview of what existing scholarship has coined as early modern Indian dance. The early modern Indian movement, dated between the late nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century, included figures like Rabindranath Tagore and Uday Shankar, among others, who were involved in transcultural experiments in Indian dance that expanded its form, content, and function. As I noted in my dissertation introduction, early modern dance in India can be considered an aesthetic predecessor of what became officially known as contemporary Indian dance in the 1980s. My summary of early modern dance of Indian origin will help my readers understand what kind of dance innovations the SNA might have been exposed to around the time of its founding.

In the fourth section, I analyze the "First All-India Dance Seminar" curated by the SNA in 1958. This event is the first concrete instance I found of the SNA directly engaging with determining contemporary dance's scope and cultural value. The deliberations during this symposium lay the groundwork for how the SNA would situate and treat the "contemporary" in Indian dance in the years to come. I evaluate the discursive commentaries of the SNA authorities and its allies and talks and performances by dance practitioners at the event. This chapter's fifth and final section is dedicated to the SNA's engagement with contemporary dance decades following the 1958 Dance Seminar. I explore a selection of major initiatives involving contemporary dance, either proposed or realized by the SNA, in the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I examine these in light of India's move to liberalize its economy in the 1990s, which propelled many state institutions (including the SNA) to open up to speculations of the world market while determining the role of cultural practices. In the chapter overall, I disclose

how the institution sought to assimilate contemporary dance into the state's project of nationalism. At first, the SNA recognized and delineated contemporary dance to promote the state's mission of cultural diversity and evolving Indian heritage. Later, the institution additionally endorsed contemporary dance to signal India's active participation in modernity, particularly its readiness to compete within an international economy. As I will detail in this chapter, the evolving mission had implications for the types of contemporary dance praxis the SNA would end up supporting.

During the research process, I found that the terms "creative & experimental dance," "Indian ballet," "modern Indian ballet," "new forms," and "dance dramas" were synonymously used in the SNA documents to refer to the genre I am calling "contemporary dance" here. Although the SNA used the latter moniker as early as 1958, it only entered its regular usage in the late 1990s.[29] Over the course of six decades, the SNA has deployed the aforementioned nomenclatures in response to the labeling practices of artists, scholars, and other cultural institutions current in the field. At the same time, I will show that the specific terms that the SNA chose to use more frequently in its formal vocabulary at particular points in time reflect how the institution perceived contemporary dance and its function vis-à-vis the Indian state's political-economic priorities.

Enacting the State's Ideal of Indian Culture: The Inception and Organization of the SNA

The Ministry of Education (Government of India) founded the SNA in New Delhi in January 1953, three years after the formation of the Indian Republic and six years post India's independence from the British colonial regime (SNA Report 1953-1958, 1). The SNA embodies

[29] The term contemporary dance is used in "Recommendations of the Dance Seminar," a document prepared at the conclusion of the "First All-India Dance Seminar" (1958).

the government's efforts to design arts and education institutions that would assist in building an image of India as a significant South Asian regional entity with a rich and distinct cultural heritage unmatched globally. During the inauguration of the SNA in 1953, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the first Union Minister for Education, made the following remark: "In a democratic regime, the arts can derive their sustenance only from the people, and the state as the organized manifestation of the people's will, must, therefore, undertake [the]…maintenance and development [of the arts] as one of [its] first responsibilities" (SNA 1997, 3). Azad's comments encapsulate the newly formed government's stance on the critical importance of the arts in advancing Indian democracy. He also emphasizes the primary responsibility of the Indian state in enabling and sustaining the synergy between the Indian people and their artistic traditions. Along with the SNA, the Indian government established the Lalit Kala Akademi (National Institute of Visual Arts), and the Sahitya Kala Akademi (National Institute of Literature) (they were both established in 1954) as apex bodies to promote and nurture the arts within domestic borders. Situating these capstone national arts bodies in New Delhi, the seat of the newly formed federal government, was an exercise by the Indian state in concentrating power through cultural affairs.[30]

[30] The specific emergence of the SNA in Delhi owes to the flourishing of many cultural institutions of note in the city before 1953. Nirmala Joshi, a dancer, arts organizer, and activist, established the Delhi School of Hindustani Music and Dance in the 1930s. In 1939, the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya launched a branch in Delhi. Moreover, the Jhankar Music Circle was founded in 1949 as a platform for annual music concerts and conferences, and eminent artists and cultural impresarios like Shivraj Bahadur, Pandit Haksar, Nawab of Pataudi, Sheila Bharat Ram, Ravi Shankar, Brinda Lal, Kamala Narindralal, and Sumitra Charat Ram were members. The Jhankar Music Circle was a precursor to the Bhartiya Kala Kendra established in 1952 by Sumitra Charat Ram, who would hold the position of key patron of Delhi's arts scene in the ensuing decades (Khokhar n.d., 19-21, 33-37, 45-46). Many of the individuals who were involved in these institutions came to play significant roles in the SNA. For instance, Joshi went on to hold a leadership position at the institution, as its first Secretary. Although the SNA is located in New Delhi, it has three constituent units and multiple affiliated centers located in different parts of the country. You can read about them here: (SNA, "Constituent Units & Centres").

Between 1947 and 1950, the territories of the Indian princely states were politically integrated into the Indian Union,[31] and a centralized state authority took over the administration of national resources.[32] The first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, envisioned the modern state formation as a catalyst for "developing" India, holding extensive responsibilities towards rehabilitating, producing, and regulating the subcontinent's economic, scientific, intellectual, political, social, linguistic, and cultural resources.[33] The new government articulated its commitment to the arts as "the rebuilding of [India's] cultural structure," and it put the SNA in charge of actualizing this aspiration within the performing arts realm (Vatsyayan 1972, 45). According to the *SNA Report 1953-1958*, the institution took on a redemptive role as the new custodian of art, promising to enable the continued existence and resurgence of the performing arts in the postcolonial context. It sought to preserve, cultivate, and assist the performing arts in light of the decline of patronage of princely states, regional elites, religious communities, and the colonial state apparatus.[34]

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[31] The British ruled India with two administrative systems: British Provinces and Indian princely states. About sixty percent of the territory of the Indian subcontinent were provinces and forty percent were princely states. Provinces were British territories directly administered by the colonial government of British India, and princely states were states with native rulers who had entered into treaty relations with the British. Around the time of India's independence from the British, there were roughly 584 princely states spread across the subcontinent. To read more about this history, see Prabhakar Singh (2020).

[32] Among the factors that contributed to India adopting a state-centric nationalist imagination as it navigated the legacy of British colonialism were: (1) accepting the European construct of the nation-state (dated between sixteenth and nineteenth centuries), which allows for the central role of the state in the modernization of society and defending the nation's unity and sovereignty, and (2) confronting the predicaments of territorial disarray caused by the Partition of the subcontinent (Roy 2007, 131).

[33] The "development discourse" became paramount with the rise of modernization theory in the twentieth century, which urged "Third World" nations like India to modernize on the template of the West to theoretically achieve the kind of stable capitalist democracies that Western societies supposedly represented. In effect, the rhetoric of "development" propagated by Indian nationalist leadership replaced the rhetoric of "state efficiency" which sanctioned the expansion of bureaucracy under the British rule (Kaviraj 2010, 223).

[34] Read Joan L. Erdman (1983), Pushpa Sundar (1995), and Anita E. Cherian (2009) for information on the nature and politics of arts patronage in the subcontinent before 1947.

A consequence of culture becoming a state-managed resource is that governmental considerations came to dictate the financial and administrative structure of the SNA. The central government founded the SNA as an autonomous organization while being mainly in charge of granting funds to the body for its various programs in the performing arts.[35] According to dance scholar Joan L. Erdman (1983), since its inception, the SNA's autonomy has been "a matter of degree rather than total independence" (266). Erdman claims that through decisions about specific allocations of annual grants and resource levels, the government has essentially exercised control over the SNA (267). In other words, by choosing to fund or not fund particular policies and programs of the SNA, the government has managed to determine the scope and orientation of the institution's programming.

The SNA has its own General Council and Executive Board, which carry out duties related to its governance. The latter is chosen from amongst the members of the General Council and is primarily responsible for the SNA's policy-setting. The General Council makes decisions about the various SNA programs and has the final say in selecting artists for awards and grants.[36] The top executive positions within the General Council include the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman, the Financial Advisor, and the Secretary (SNA, "General Council & Executive Board"). Erdman observes that from the start, government appointees have dominated the

[35] The first SNA Secretary, P.V. Rajamannar clarifies what the government being "in charge" of culture means: "the Akademis can be certain hereafter of material assistance from the Ministry in the shape of funds, for after all when we venture on any large scheme, we have got to depend for substantial help from the Government" (Kabir [1958] 2014, 146).

[36] For instance, artists are nominated for the SNA Awards by Akademi Ratna Sadasya (Committee) and Awardees, members of the General Council of the SNA, Chairman/Presidents of the State Akademies, Secretaries in the States/Union Territories' Department of Culture, Heads of Department of Performing Arts in recognized/deemed universities, eminent scholars and experts in the field of performing arts. Then the nominations that are received are placed before the Executive Board for shortlisting of the names for consideration by the General Council, who has the power to make the final decision based on the final word of the Chairman (SNA, "Guidelines for SNA Awards").

General Councils and Executive Boards of the SNA, with no or limited representation of artists and cultural experts overall.[37] As per the SNA *Rules and Regulations* booklet, the first members of the institution's Executive Board included the Governor of Mysore, the Chairman of the Law Commission, an industrial consultant, a member of the Indian Parliament, and four Secretaries of the Government of India (5); this kind of representation on the Executive Board has continued over time.[38]

The Rules and Regulations document also states that due to the pressures mounted by performing artists disgruntled about their lack of representation, additional members from the community were assimilated into the SNA's General Council over the years, in compliance with a plan of distribution that allegedly takes into account knowledge and expertise of dance, drama, and music, or individual achievements in any of these fields (9-10). But according to my research, while the number of performing artists serving official posts in the SNA increased in successive years, this increase was meager, and the appointments were skewed based on the genre and region of the performing artists.[39] For instance, between 1999 and 2014, performers

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[37] Erdman (1983) notes that dominance of official appointees instead of eminent artists and cultural experts is a result of the way in which the General Councils and the Executive Boards have been chosen throughout the years. The Chairman of the SNA is appointed by the President of India and the Financial Advisor by the government. The Secretary is selected by the Executive Board, which is appointed from the General Council. A few members of the General Council are chosen by government nomination and other members automatically join the General Council as representatives of each of the States and Union Territories enumerated in the Constitution of India and members of other ministries and state-funded cultural institutions, such as the Department/Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the National School of Drama, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, the Lalit Kala Akademi, and the Sahitya Kala Akademi (254).

[38] The Governor of Mysore was H.H. Maharaja Shri Jaya Chamaraja Wadiyar Bahadur; the Chairman of the Law Commission was T.L. Venkatarama Aiyar; the industrial consultant was S.N. Mozumdar; and the government secretaries were N.R. Ray, Dharma Vira, A.K. Ghosh, J.C. Mathur, and A.V. Venkateswaran (*Rules and Regulation*, 5).

[39] Reviewing Erdman's survey of council membership appointments in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s revealed that the 1977-1982 council membership included more artists and experts in music, dance, and drama than previous years (254). More recently, artists have held the highest executive post (of Chairman) in the SNA. Between 2010 and 2014, Bharatanatyam exponent Leela Samson was the SNA Chairman, and in 2020, singer, lyricist, and composer, Shekhar Sen was appointed for this post (SNA, "General Council & Executive Board").

selected to serve official posts within the SNA predominantly hailed from New Delhi.[40] Moreover, a survey of the SNA's annual reports between 2009 and 2015 reveals that, for the most part, the SNA's Advisory Council for Dance included classical dance exponents.[41] Even the four committees set up by the Indian government to review the functioning and impact of its cultural bodies—the Bhabha Committee (1964), the Khosla Committee (1973), the Haksar Committee (1990), and the Sengupta Committee (2014)—unanimously conclude the repeated failure of the SNA to maintain programmatic autonomy. The review committees report that artists serving on the advisory councils of the SNA were expected to act as spokespeople for the bureaucracy rather than conduits for the arts communities.[42]

[40] The Sengupta Committee Report (2014) critiques the perceptible regional bias in the selection of members for the governing body of the SNA, making a key observation about the over presence of members situated in Delhi. According to the report, between 1999 and 2004, the Executive Board of the SNA consisted of eighteen members, which included three members from the Southern region of the country, of whom one was largely based in Delhi. Members from the North Eastern part of the country included four members, one of them being the Chairman, whose primary address was also in Delhi. The rest of the eight members and officials were from Delhi. Moreover, between 2009 and 2014, there were as many as ten out of fifteen members from New Delhi, including the Chairman of the Akademi, three from Chennai and one each from Bombay and Chandigarh. Even the Advisory Boards for Dance between 1999 and 2014 predominantly included members from or residing in New Delhi (26, 40-41).

[41] Researching the SNA Annual Reports from 2008-2019, I noticed that the Advisory Council for Dance during 2009-2015 included eminent critic Shanta S. Singh and classical exponents Raja Reddy, Geeta Chandran, Ramil L. Bareth, Ranjana Gauhar, Jatin Gowswami, Anita Ratnam, Sadanand Balakrishnan, and Jayant Kasturi as the Secretary. From 2015 onwards, the Advisory Council for Dance changed and included Ms. Kamilini (as Chairman), Malavika Sarrukai, Chitra Visweswaran, Birju Maharaj, Sadanand Balakrishnan, Jatin Goswami, Kanak Rele, Kavita Dwivedi, Shama Bhatte, Priti Patel, who are all again, self-identified classical performers, with Helena Acharya as Secretary (SNA, "Annual Reports & Audited Accounts 2008-19").

[42] The Bhabha Committee Report (1964), the Khosla Committee Report (1972), the Haksar Committee Report (1990), and the Sengupta Committee Report (2014) were named after the individuals who chaired these respective review committees, namely Dr. Homi J. Bhabha, Justice G.D. Khosla, P.N. Haksar, and Abhijit Sengupta. All the reports differ in their approach and content, representing the different stages of the growth of the three Akademies and other institutions under the Department/Ministry of Culture over time. But all of them have meditated on the what constitutes benign state support, state interference, and excessive state control in culture. All review committees unanimously agreed that artists, cultural experts, and scholars need to be increasingly elected as Fellows or members of the General Councils of the Akademies, and need to have more say in the administrative and programmatic aspects of running these bodies. What also commonly appears across these reports are the testimonies of artists about the failure of these institutions to increase their representation in decisions about arts patronage. For detailed analysis of these reports, refer to Erdman (1983), Rustom Bharucha (1992), Lada Guruden Singh (2005), and Cherian (2016).

I now move on to delineate how the goals of the Indian state shaped and reflected in the mission and cultural intervention of the SNA. The SNA's original mission read as follows: "To preserve and promote the *vast heritage* of India's *diverse culture* expressed in the forms of music, dance and drama" (SNA, "Introduction," italics mine). I believe this mission sought to actualize the principles enshrined in the Indian Constitution, espoused by the architects of the new nation on November 26, 1949. The Constitution declares the subcontinent a "sovereign democratic republic." The words "secular" and "socialist" were officially added to the Constitution in 1976 through the 42nd amendment; however, they were foundational to the conception of the Indian Republic. Article 51A, [f] and [e] of the Constitution enlists the following two fundamental duties of the government and its citizens: "to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture" and "to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood (*sic*) amongst all people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities" ("Fundamental Duties: Article 51 A of the Indian Constitution"). This outlook prevailed in Indian cultural policy debates and discourses over the years.[43]

Performance scholar Anita E. Cherian (2009) observes that the Indian government's "preoccupation with questions of unity and integrity" was motivated by the "belated recognition in 1947 that the 'unified' nation of the nationalist imaginary was in actuality a governmentally, economically, linguistically, and socially fragmented territory" (34). The Indian state framed culture as an "imagined foundation of social solidarity" (Ibid.). In particular, it viewed art as a crucial medium of consolidating and performing the idea of a unified nation. In line with democratic and secular principles outlined in the Indian Constitution, the government (and its

[43] For comprehensive accounts of Indian cultural policy, see Kapila Vatsyayan (1972), N.K. Prasad (1982), Lloyd Rudolph (1984), Erdman (1983, 1999), Bharucha (1992), Purnima Shah (2002), Lokendra Arambam (2011), and Cherian (2009, 2016).

cultural emissaries) approached creating and sustaining national harmony by incorporating all forms of difference and diversity. The founding constitution of the SNA reflects this purpose of fostering domestic diplomacy by supporting performing arts from different regions of the country.[44] Some of the responsibilities listed in its constitution include the following: (1) to encourage the exchange of ideas and techniques between different regions in dance, drama, and music, (2) to promote the establishment of theatre centers based on regional languages and cooperation, (3) to encourage and assist the production of new plays through prizes and other distinctions, (4) to sponsor music, dance and drama festivals, seminars, conferences on an all-India basis and to encourage such regional programs, (5) to award prizes and distinctions and to give recognition to individual artists for outstanding achievement in the fields of music, dance, and drama, (6) and to foster cultural contacts between different regions of the country (SNA Report 1953-1958, 6-7). The SNA has retained this constitution in its fine print.

Moreover, nation builders and state officials considered forms of cultural heritage to hold great educational value for Indian citizens. In particular, they believed that the arts would help the Indian people to rediscover and reconnect to their culture and identity repressed under colonialism. This might explain why the SNA was initially housed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education.

To further understand how the Indian government drew out the relationship between culture, education, and identity, I turn to a brief discussion of its first Five-Year Plans. "Five-Year Plans" is a method of phasing the development of a national economy, used first in the

[44] Cherian (2009) observes that a core feature of the SNA's remodeling of patronage in line with the Indian government's efforts to cultivate alliances with regional states involved mediating relationships with small and large-scale institutions and public and private agencies that had supported performance before independence (40). One of the principal ways in which the SNA achieved this goal was through the "practice[s] of affiliation and recognition," which "brought art institutions into a unified national framework, fostering kinship with one parent body and sharing the spirit of common purpose" (SNA Report 1959, 57-58).

Soviet Union and later adopted by other nation-states oriented toward socialism. While India was one of the founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement, it did eventually adopt this Soviet-style administrative framework.[45] The "First Five-Year Plan" (1951-1956) of India declares that a chief function of the education sector was to "satisfy" the nation's "cultural needs." The document asserted that it is via "the growth of the creative faculties" and by galvanizing a "spirit of critical appreciation of arts, literature, and other creative activities" that individuals with "integrated" dispositions would arise (Planning Commission, "Chapter 3: Education"). Thus through arts education, the Indian state desired to cultivate and discipline a citizenry "invested not in an ethic of self-interest" but in the larger purpose of assisting India's "rapid and coordinated advance" towards becoming a notable geopolitical entity in the context of the world (Planning Commission, "Chapter 1: Planning: Economic and Social Perspectives" and "Chapter 23: 2nd Five Year Plan").

Throughout the Nehruvian period (1947-1969), the Five-Year Plans emphasized that the value of cultural education inhered in the capacity to work and produce for the nation.[46] The

[45] As Cold War politics unfolded and swept the globe, leaders of countries such as India, Yugoslavia, Egypt, Ghana, and Indonesia—the formative architects of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)—were driven by the anxiety to preserve their freedom of action at the international level and declared themselves against any permanent or long-term involvement on the side of either the United States or the Soviet Union. This negation or "negative" absentation of the NAM actors is classically praised for recognizing the ills on both sides: the oppressive totalitarianism of the Soviets and the colonial militarism of the United States and its allies. However, non-alignment was not a negation for negation's sake. The politics of the NAM were heavily premised on unifying the formerly colonized and racially oppressed. Thus, the NAM was not a fetishized "third space," but an uncomfortable compromise that resulted from the impossible reality faced by the decolonizing world. As Frantz Fanon (1963) has theorized, lacking reparations, decolonizing states were forced to choose between either compromising with capitalists or enslaving their own populations to achieve the total transformation that decolonization entails (Ritchey and Singh 2020, "BETWEEN: The Contradictions of Non-Alignment"). Ultimately, India selected favorable elements from the democratic socialism of the Soviet Union and the liberal capitalist democracy of the United States. As early as 1938, with the formation of the National Planning Committee, Nehru had begun to envision how the instrument of planning, inspired by Soviet-style model of planning, could contribute to the transformation and unification of India's cultural and socio-economic resources. While Nehru envisioned and advocated for the need for industry and technology to achieve the goals of democracy and modernization, he believed that the state needed to act as the central regulating body that kept the forces of market and industrial capital in check.

[46] "Nehruvian period" is often used as the term to refer to the formative role played by Jawaharlal Nehru in establishing the instituional and ideological architecture of the new nation-state in the 1950s and 1960s and

SNA primarily complied with this role of culture due to being housed under the Ministry of Education until the mid-1980s.[47] For the SNA, serving the national body took precedence, which, as I argue, had material and political implications for performance genres, such as contemporary dance, that centered on individual creativity and thus challenged the overarching political agenda of the nation-state. Before analyzing the SNA's disposition towards contemporary dance, I examine how its framework for Indian dance attempted to codify the state's idea of cultural heritage and diversity.

Categorizing Cultural Heritage and Diversity: The SNA's Framework for Indian Dance

In this section, I focus on how the SNA claims to promote and preserve cultural heritage and diversity through the realm of dance. Cherian (2009) writes that a vital feature of the SNA's function as a patron evolved around its choice to institute awards to exponents of dance, drama, music, and film, called the "Akademi Awards." She observes that the SNA perceived this practice of conferring honors as enacting its role as the "voice and conscience of the arts and artists" (45). Surveying the SNA's awarding system revealed how the organization categorizes dance in the subcontinent, signaling which forms it legitimized as important. In the following pages, I deliberate on how and why the SNA might have arrived at the dance categories part of its official rubric.

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specifically corresponds to the years between 1947-1969. While Nehru died in 1964, there was no significant transformation in state-society relations and the structures of governance under his immediate successor, Lal Bahadur Shastri (1964-1967) and during the initial years of Indira Gandhi's premiership (Roy 2007, 180-181).

[47] From its inception in 1953 to 1961, the SNA was under the Ministry of Education. Between 1961 and 1971, it came under the jurisdiction of Ministry of Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs. Then in between 1971 and 1979, it was placed under the Sanskriti Vibhag (Department of Culture), after which it was affiliated to the Ministry of Education and Culture until 1985 (Vatsyayan 1972, 48).

According to the information on their website, the SNA introduced awards for dance two years after its inception, in 1955. The only two artists it conferred awards to were hereditary dancer T. Balasaraswati for her contributions to Bharatanatyam and Shambhu Maharaj for his accomplishments in Kathak (SNA, "Awards and Honors"). In the initial years, the institution's recognition of dance was only limited to "four well-known styles of classical dancing": "Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Manipuri, and Kathakali" (SNA, "Guidelines for SNA Awards").[48] In my archival research, neither did I find any information on the SNA's procedures for recognizing dances before the 1958 "All-India Dance Seminar" nor any explanations for why it anointed the aforementioned dances as "classical."[49] However, we can look at certain developments within Indian history that predate the SNA and offer possible explanations for the organization's particular imagination of dance.

The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century nationalist movements against colonial rule in India engendered a reassertion of traditional values among a large segment of the public.[50] Dance scholar Purnima Shah (2002) writes that the nationalist movements stimulated an awareness of the country's cultural heritage to recuperate and restore the Indian people's

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[48] Following the nomination of exponents of Bharatanatyam and Kathak in 1955, Manipuri dancer, Ambui Singh and Kathakali dancer, P.K. Kunju Kurup were recognized in 1956. Subsequently, Rukmini Devi Arundale was awarded for her contributions to Bharatanatyam and Lacchu Maharaj, for his accomplishments in Kathak in 1957. Yet again, in 1958, Haobam Atomba Singh and Thotton K. Chandu Panikkar were conferred awards for Manipuri and Kathakali respectively. In 1959, it was the turn for artists practicing Bharatanatyam (Myplapore Gouri Amma) and Kathak (Sunder Prasad) to be awarded (SNA, "List of Awardees").

[49] Cherian (2009) speculates that the factors that might have contributed to the institution's selection process: prior visibility and regional representation (47).

[50] Cultural critic Sadanand Menon (2008) writes that term "tradition" is not part of the Indian lexicon and only gained popularity during the Indian freedom struggle at the turn of the nineteenth century. It was words like *parampara* (convention), *sampradaya* (school), *purana* (received practice), or *reeti-rivaz* (customs and manners) that were in circulation. Menon observes that a "newly defined tradition" was manufactured by the Westernized urban Indian elite and it symbolized a "power bloc": "Aligning with tradition was a means of self-inscription into the body politic of an emerging nation-state, something they had been marginal to in the earlier monarchial system and against which they had connived, on the side of imperial power" ("Cultural Policy and its Challenges").

suppressed sense of identity after colonialism (125). During this time, the Indian national elite cherry-picked dance to represent a significant hallmark of a well-endowed and glorious tradition, a conception that remains today. As demonstrated by a host of scholars on Indian dance, the "revival" and reconstruction of several dance idioms practiced by communities oppressed due to their caste, class, religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity to invent "classical" dance forms constituted an integral part of this political action.[51] With regard to specific antecedents of Bharatanatyam and certain *tawaif* influences on Kathak,[52] the early twentieth century witnessed a significant extraction and transference of the surviving pre-colonial dance practices from their original creators—which, among others included Dalit and Bahujan women and men—to the ownership of national elite invested in the diplomatic powers of the arts.[53]

The consecration of modern "classical" forms as national heritage functioned as a recasting, repopulation, relocation, and renaming, whereby the local movement repertoires of hereditary performers socially stigmatized for the above identifications were banned from public spaces. At the same time, their vocabularies and somatic knowledge were appropriated into modes and contexts of performance that excluded them. Aestheticians, scholars, and national

[51] For critical histories on Indian classical dance, see Vatsyayan (1974), Amrit Srinivasan (1985), Saskia C. Kersenboom-Story (1987), Pushpa Sundar (1995), Matthew Harp-Allen (1997), Mandakranta Bose (2001), Shah (2002), Leela Venkatraman (2002), Avanthi Meduri (2005), Janet O'Shea (2007), Pallabi Chakravorty (2008), Davesh Soneji (2012), Anurima Banerji (2019), and Harshita Mruthinti Kamath (2019).

[52] The Urdu word *tawaif* refers to professional dancing women who performed outside the princely courts in private salons particularly during the Mughal era. They were highly accomplished women catering to the nobility and enjoyed high degrees of financial independence and social prestige.

[53] This process of dispossessing caste-oppressed communities from their cultural practices and reconstructing new dance forms instead was ignited at the outset by the colonial public condemnation of former's traditions in the early twentieth century. Colonial chastisement was supported by the Brahmin Indian elite in different parts of the country, who morally justified it by claiming that the customs of hereditary performers were festering with "prostitution" (Shah 2002, 125-126).

elites selectively legitimized a few dances as classical through an intricate engineering process.[54] This included systematically restructuring the grammar of their forms, deliberately linking the newly invented dances to the ancient dramaturgical treatise *Natyasastra* (c. 2nd cent. BCE-2nd cent. CE), teaching these new dances to upper caste and class women and men who would become its official bearers, and even giving the dances new names like "Bharatanatyam," "Kathak," and so on.[55] These twentieth-century architects of Indian culture often homogenized the regional histories of the newly invented classical dances by claiming the *Natyasastra* as their common source, such that they could deploy these forms to convey a unified sense of national cultural identity. Moreover, they declared these modern classical dances as symbols of antiquity and a representation of the zenith of Indian heritage. As dance scholar Urmimala Sarkar Munsi (2011) appropriately observes, this narrative has been reinforced and authorized by the work of government institutions, their funding agencies, and archival sources in the post-independence context (125).[56]

Most Indian revivalists came to serve as primary architects of the newly emerging nation-state. Thus the cultural institutions they built, like the SNA, were meant to consolidate the hegemony of their dominant voice, privileging those dance forms linked to the above "Sanskritzed" history.[57] We can assume that the authentication and visibility acquired by

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[54] The emergence of the reinvented classical forms was also linked to the emergence of dance criticism has a genre its own right, as separate from long-standing aesthetic theory genres.

[55] Cultural nationalism in India was not a singular homogenous project of inventing classicism. There were many regional variants. For instance, while Madras adopted the project of classicism, in Bengal, the fervor of cultural nationalism gave rise to the modern art movement (Mitter 1995).

[56] Here I also want to gesture toward the importance of a network of private venues and arts organizations (such as the *sabha* system in Chennai) that operated outside governmental bureaucracies and were invested in similar nationalist narratives while relying on discourses of regionalism and caste association. For a detailed discussion of this as it relates to the modern formation of Bharatanatyam, see O'Shea (2007).

[57] Sanskritization refers to the textual legitimization of performing arts, connecting them to the ancient treatise, the *Natyasastra*, composed in the Sanskrit language. The Sanskrit language (from Sanskrit *saṃskṛta*, "adorned,

Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, and Manipuri through the aforementioned restructuring process guided the SNA's decision to identify these forms as central to their dance framework and give them a classical status; the classical canon expanded beyond these four dances eventually.[58] In the eyes of the SNA, these dances epitomized India's heritage of cultural and aesthetic excellence rooted in an "ancient" past. Moreover, as Erdman (1983) explains, the national integration policy after 1947 also promoted the concept that the classical arts helped unite India culturally, yet again echoing the rhetoric of the revivalists (262). As an organization entirely funded and operated by the central government, the SNA's recognition and patronage of classical dances served the former's national integration mission. The dual claims of preserving and fostering tradition and cultural unification propel the SNA's support for classical dances to date.

The SNA also patronized folk and tribal dances since its early years. The institution's justification to support these forms also emphasized issues of scarcity and decline. Therefore it decided to intervene in developing these forms vis-à-vis similar discourses of revival, preservation, and authenticity (Cherian 2009, 51-52). In other words, the SNA seemed to be performing a kind of "salvage mission" through its recognition of folk and tribal dances. Folk dance existed as an official term around the inception of the SNA, and the organization conferred

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cultivated, purified") is an old Indo-Aryan language in which the most ancient documents are considered to be the Vedas. For instance, scholars ascribe the Rigveda to approximately 1500 BCE. Read Vatsyayan (1968) for detailed analysis on Sanskritization of Indian arts.

[58] Cherian (2009) writes that "with the linguistic reorganization of the states [in 1956], the imperative to claim these forms [Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Manipuri, and Kathak] as *native* to particular states, and as representative of their linguistic and cultural distinctiveness increased"(49). She further observes that it "is clear from the Akademi's *Reports* [referring to the reports from 1953-1959], which document the mounting pressure on the SNA to expand the classical canon beyond the four idioms already listed. The classical appears here like a concept 'up for grabs', a space where demands for regional recognition were played out" (Ibid). Cherian mentions the deliberations of the Expert Committee formed during the 1958 Dance Seminar about the SNA's assessment and claims of forms like Odissi, Kuchipudi, and Satriya that were seeking classification as classical around this time.

its first award in the conjoined category of "folk/tribal dance" in 1961.[59] Kapila Vatsyayan (1972), Erdman (1983), Rustom Bharucha (1992), and Cherian (2009) have all discussed how incorporating the dance practices of marginalized folk and *adivasi* (tribal) communities within the nation's symbolic framework as "ethnographically interesting variations" of Indian heritage was another motif of the state's cultural policy to promote secular national integration, or were revitalized and nurtured as potentially commercial enterprises (Erdman 1983, 263). Sarkar Munsi (2011) explains that folk and tribal dances were part of the culture of the non-elite "mass," suitable for showcasing "the variety and 'ethnicness' of Indian people" (124). According to her, the state's cultural institutions thus were required to put these dances into a special category, considered appropriate to be displayed in "exhibition-like circumstances of the Republic Day Parade or India Festivals abroad but never deemed good enough to be representative of 'high' Indian culture" (Ibid.). But by drawing folk and tribal dances into its paradigm, the SNA was able to justify and perpetuate the rendering of India as a land of inalienable diversity.[60]

While reviewing the SNA's awards list over time, I noticed that the celebrated modern dance choreographer Uday Shankar had been honored for his contributions to "creative & experimental dance" in 1960. On further research, I found earlier evidence of the creative & experimental dance category existing within the ranks of the SNA. In her autobiography

[59] For instance, in 1953, Nehru launched the Folk Dance Festival as part of the annual January 26 Republic Day celebrations. Governmental support of folk dance materialized into a new prize titled "Folk Dance Trophy" which would be awarded to the best troupe performance at the Festival (Cherian 2009, 52). While differing in practice and social affiliation, the SNA conflates folk and tribal dance, such that they appear as a singular performance category within the institution's awards system. Cherian laments that "despite the centrality of the folk in the State's policy agendas, the SNA has remained unconcerned with the definitional questions raised by the category. Its references to the 'folk' reveal the concept's endemic fuzziness, with the *identity* of the folk, inevitably conflating the 'tribal' with the rural, and vice versa (51). In 1961, the first award under the title of folk/tribal dance was bestowed to Bapurao Khude Narayankar for his accomplishments in *Tamasha*, a dance-theatre tradition from the Western state of Maharashtra (SNA, "List of Awardees").

[60] Erdman (1983) suggests that folk performing arts presented annually in New Delhi during the Republic Day Parade, are designed and choreographed to promote this narrative (262).

Nrityarase Chittamama (2000), Manjusri Chaki-Sircar claims to have applied for an SNA fellowship under this category in 1955 to support one of her earliest dance experiments (89). I wondered how creative & experimental dance fit into the SNA's intent to manufacture cultural heritage and diversity?

Many dance scholars in India, including Sarkar Munsi (2008, 2010, 2022) and Prarthana Purkayastha (2014), assert that in the course of streamlining the heritage of dance in India, nation-builders and state officials repeatedly sidelined the question of modernity. In light of their claims, the inclusion of creative & experimental dance in the SNA's official dance classification is striking and required further examination in my opinion. However, on doing further research, I could not find information about how the institution decided to include this category within its rubric or arrived at the particular naming. When I surveyed which artists received the SNA award in creative & experimental dance through the years, it led me to infer that the aesthetic trajectories of early modern dance might have partly served as a reference point for the institution.[61] Within South Asian performance history, scholars often associate the artistic explorations of Uday Shankar and the polymath Rabindranath Tagore (and their pupils) in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries with developments in modern dance of Indian origin. These artists embraced the language of modernism to proclaim their autonomy and enact social progress through artistic explorations.

[61] Several individuals who have been honored with the SNA Award in creative & experimental dance self-identify as modern choreographers, claiming to follow or advance the aesthetic legacy of Uday Shankar, such as Narendra Sharma (1976), Prabhat Ganguli (1979), Parvati Kumar (1981), Sachin Shankar (1992), Gul Bardhan (2001), Sambu Bhattacharya (2002), Yogsunder Desai (2008), and Tanushree Shankar (2011) (SNA, "List of Awardees").

Tagore was an internationally-renowned poet, novelist, dramatist, and painter, and he received the Nobel Prize in 1913 for his contributions to literature.[62] The dance dramas of Tagore, also known as Rabindra Nritya or Rabindrik Nritya, played a critical role in establishing his position and legacy as a modern artist and pedagogue.[63] Uday Shankar toured the West extensively from 1928 till the late 1950s, captivating the imaginations of audiences across Europe and America.[64] Erdman (1987) writes that Shankar's emergence on the Paris dance scene in the 1930s and his monumental success in France, Germany, and North America, paralleled an enchantment with Eastern spirituality and philosophy in the Western hemisphere (363). Tagore and Shankar became known as cultural ambassadors of India by the first part of the twentieth century, celebrated by government institutions for their achievements in propagating Indian art globally. Their wider influence might partly explain the inclusion of the creative dance genre within the SNA's national dance framework, even though it stood out as the only non-heritage dance category, and the term, as noted by Purkayastha, evaded an explicit acknowledgment of dance modernity demonstrated by these artists.[65]

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[62] Rabindranath Tagore and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi were among the most critical voices in India's movement towards modernity and postcolonial agency. Tagore had been involved with the *Swadeshi* movement, and in 1905 he became the leader of this political movement organized against the British-led partition of Bengal. But in less than two years, he withdrew his support, appalled by the violence, bombings, and killings advocated by other party members. Additionally, Tagore refused to support Gandhi's idea of spinning the wheel (*charkha*) and locally produced hand-made cotton to solve the country's economic problems. After withdrawing from the sphere of politics, Tagore played an instrumental role in modernizing the Bengali language, was an inventive writer of Bengali novels and short stories, created the Bengali dance drama genre of performance, and composed patriotic songs (both the national anthems of India and Bangladesh were composed by him) (Purkayastha 2014, 22-24).

[63] Rabindrik Nritya is a cultural repository and hallmark of a Bengali school, style, or performance tradition. It continues to be reproduced and reperformed in many Bengali communities in the subcontinent and the diaspora (Purkayastha), and enjoys a semi-classical status in Bengal today (Aishika Chakraborty, interview by Arushi Singh, Kolkata, August 31, 2018).

[64] For a detailed analysis of this, see Sarkar Munsi's new book, *Uday Shankar and His Transcultural Experimentations: Dancing Modernity* (2022).

[65] Purkayastha argues that both the Orientalists and Indian nation builders and cultural policy makers were implicated in the deferred arrival and recognition of modern dance in the twentieth century. She claims that the use of nomenclature creative dance rather than modern dance signifies this trend (8).

In the following section, I address the multi-layered attempts at modernity in Indian dance that occurred before the existence of the SNA in 1953 and warranted the genre's inclusion within the SNA's dance framework. My brief overview of the early modern Indian dance movement will help readers grasp the aesthetic conventions that the SNA was possibly exposed to as it deliberated the place and value of creative & experimental dance in the twentieth century.

Early Modern Indian Dance: Fringe Activity or Cultural Touchstone?

Modern dance of Indian origin existed around the late nineteenth century and simultaneously burgeoned with the invention of classical dances and the mapping of folk and tribal dances in the early twentieth century. This section will offer a concise survey of modern Indian dance that preceded the establishment of the SNA by summarizing key insights of scholars who have extensively archived and analyzed this practice.[66] A philosophy of individual freedom propelled modern Indian dancers beyond the restrictive rules of any singular dance form. These choreographers are known for imaginatively assimilating dances from different cultures, which we can see as another kind of aesthetic response to the conditions and effects of colonialism. The choreographies of modern Indian dancers intertwined local and international aesthetics and movement idioms and engaged with the mediums of visual arts, theatre, music, and film. As Purkayastha suggests, these artists, generally driven by a secular (often feminist) vision of dance, cultivated a communicative movement language informed by newly designed performance scripts critically dealing with political and social issues of their time (8).

[66] For documentation and analysis of early modern dance in India, refer to John Martin (1934), Fernau Hall (1953), Vatsyayan (1968, 2003), Narendra Sharma (1978), Projesh Banerjee (1982, 1983), Mohan Khokhar (1983, 2018), Peter Cox (1986), Erdman (1987), Gul Bardhan (1992), Uttara Asha Coorlawala (1994), Ranjabati Sircar (1995), Jayantee Paine (2000), Alessendra Lopez Royo (2003), Sunil Kothari Ed. (2003), Ruth K. Abrahams (2007), Sarkar Munsi (2008, 2010, 2018, 2022); Pallabi Chakravorty (2008), Mandakranta Bose (2009), Diana Brenscheidt Jost (2011), Ketu Katrak (2011), Purkayastha (2014), Astaad Deboo and Ketu Katrak Eds. (2017), Ashish Mohan Khokhar (2018), and Sonal Khullar (2018).

Sarkar Munsi (2008), Purkayastha, Erdman (1987), and other academics argue that modern Indian dancers held an ambivalent position within the Indian dance landscape due to the politics of cultural representation reigning when they were producing their work. In the previous section, I have examined how dance became an exercise in composing national culture and reconstructing tradition, sometimes at the expense of practices and aesthetic frameworks that did not serve the idea of a new India (Dave 2021, xiii). Classical and folk dances epitomized Indian tradition. Whereas a possible reason for the ambiguous status of modern dancers in the subcontinent, Purkayastha claims, was that their aesthetic embodiments harbored "a complex relationship" "with ideas around 'nation' and the concept of the 'national' which gave rise to an altogether different representation of Indian identity in dance, one that openly and consciously celebrated a dialogical relationship between India and the world beyond it" (7). To understand how early modern dance challenged the hegemonic discourse on Indian nationalism, I review the cases of Rabindranath Tagore, Uday Shankar, and Shanti Bardhan. Interestingly, the SNA included deliberations on these three figures during their 1958 Dance Seminar, and hence I focus on them in the following delineation.

Rabindranath Tagore carved out an alternative space for his hybrid experiments in art and education at his unique institution, Shantiniketan, which originated in rural Bengal in 1901. Tagore is known worldwide for his engagement, expertise, and excellence in different art disciplines, and his productions in the area of performance distinctly fused dance, drama, and music. He introduced dance to the curriculum in Shantiniketan in the late nineteenth century. An example of his earliest staged event from this time includes a *geeti natya* or musical play called

Mayar Khela (1888); the later iterations of this play appear to have included some kind of dancing (Purkayastha, 27-28).[67]

Tagore's travels and movements beyond the geographic and cultural boundaries of Bengal during the colonial period resulted in a series of intracultural and intercultural borrowings (Ibid., 22, 28).[68] Purkayastha writes that before the 1920s, Tagore's connections with a royal court of Agartala in the northeastern region of Tripura led him to introduce what is now known as Manipuri dance into the pedagogy and structure of Shantiniketan through exercise classes offered by dance teacher Buddhimantra Singh (32-33). Purkayastha also shows how the Manipuri dance training of Nabakumar Singh was apparent in Tagore's productions, such as *Natir Puja* and *Nataraja* (1927). Furthermore, she notes that a particular aspect of Manipuri dancing called *gamak* became a key choreographic strategy in the dances he created in Shantiniketan, allowing Tagore to represent the themes of his productions through abstraction (38). Research on Tagore additionally discloses that his travels to Southeast Asia in the late 1920s and 1930s were a significant stimulus for his dance experiments. Evidently, he drew on Javanese and Balinese systems of narrative and non-narrative movement to generate abstract and stylized gestures utilized in his dance dramas.[69]

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[67] A Tagorean production from this time in which dancing occurred alongside acting and singing were *Raja* (1911). In *Phalguni* (1916), Tagore himself danced as a blind *baul* (wandering minstrel).

[68] Tagore's lecture tours to America through Japan in between 1916 and 1917, his 1920 trip to Sylhet in East Bengal (now Bangladesh), and the Northeast exposed him to a diverse range of communities and practices of dance.

[69] Purkayastha suggests that Tagore's preference for abstract movement units within Southeast Asian dances need to be seen in light of his attempts to disengage with highly sexualized movements of female courtesan dancers, echoing the bourgeoisie puritanism of upper caste Indian revivalists of his time. In a letter he wrote during his time in Java in 1928, Tagore deems the movements of Southeast Asian dances more superior to the elements of "bai naach" (courtesan dance). She notes that these views of Tagore on aesthetics, lies in contrast to his inclusion of marginalized female characters in his dance dramas (35-36).

A significant development to mention here is Tagore's interaction with the Indonesian educational institution, Taman Siswa, which Purkayastha suggests, inspired Tagore to develop a vision of Indian aesthetic praxis different from the one propagated by cultural nationalists of his time.[70] She claims that Taman Siswa and Shantiniketan commonly emphasized the need for a cultural education founded on principles of internationalism (36). Tagore's institution was more concerned with innovating hybrid dances that could embody the circulation of ideas across borders rather than preserving dances as an act of cultural purification (37). He was against traditions that were like archaic "dead habits." Thus, by the 1930s, Shantiniketan evolved dance styles that assimilated diverse movement genres, including Manipuri, Indian forms that are today classified as folk, and Balinese, Javanese and Indonesian dances elements, rather than developing a sole codified dance technique.

Lastly, the thematic content of Tagorean dance dramas, such as *Chitrangada* (1936), *Chandalika* (1938), and *Shyama* (1939), was also exceptional for the time. They portrayed marginalized women subjects—respectively, a warrior, an untouchable, and a courtesan. Purkayastha notes that the narratives in these productions did not focus on the extraordinary spirituality of these characters, as the prevailing doctrine of Indian classical revivalism would have it, but instead, they represented these characters' ordinary internal conflicts. This choice, Purkayastha argues, marked Tagore's modern sensibility and penchant for addressing and contemplating the changing social, cultural, and political contexts of his time (38-39).

Many dance historians widely regard Uday Shankar as a progenitor of modern Indian dance proper. Shankar choreographed two ballets for Anna Pavlova—*The Hindu Wedding* and

[70] Taman Siswa was a social movement initiated by a group of intellectuals in Indonesia in 1922 which led to the opening of a private school in Yogyakarta. Tagore is known to have visited this institution in the 1920s, and subsequently, students from Taman Siswa travelled to Shantiniketan to partake in a series of cultural exchanges (Purkayastha, 36-37).

Krishna and Radha—and their first performance at Covent Garden (London) in 1923 won critical acclaim from the press and the public (Khokhar 2018). Post his choreographing and performing experience with Pavlova, Shankar began to author his own dances, showcasing the "Orient" to the West. According to the information shared by Sarkar Munsi (2011), from 1930 to 1942, he and his troupe presented 889 performances all over Europe, and during this time, he also toured the US several times (131); you can also read more about this in Sarkar Munsi's 2022 book on Shankar.

On the one hand, scholars have often critiqued Uday Shankar's "Hindu ballets" from this period, such as *Indra, Tandava Nrittya, Kalia Daman,* and *Kartikeya*, for pandering to the prevailing Euro-American orientalist assumptions and imaginations of dancers from the Global South. Sarkar Munsi, in the aforementioned text, writes that Shankar's works indulged his fantasy of India, animating popular Hindu myths and portraying Hindu gods and goddesses, while also utilizing costumes and jewelry from neighboring Asian cultures like Java and Bali (134).[71] On the other hand, scholars recognize his creative genius as an intercultural instigator. Purkayastha suggests that Shankar exercised his identity as an "authentic" Indian during his international tour years, capitalizing on his foreignness as a dancer from the Orient (52). Moreover, Erdman (1987) observes that in many of his productions from this time, Shankar staged narratives from his "source culture" by translating poses, movements, gestures, and costumes from existing genres of Indian dance, such as princely court and Hindu temple performances, into the format of Western dance theatre (65).

[71] Uday Shankar was also inspired by Orientalist philosopher Anand Coomaraswamy's *Mirror of Gesture*, and derived heavily from postures and images of ancient Indian sculptures and art for his choreographies (Purkayastha, 63, Sarkar 2018).

This strategic use of cultural translation and interpretation was an aesthetic choice made by many of Shankar's contemporaries navigating the expectations of India and the West. Sarkar Munsi (2008) provides the historical background for this phenomenon. She notes that the Western modern dance movement in the last decade of the nineteenth century emerged out of a desire to seek new forms and break away from the rigidity of ballet. She notes that modern Western dancers looked towards the "East" for ideas and inspiration, a fact also well-documented in the scholarship of Ruth K. Abrahams (2005), Pallabi Chakravorty (2008), Priya Srinivasan (2012), and Rebekah J. Kowal (2020). Sarkar Munsi further states that around the 1920s, dancers from India like Shankar, Madame Menaka, and Ram Gopal began to take cues from the West concerning presentation style, stage techniques, and choreographic methods for group dances (86).[72] The choreographies of these individuals are often referred to as "ballet" in Indian performance discourse to indicate this Western influence on their dance explorations.[73]

While Shankar's dances might have been successful in Europe and the United States, this was not always the case in his homeland.[74] As Sarkar Munsi substantially documents, many Indian reviewers singled out Shankar for not having a discernible dance technique, and disparaged him for using isolated elements from various Indian dance forms to design exotic spectacles that they considered self-orientalizing (87). We need to see the sometimes tepid

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[72] For instance, Madame Menaka is known to have drawn inspiration from Sanskrit dance dramas and aesthetics based on the *Natyasastra* and *Abhinaya Darpana* for her 1936 productions such as *Krishna Leela* and *Menaka Lasyam*. She presented these dances with modern accoutrements of Western concert dance such as stage lighting, costumes, orchestra music, and choreography (Chakravorty 2008, 50-55).

[73] Scholars and writers like Hall (1953), M. Khokhar (1990), Kothari Ed. (2003), and Chakravorty (2008) have used ballet as the term to refer to the work of Uday Shankar, Ram Gopal, and Madam Menaka.

[74] Look up Khokhar (1983), Sarkar Munsi (2008), and Purkayastha (2014) to read about Indian reviews of Uday Shankar from this time. Of course, there were exceptions to the overall "bad press" that Shankar might have received. For example, Sarkar Munsi (2011) informs us that Shankar's 1937 Kolkata performance was "received with great fanfare" for his "mix of dance choreographies made up of everyday issues of human life and grand mythical themes" (131).

reception of Shankar and his hybrid and transcultural engagements in dance in the light of the discursive centering of cultural authenticity that made up the zeitgeist in India at the turn of the century.[75]

Nonetheless, committed to being taken seriously as an artist in India and supported by a distinguished list of patrons such as Nehru, Tagore, Gandhi, and the Elmhirsts of Darrington Hall, Shankar established the Uday Shankar India Cultural Centre (USICC) in 1939 on a hillside in Almora, an Indian district in Uttarakhand.[76] At the USICC, Shankar hoped to solidify and disseminate his unconventional approach to dance training and making. Like Tagore's Shantiniketan, Shankar's institute is fondly remembered by his students and scholars as an extraordinary experiment in arts education rooted in the study of contemporary culture, even though it had a short run and shut down in 1944 due to financial and administrative reasons (Sarkar Munsi 2022).[77]

Shankar invited a host of master teachers to work with his students at the USICC, such as Amboi Singh for Manipuri, Shankaran Nambudri for Kathakali, Kandappa Pillai for Bharatanatyam, and Ustad Alauddin Khan for music. The USICC combined training in dances that are today recognized as classical and folk. Still, Shankar's dance pedagogy did not subscribe to ancient Indian theories of performance or presentation, unlike the classical dance revivalists' method of politicizing dance for historical recuperation. Art historian Sonal Khullar (2018) draws a parallel between visual art modernism and dance modernism in the early twentieth century, which contextualizes Shankar's vision for his institution:

[75] I will detail this issue later in this chapter, while analyzing the 1958 Dance Seminar.

[76] In 1938, Uday Shankar secured substantial funds from Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst of Dartington Hall in Devon (England) to set up his institution.

[77] The disintegration and closure of the USICC was in large part due to the drying up of foreign funds in the context of World War II.

> The project in Almora had stronger affinities with the nationalist-modernist vision of Kala Bhavana, the art school of Shantiniketan (established 1919) led by Nandalal Bose, than with the traditionalist, if utterly modern, dance school at Kalakshetra in Madras (established 1936) led by Rukmini Devi Arundale. Although scholars have shown that the Bharatanatyam revival was a reimagining of Indian dance, or an invented tradition, Arundale's rhetorical emphasis on authenticity, purity, recovery and the nation's past was distinct from the self proclaimed mission of Shankar's Centre which was: 'to develop a spontaneous expression of the student's inner creative urge' and 'to give interpretation' to 'dancing, drama, and music' (16,18).

To materialize this mission, Shankar designed a syllabus that focused on personal and autobiographical recollection alongside historical memory in dance, exercises in improvisation, concentration, imagination, speech, and eurhythmics.[78] Sarkar Munsi (2008) shares that at the USICC, the rigor and routine of classroom exercises were balanced by encouraging students to innovate and develop their creative voices, which was unique for the time. Apparently, Shankar realized the importance of training the inner world of dancers along with the discovery of movement from theatre director Micheal Chekov, which suggests how European performance techniques might have also inspired the curriculum in USICC.[79] Moreover, disciplinary confines did not restrict Shankar's practice as a choreographer and teacher, and thus the USICC also included a study of music, theatre, fine arts, and filmmaking.[80] Additionally, physical education at the USICC centered on closely analyzing found elements and rhythms in nature and improvising movements from everyday life. Sarkar Munsi recounts that Shankar guided his students to transform actions such as walking, sitting, and standing into dance and movement

[78] Sharma (1978), Erdman (1987), Sarkar Munsi (2008), Purkayastha (2014), and Khullar (2018) offer a detailed breakdown of course syllabus at the USICC.

[79] Zohra Segal, one of Shankar's senior dance students at the USICC, who trained in modern dance under Mary Wigman in Germany, was one of the main individuals in charge of syllabus building (Khullar 2018, 26).

[80] Shankar himself had no formal training in dance or music, and instead studied visual art at Royal College of Art (London) and Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy School of Art (Mumbai). Moreover, Shankar was involved in a long term cross-cultural collaboration with Swiss artist and sculptor Alice Boner in the early part of the twentieth century, which you can read about more in Sarkar Munsi (2018, 2022).

scores for performance. She discusses how students in USICC also learned performance outdoors, across the hilly forests in Almora, with nature serving as a guide. Khullar insists that this feature of Shankar's pedagogy resembles the practice of early modern visual artists like Benodbehari Mukherjee and Ramkinker Baij at the Kala Bhavan in the 1920s, where they delved into their surrounding environment alongside classroom study (21-22).

Shankar's explorations with movement and the body at his institution continued to ferment new directions for his choreographies. Purkayastha notes how Shankar shifted from an impressionist dance style that informed his works in the 1920s toward creating realism-inspired productions in the late 1940s. One such example is his 1948 dance film *Kalpana,* which Sarkar Munsi (2011) describes as a concrete record of Shankar's views on life and dance and his choreographies (94-95). Released a year after the formation of the Indian Republic, the dance film uniquely blends cinematic and choreographic techniques to depict and reflect on the ideals, desires, hopes, negotiations, and challenges underlying the process of building modern India. There are abundant moments in this two-hour dance film when Shankar harks back to self-orientalizing imagery. But *Kalpana* serves as a critical document on his encounter with issues of regional diversity, modern statehood, labor and the mechanization of human life, capitalism and corporate ownership, trends of education, artistic freedom, cultural patronage, and political activism.

Even though the USICC closed in 1944, it was a landmark institution in Indian dance history, having trained a whole new generation of artists who would continue to make their mark in dance, theatre, cinema, and education. Here I would like to point toward just those who continued to work as dancers and choreographers. I have gathered some of this information from Khullar (2018). Many of Shankar's students and teachers at the USICC, such as Shanti Bardhan,

Guru Dutt, Zohra Segal, Prabhat Ganguli, Uzra Butt, Shanta Gandhi, Dina Pathak, Sardar Malik, and Mohan Segal, got involved with the Indian People's Theatre Association in the 1940s, and later on, with the film industry in Bombay. Other students established their dance academies and ensembles: Shirin Vajifdar created Nritya Darpana in 1943 in Bombay (now Mumbai), Zohra and Kameshwar Nath Segal started Zohresh Dance Institute in 1943 in Lahore (Pakistan), Yogsunder Desai founded India Revival Group in 1950 in Delhi, Sachin Shankar launched Ballet Unit in 1953 in Bombay, and Narendra Sharma set up Bhoomika Creative Dance Centre in 1972 in Delhi. Uday Shankar's family members further concretized his dance method into a reproducible modern technique at their institutions in Kolkata. For instance, Amala Shankar, Uday Shankar's long-term collaborator and wife, was actively involved with the Uday Shankar Centre of Dance from its founding in 1965 until her recent death in 2020. Their daughter Mamata Shankar continues to teach the Uday Shankar style at the Udayan Dance Company, established in 1986. Moreover, Tanushree Shankar, Uday Shankar's daughter-in-law, claims to teach the "Uday Shankar *gharana*" at her institution, Ananda Shankar Centre for Performing Arts, since the early 2000s (Ananda Shankar Centre For Performing Arts, "About Us").[81]

Shankar's student Shanti Bardhan deserves particular attention. After leaving USICC, in a career-defining moment, Bardhan choreographed his first solo production called *Bhooka Hai Bengal* in 1944. He created this production for the Communist Party of India's (CPI) cultural program to aid the victims of the British-manufactured famine that ravaged Bengal between

[81] Predominately associated with the classical dance world, the function of the *gharana* as the core identity of a family or group grew out of extant practices of music and dance that were centered on family lineages or occupational groups referred to as *ghars/khandans*. More or less, the gharana can be traced to the period of political and cultural transition in the nineteenth century when patronage was shifting from royalty to the *zamindars* (landlords) and national elites (Chakravorty 2008, 140).

1942 and 1946, which was also the theme for the dance.[82] Soon after, the then CPI Chairman, P.C. Joshi, appointed Bardhan as the dance director of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). IPTA was a politically vociferous national cultural enterprise founded by the CPI in 1943 to unite the fragmented Left across the subcontinent and involve cultural workers in the independence and anti-fascist movements of this time (Purkayastha 2014, 81).

The association with IPTA shaped the aesthetics and politics of Bardhan's dance from 1944 to 1946, including *Bhooka Hai Bengal*, *Spirit of India*, and *India Immortal*. IPTA engaged with local art forms in India to reflect on ordinary people's concerns and social realities, advocate for human rights, and cultivate a spirit of national unity (Ibid., 84, 86). While elite artist-intellectuals were involved with the IPTA, including Bardhan and his peers from the Almora days, the organization centered on the participation of working class people, peasants, and agricultural laborers from Indian villages.[83] Purkayastha observes that the cultural sphere of the IPTA was marked by a move away from urban-bourgeois models of theatre and performance towards an alignment with rural and folk models of theatre, music, and dance;[84] however, the ethics of IPTA's engagement with the "folk" has come into question.[85]

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[82] The colonial government's massive export of food grains to feed British troops in Europe and Japan resulted in an acute food scarcity in the rural areas of Bengal, and millions of peasants and laborers died of starvation. Purkayastha remarks that this widespread devastation and calamity astonished and infuriated artists and intellectuals both within and outside Bengal and persuaded them to launch a large-scale protest against the injustices dispensed by the colonial government to its subjects, which took shape through the mediums of theatre, music, and poetry (81, 83).

[83] The IPTA set up cultural "squads" in eight Indian states, including Bengal, Bihar, the United Provinces, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and Karnataka, to accomplish their mission. Each squad included a range of talents from film, theatre, music, poetry, art, and dance. While most of the dancers were amateur performers, some trained dancers included Sachin Shankar, Prabhat Ganguli, Narendra Sharma, Annandiprasad, Pinaki, Ghanshyam, and Sunil Dasgupta, who were also alumni of Uday Shankar's Almora Institute (Purkayastha, 88).

[84] As Purkayastha shows us, IPTA's choice of folk idioms to realize their cultural interventions was inspired by how the Soviet state politicized folk dance in the early twentieth century to consolidate a union on Communist principles. This aesthetic parallel reflects the ideological alliances and sympathies Indian leftists established with the Soviet political project. Purkayastha suggests that IPTA's revival of folk idioms in their dance dramas shared remarkable similarities with the art practice of the pre-and post-Bolshevik revolutionary era, characterized by a spirit of

In 1946, ideological differences led Shanti Bardhan to sever ties with IPTA.[86] Following the incident, Bardhan served as choreographer for the Indian National Theatre (INT), the cultural ensemble of the CPI's primary political opponent, the Congress Party (led by Nehru).[87] At the request of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, who was the President of the INT then and would later become one of the founders of the SNA, Bardhan choreographed the *Discovery of India* (1947) based on Nehru's memoir of the same name. He presented this dance at the inaugural show of the First Asian Relations Conference hosted by Nehru in New Delhi in March-April 1947. Nehru, who headed a provisional government preparing for India's independence that same year, intended this event to unite leaders of independence movements in Asia and assert Asian unity (a precursor to the Non-Aligned Movement).

During a period informed by the discourse and practice of revivalism, as dance became yoked with "ancient form" and "renewed glory," prominent choreographers like Tagore,

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collectivism and the politics of agitprop theatre. Folk-inspired Soviet *drambelts*, which enabled working classes to practice art forms, were undoubtedly an inspiration for IPTA's cultural engagements and influenced Bardhan's choreographic vision. However, there was a significant difference in their valorization of the folk. Whereas under Stalin's Soviet Union the function of dance was to serve the state, IPTA operated outside the control of the colonial state apparatus and it meticulously worked towards critiquing and exposing colonial authorities (82-85, 86-87).

[85] Refer to Bharucha (1998) for his insightful argument about how the IPTA used the "folk" without problematizing the ethical and aesthetic aspects of their adaptations and appropriations (42).

[86] You can read more about these ideological differences in Purkayastha's book.

[87] The CPI was one of the most strident opponents of the Congress Party, the former established in 1920 at the Tashkent Military School in Russia and was soon connected with Lenin's Communist International (Comintern). Early Communism reached India from Soviet Russia and adopted the cause of anti-British imperialism. In 1936, efforts had been made to create a United National Front to bring the socialists in Congress and the communists together in an anti-imperial pact against the British colonial government but that coalition did not last for long. With the eruption of World War II, the brief union was entirely fractured and by the 1940s, political differences between the Congress Party and the CPI was openly proclaimed. After the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union by Hitler in 1941, the CPI's support for the Soviet Union was, in effect, expanded to the Allied Forces of Britain and America. Thus, the anti-imperial position transformed into the CPI's anti-fascist "People's War," which was a different position from the Congress Party's exclusively anti-British stand. As a consequence, the CPI committed to the cause of "the people" and IPTA was created to consolidate their political-cultural agenda. My summary of the historically antagonistic relationship between the politics of the Congress Party and CPI is based on (Purkayastha, 82).

Shankar, and Bardhan envisaged a new language to convey modern ideas (Chakravorty 2008, 149). Their examples show a robust expansion of the modern dance movement in India before the founding of the SNA. Moreover, the practice continued to grow throughout the twentieth century, simultaneously with the development of the SNA. Thus we can assume that the SNA was looking to the artistic trajectories of these dancers and dance ensembles as it determined its relationship and support for innovative and experimental dance over the years.

Modern Indian dancers deployed "transnationalism as a strategy" to cultivate valuable links with the outside world and engage with international culture and politics to enable their visions, ideas, and practices (Purkayastha, 17). For this reason, their peers, patrons, and critics in the Indian dance world often judged them as "confused" or "westernized" (Sarkar Munsi 2008, 79). Sarkar Munsi and Purkayastha insist that the hybrid embodiments of modern dancers traversed the narrow confines of nationalism in the twentieth century. Thus even though various choreographers and troupes continued to work in this style, they held a marginal position relative to the classical dances in India.

At the same time, the presence of Bardhan at the First Asian Relations Conference and his prior work with IPTA serves as a historical imprint of the contribution of modern dancers to the ideological and geopolitical struggles of the newly emerging nation-state in India. Moreover, Uday Shankar was honored with the 1960 SNA award, the 1962 SNA fellowship, as well as the 1971 Padma Vibhushan Award—the Indian government's highest tribute to artists—for his contributions to dance (SNA, "List of Awards"). As per the *SNA Report 1953-1958*, Tagore's premier institution Shantiniketan was included in the list of 43 dance institutions recognized by the SNA for its national importance and offered financial assistance to disseminate advanced

training in the performing arts (item no. 191 under the section "West Bengal").[88] In 2012, in the commemoration of the 150th birth anniversary of Tagore, the SNA inaugurated two new award categories in his name—the SNA Tagore Ratna and the SNA Tagore Puraskar—to recognize seasoned artists across different genres of Indian dance, drama, and music.[89] This gesture speaks to the continued resonance of Tagore within the discursive sphere of the SNA. To further assess this simultaneous recognizability and obscurity that undergirded the discourse on creative dance in the twentieth century, I decided to investigate the SNA's 1958 Dance Seminar. Amongst a series of reasons that this event was significant, one of them was that on a recommendation made at the conclusion of the Dance Seminar, the SNA established an official award for the category of creative dance.[90]

The "First All-India Dance Seminar" and the Question of New Dance Forms[91]

The SNA organized a series of national festivals and seminars in the first few years of its existence to take stock of culture and performance from an all-India angle, including the National Folk Dance Festival (1953), the National Festival of Dancing (1955), and the National

[88] The SNA identified about 200 institutions across the country for "rendering outstanding service in the field of dance, drama and music" and this included 111 institutions in music, 54 in drama and 43 in the field of dance (SNA Report 1953-1958, 59). The SNA decided to grant financial assistance to these institutions for the purposes of imparting higher level of training in the performing arts. In the first five years of its operation, the SNA claims to have financed a number of short and long-term projects in the performing arts: the SNA spent a total budget of Rs. 75,000 (approx. US $979.66) in 1953-54; Rs. 1,00,000 (approx. US $1,306.21) in 1954-55; Rs. 2,00,000 (approx. US $2,612.43) in 1955-56; Rs. 2,61,000 (approx. US $3,409.22) in 1956-57; and Rs, 4,00,000 (approx. US $5,224.85) in 1957-58 (SNA Report 1953-1958, under the section "Financial Assistance").

[89] Amala Shankar and Maya Rao were the only dance innovators who have been conferred the Tagore Ratna.

[90] Point 20 in the list of recommendations reads "That an award for modern dance compositions (Production) in ballets and dance-dramas be instituted to be given annually along with other Akademi Awards for dance" ("Recommendations of the Dance Seminar," [1958] 2014, 140).

[91] This dance seminar might have been the first of its kind in the postcolonial context. But as per Khokhar (1983), there was an all-India dance seminar in 1945, but the event only included deliberations on "classical" forms.

Dance Festival (1959).[92] The institution also hosted seminars on film (1955), drama (1956), music (1957), and dance (1958). Cultural writer Ranjana Dave (2021) observes that the curatorial decisions made in designing these seminars would inform the SNA's mandate and, simultaneously, the trajectories of performance practice over the next few decades (xiii). She notes that the SNA mapped the field through the seminars and prescribed disciplinary boundaries—decrees that would dictate which traditions survived, how they were funded, and what spaces they could inhabit (Ibid.).

The decision to hold the "First All-India Dance Seminar" was taken by the SNA's General Council at its meeting held on May 17, 1957. The first SNA Secretary, Nirmala Joshi, and a committee composed of eminent scholars and artists, including V. Raghavan, Rukmini Devi, Hari Uppal, and Uday Shankar, planned and conducted the Dance Seminar, which took place at Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi from March 30 to April 7 (SNA Report 1959, 40). I imagine the presence of Uday Shankar as one of the core organizers might have something to do with the inclusion of modern dance perspectives during this momentous event (?)

The 1958 Dance Seminar is an important milestone in the postcolonial history of Indian performing arts, as it included formative deliberations on the scope and function of Indian dancing carried out by leading scholars and practitioners of the time: over 350 artists and 40 scholars and critics participated in it ("The Dance Seminar: A Brief Day-to-Day Account, [1958] 2014, 121-137).[93] In his "Inaugural Speech," the first SNA Chairman, P.V. Rajamannar, shared his hope for the event: he wished that delegates of diverse dance styles would work together

[92] In a report from 1958, the first SNA Secretary Nirmala Joshi explains that "a special feature of that festival [National Festival of Dancing] was that it featured some of our less-known classical dance styles such as Odissi, Kuchipudi and Satriya, for the first time on a national platform" (142).

[93] In acknowledgment of the landmark event, Nehru hosted a reception to honor seminar delegates and participants at his Prime Ministerial residence in Teen Murti House.

through the different platforms of exchange enabled by the seminar to encourage national integration across regional, religious, and linguistic affiliations (8). He explicitly stated the seminar's goal to ascertain, document, and catalog the "staggering multiplicity" of movement traditions and genres in India and facilitate the exchange of ideas, views, and experiences about the diversity of Indian choreography (7).

The seminar offered a variety of practical, theoretical, and historical reflections on Indian dance. It included a string of reading and discussion sessions by prominent scholars and dancers during the day, followed by nightly performances at the Talkatora Garden Theatre by exponents of some of the forms represented during the event ("Programme of the Dance Seminar," [1958] 2014, 115-120). The seminar program encompassed classical dances, folk dances, dance dramas, modern ballets, and film dances. These were the official terms used in the program notes. The word ballet was in widespread usage, referring to narrative-based ensemble dances created by Indian choreographers who applied Western staging and production techniques for group dances.

The seminar also included discussions on dance from a transnational perspective: representatives of Kandyan dances of Ceylon (Srilanka), Southeast Asian dances, Nepalese and Chinese dances also participated in the event. As a product of the time's nationalist philosophy, the seminar prioritized ruminations on classical and folk dances. Hence, a maximum number of panels and performances were dedicated to these forms. Only a handful of presentations meditated on innovation and new dance forms. According to one seminar attendee, "there were arguments on the traditional styles and modern styles of Indian dancing" (Gopinath [1958] 2014, 175). In the ensuing pages, I evaluate the dialogue and debate about the nature and role of new dance forms during the seminar.

Close to the end of his opening address, Rajamannar noted the necessity of creating new dances alongside preserving old movement traditions. The development of new forms was acceptable to him, "provided the creation is authentic and original and not mere imitation, for instance, some of the rock'n'roll dance sequences [we see] in modern Indian films" (10). He pointed toward "an infinite variety of folk dances which can inspire a talented choreographer to design and create new dance patterns" (Ibid.). The concepts of authenticity and originality are interwoven with the dance revival in the Indian context. As I disclosed earlier, a central idea driving the dance revival was codifying dances to reflect and create an unbroken Indian civilizational practice (Chakravorty 2008, 150).[94] All state institutions and their figureheads espoused and perpetuated this ideology.[95] Thus I interpret Rajamannar's statement as claiming that for new forms to be considered legitimate, they needed to be authentically "Indian," i.e., engage with performance traditions that signal a cultural heritage unscathed by international influences. Rajamannar might have suggested steering clear of "aping the West" in particular due to the subcontinent's recent colonial history and the attempts of the Indian state to explore the nation's own heritage as a maneuver of resisting or reclaiming a suppressed cultural past. Dance innovations were thus also expected to express and consolidate national identity to be read as original.

[94] I would say that institutions of the Indian state encouraged classical dances to revive a pre-colonial, "pure" Indian past, without overtly contemplating the violence of colonialism and cultural imperialism that triggered the careful construction of these forms in the first place.

[95] In her report after the 1958 Dance Seminar, the first SNA Secretary, Joshi reiterates this sentiment: "Dancing as a cultivated art has existed in our country for thousands of years. Due to various social, political and historical reasons, many a divergent trend has developed in the field of dancing. The existence of alien rule and the resulting division of the people into States and regions has fostered a sectional and parochial outlook hindering the growth of national culture" (142).

Rajamannar's remark about dances from modern Indian films further sheds light on which direction his institution wanted to develop new forms. According to the above citation, Rajamannar charged dance in Indian cinema with ventriloquism for incorporating American dance forms like rock'n'roll. Moreover, he suggested that new dances for the concert stage must not follow suit. In the next paragraph, I offer a brief examination of the character of dances in Indian cinema from the early twentieth century to provide context for Rajamannar's comment.[96]

Song and dance choreographies have been an integral part of Indian cinema since the first talkies in 1931 (and here I exclusively mean cinema produced in Bombay that Rajamannar seemed to be referring to).[97] Chakravorty (2017) writes that films produced in the Bombay film industry were instrumental in conceiving a new dance genre in the twentieth century, which retreated from the aesthetics exclusively associated with classicism (65).[98] She explains that since their initial appearance in cinema, a distinguishing characteristic of dance sequences has been aesthetic syncretism. Scholar Arundhati Subramaniam (2001) shares that in the formative years of film dance, choreographers drew on a range of performance genres: regional folk dance and theatre, such as raslila, nautanki, tamasha, Parsi theatre (a nineteenth-century theatrical form based on the fusion of Indian folk idioms and colonial theatre), classical Sanskrit aesthetics, and

[96] Indian cinema is the term often used to refer to the film industry that has largely developed in Bombay. The Bombay film industry, also commonly referred to as Hindi cinema, became synonymous with the Indian film industry despite the efflorescence of regional film industries across the country. For instance, the Tamil, Telugu, and Bengali film industries produce modern vernacular forms that are different from Bombay cinema. The song-and-dance sequences of Bombay/Indian cinema began to be known as Bollywood dance from the 1980s onwards.

[97] The first sound film in India, *Alam Ara* (1931), which was directed by Ardeshir Irani, successfully intermixed song and dance as central aspects of the film. However, the instance of "music-dictated movements" in a film as far back as Dadasaheb Phalke's *Lankadahana* (1917) suggests that the element of dance was by no means a stranger to the silent era (Subramaniam, 2001, 133).

[98] This is different from the case of early Tamil cinema, which according to dance scholar Hari Krishnan (2019), played an integral part om the construction of modern Bharatanatyam. Nevertheless, the emergence of heroines trained in classical dance, such as Gopi Krishna, Vyjajanthimala, Waheed Rahman, Asha Parekh, and Padmini, among others, also gave fillip to choreographies in Bombay cinema (Subramaniam, 136).

a suite of European, North and South American dances (133).[99] In the 1950s and 1960s, choreographies in Indian cinema frequently featured the waltz, rumba, samba, jive, rock'n'roll, shake, twist, and cha-cha-cha. This period produced iconic figures of dance cosmopolitanism in Indian cinema, such as Anglo-Burmese dancer-actress Helen and the emergence of a new crop of film choreographers like Sanjay Kumar, who was equally proficient in Indian and non-Indian dance forms (Chakravorty 2017, 76-77).[100]

By qualifying film dance as "imitation," Rajamannar only sees this genre as a foreign derivative, rather than celebrating its uniquely cosmopolitan form and orientation to world culture noted by Subramaniam and Chakravorty. We can assume that the model of cross-cultural creativity forwarded by film dances threatened the narratives of cultural purity the Indian state was invested in at the time in response to the recent colonial encounter and hence were viewed with deep skepticism by its agents, such as Rajamannar. As dance scholars have shown, modern Indian dancers also faced similar reservations from the state's cultural institutions due to their international and hybrid sensibilities.[101] I suggest that even though the overall objective of integrating diverse vocabularies in film dances and modern concert forms was different, how the

[99] Some of the earliest films that featured dance sequences that employed this hybrid aesthetic framework included, *Narthaki* (1940), *Chitralekha* (1940), *Rajnarthaki* (1941), and V. Shantaram's *Shakuntala* (1943), which was based on Kalidasa's *Sanskrit* drama (Chakravorty 2017, 72-73).

[100] For instance, Helen's famous dance in the film *Howrah Bridge* (1958), "Mera Naam Chinchinchu" (My name is Chinchinchu), constituted a medley of different Western dances, especially from the Swing Era in the United States, choreographed by Surya Kumar (Chakravorty 2017, 77). Kumar belonged to a group of Bombay-based choreographers, including Krishna Kumar and P.L. Raj (Subramaniam, 136).

[101] Relevant to this discussion is that Uday Shankar is known to have revolutionized dancing on-screen and for linking cinematography and choreography in his 1948 film *Kalpana*. Chakravorty (2017) notes that even though *Kalpana* is not considered a typical Indian feature film, it was a noteworthy accomplishment for weaving together a tapestry of images based on various classical and folk music and dance forms (68-70). Even Subramaniam (2003) notes that some of the song and dance sequences in Indian films of the 1940s and 1950s tangentially drew aesthetic inspiration from Uday Shankar's cinematic treatment of dance and those who trained under him (136). Shankar's students like Shanti Bardhan, Sachin Shankar, and Narendra Sharma, were shortly employed as choreographers in the Bombay film industry, before moving on to become choreographers primarily for the concert stage.

SNA representatives received film dance might have had direct implications for innovations on the concert stage and vice versa.[102]

New forms were acceptable *only if* their aesthetics had legible connections to India. This is well-supported by another assertion that Rajamannar makes in the cited text. He advocated that folk dances in the subcontinent could be generative materials for choreographers of new dance forms.[103] His recommendation is not unusual, especially as one of the founding missions of the SNA and the seminar was to foster regional identity through the performing arts. Dancers innovating new forms were also expected to align with this mission. But this suggestion by Rajamannar has complex implications. On the one hand, he gives value to folk forms as a source of innovation, rather than marginalizing them as fixed and burdened with "tradition," and so encouraging artists to regard them as an essential cultural resource. On the other hand, he seems to be actively promoting the appropriation of the folk.

In addition to Rajamannar's commentary, a few artists presented lectures and recitals on new forms during the seminar. On April 3, Shrimati Tagore gave a talk entitled "Dance-drama of Tagore," in which she shared her teacher and husband's interdisciplinary approach to arts

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[102] Unlike modern or contemporary concert forms, the overall objective of integrating diverse aesthetic vocabularies in film dance sequences was to achieve commercial success (Subramaniam, 135); this convention continues with "item (dance) numbers" in Bollywood today.

[103] One of the seminar presentations was on "Dance in Films" by Vinod Chopra. He discussed the choice of the apt dance style and form for films, noting the following:

> We have a rich variety of folk and classical dances which offers a vast repertoire for any dance director, if he has the necessary perspective and imagination, to make an apt choice. Each dance style has it special appeal and merit; for instance, the Kathakali can be used successfully if the number is being designed to depict a dramatic incident. Manipuri is a style which a dance director should find very handy to use because of its lyrical quality and simplicity. Kathak or Bharatanatyam abhinaya can be used (and is being used today) very effectively for action songs, etc. Dances in these styles can be used according to the demands and needs of the story. My experience has also shown that sometimes one has to adapt the steps and movements of various classical dance forms in order to enhance the dramatic effect—which may not be possible otherwise. Sometimes one has even to create dances without any specific classical or folk base too, but all this entirely depends on the creative ability and imaginative capacity of the choreographer himself (88).

education at Shantiniketan and the process of making some of his well-known musical plays and dance compositions. She described Tagore's method of creating dance dramas: "Like a master-weaver, Rabindra Nath gathers the threads, selecting and blending rhythms and moods, dance-sequences and melodies, emotions and words, and weaves them together into a harmonious whole. Song and dance rhythms are here so interdependent that one without the other becomes meaningless" (268). Furthermore, she cited Tagore's perspective on the role of dance as follows: "The dancer takes delight in evolving new dance forms of her own rhythmic representation of ideas that offer scope to her spirit to revel in its ever-changing creations, which according to me is the proper function of the dance" (Ibid.). Shrimati Tagore explains how her mentor engaged regional and foreign performance genres at his institution and, at the same time, believed in the individual's freedom to interpret these techniques for communicating ideas and themes they found an urgency to explore.

The next day, the Indian National Theatre (INT) presented a recital, *Dekh Teri Bambai,* choreographed by Parvati Kumar, a former student of Uday Shankar. According to a production review from the time, *Dekh Teri Bambai* depicted rhythms of modern life in Bombay through an intermixing of dance, film, music, and gestures from everyday life (Awasthi [1958] 2014, 168-169). The same evening, the Little Ballet Troupe (LBT) restaged Shanti Bardhan's nationally-acclaimed choreography *Ramayana*, initially premiered in 1952.[104] Bardhan founded the dance group LBT in 1951 after severing ties from the INT. With LBT, he directed a few productions like *Roomal*, *Brij Lila*, *Ramayana*, and *Panchatantra*, until his untimely death in 1954. Based on the popular Indian epic of the same name, *Ramayana* used movement based on Rajasthani folk-

[104] Purkayastha reports that after a year-long contract with the INT, the Bardhan made the decision to retreat from mainstream political affiliations. With the support from some of this former IPTA troupe members, such as Appuni Kartha, Dashrathlal, Abani Dasgupta, and Gul Bardhan, he established the LBT in Trombay, a fishermen's village in the outskirts of Mumbai (97).

puppet theatre, a model of performance that Bardhan had grown up watching in Comilla (Rajasthan).

As I could not find a review of the performance at the seminar, I rely on Purkayastha's knowledge of the production to give my readers a sense of what attendees might have seen. For *Ramayana*, Bardhan directed his dancers to imitate the moves and rhythms of puppets instead of playing the role of puppeteers maneuvering small string puppets. To paint the aesthetic world of this production, Purkayastha (2014) notes the similarities between *Ramayana* and "the experiments of the Russian choreographer Mikhail Fokine whose *Petrouchka* (1911) for the Ballet Russes[,which] was a twentieth-century symbolist adaptation of the popular Russian folk-puppet character Petrushka" (97). Furthermore, she writes that it is not implausible that Bardhan was oblivious to this exploration, considering the puppet masks for *Ramayana* were crafted out of the cardboard boxes in which magazines from Soviet Russia arrived at his residence (97-98).

Ramayana is celebrated for its concluding scene that portrays the battle between Rama and Ravana "with a dramatic musical score and choreography rich in movement patterns and group formations" (169). Purkayastha elucidates that by employing large puppet masks and costumes for his dancers, Bardhan castaway *abhinaya* (facial expression) and *mudra* (hand gesture) customary in Indian classical dancing. Alternatively, he focused on spatial dynamics between dancers, group choreography, and movement structures and patterns (98). While the INT performance at the seminar focused on the hustle and bustle of city life, the LBT performance explored mythological themes. Still, both showcased the intermedial and choreographic capacities of Indian modern dancers.

On April 5, 1958, Shanti Bardhan's peer and widow, Gul Bardhan, reflected on the former's career in her lecture called "Indian Ballet," alternatively titled "The Art and Work of

Shanti Bardhan" in the 2013 reprint of the same text. In an excerpt from Gul Bardhan's paper, we get a sense of the similarity between what Tagore and Shanti Bardhan thought about the efficacy of experimentation: "Shantida realized that if new ideas were to be introduced in our conception of Indian dancing, if new forms had to be created and new techniques evolved, experimentation was absolutely necessary" (279). To illustrate this point, she emphasized how Shanti Bardhan tellingly combined folk melodies and simple movements to give poignancy to the messages in his productions like *Bhooka Hai Bengal*. Notwithstanding, she noted that knowledge of classical forms guided Shanti Bardhan while structuring his modern dance compositions.

Sachin Shankar presented on the same panel as Gul Bardhan, offering his insights on "Modern Ballet Production." Based on an analysis of his teacher, Uday Shankar, Sachin Shankar proposed five main aesthetic criteria to distinguish the subject of his paper. He delineated that (1) modern ballet displays universal content that appeals to an all-India audience (*it had to contain pan-Indian content*), (2) it employs different presentation techniques, including stagecraft, décor, choreography, and lighting that comply with norms of verisimilitude (*it engaged with Western staging and production tools drawn from the tradition of theatrical realism*), (3) music plays a secondary role in modern Indian ballet; however, a modern dancer uses music to establish situations, characters, or an underlying mood of the ballet (*it selectively deployed music to match the intent of the choreography*), (4) modern Indian ballet "is more or less" improvised compared to orthodox dance styles and hence relies on the choreographer's "full initiative and imagination," (*it was based on structured improvisation and tied to the notion of individual self-expression and authorship*) (5) an artist devoted to the medium of modern Indian ballet commits to expressing contemporary social issues through a dialogue with literature, history, sociology,

and liberal education (*it was conversant with the issues of the modern world*) (Shankar [1958] 2013, 291-292, italics mine).

Mrinalini Sarabhai, who was also featured in the same panel as Gul Bardhan and Sachin Shankar, had a different take on creating new forms in the Indian context. Interestingly, Sarabahi performed in Rabindranath Tagore's dance dramas at the start of her career, even though she eventually made a big name for herself in the classical dance world as a performer of Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, and Mohiniattam.[105] In her paper on "Modern Composition in Traditional Form," which is retitled "Traditional Concepts and New Forms" in the 2013 reprint of the seminar proceedings, Sarabhai proposed that "The creation of any new art form…can only be on the firm foundation of tried techniques," explaining that "We can only approach new thoughts if we have reverence and knowledge of what has gone before, for without entering the inner spirit of our conventions, we cannot add our own vision and imagination" (294). She clarified what she meant by "tried techniques" and "conventions": dances considered to be classical. In Sarabhai's opinion, "worthwhile experiments" in Indian dance could only be executed "by a highly selected group of artists already renowned and accepted fully in classical environments" (297). To summarize her words, it was only possible for an artist to yield new dances once they gained a deep understanding of classical dance traditions.

Moreover, Sarabhai articulated that individual creativity has directly contributed to the "invention of tradition," by which she meant the modern contrivance of classical dance.[106] She

[105] Mrinalini Sarabhai served on the frontlines of inventing of Indian classical dance, and furthered this project through her institution, Darpana Academy of Performing Arts, which she founded in 1949. Interestingly, Sarabhai studied at Shantiniketan under Rabindranath Tagore in her formative years. She then went on to learn Bharatanatyam from Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai, Mohiniattam from Kalyanikutty Amma and Kathakali from Asan Kunju Kurup.

[106] Marxist intellectuals Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) and later, Bharucha (1993), theorize that tradition is not just a "handing over" but in actuality, is invented, leading us to consider that it is the concern with the contemporary that fuels the creation of tradition.

declared that "Tradition is, after all, a blending together of what individual artists throughout the centuries have contributed and added to the dance" (295). Thus according to Sarabhai, individual expression was the basis of evolving and enriching "our heritage by adding new beauty to it" (Ibid.). Her sentiment is echoed by the Minister for Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs, Humayun Kabir, in his address during the seminar: "I have felt that the Sangeet Natak Akademi, and the other Akademis—they can create conditions where our old forms of art are continued in the sense of being re-created, in the sense of being continuously re-born, they will have served their function well" (145). In Sarabhai and Kabir's formulation, innovation of new forms and preserving traditional dances were part of the same continuum. Many other performers and scholars in the Indian dance world share this view of Sarabhai and Kabir: they consider tradition and innovation as complementary forces that ought to fuel each other rather than positioning them as oppositional categories. But to be clear, in their view, the meaning of tradition is particular: it refers to classical and folk dances.

Relatedly, what we think is "new" or "modern" in Indian dance is fraught with tensions and complications.[107] As illustrated by me previously, what is commonly known as classical dance today, is indeed a modern construct, its invention located within India's twentieth-century history. Additionally, as scholarship on classical dances has shown, the continuous infusion of the new, through dialogue and difference, has informed the very construction of these forms. Furthermore, classical dance choreographers often insist that despite their practices inheriting "a centuries-old legacy," they continue to have relevance through the contemporary themes they explore (Venkatraman 2002). For example, Bharatanatyam dancer Pratibha Prahlad says that in her opinion, "all dance is creative; all dance is contemporary. Every legitimate dancer creates all

[107] Sarkar Munsi (2008) and Purkayastha (2014) also examine the confusions and complexities of nomenclatures in the Indian dance context.

the time, even if she is typecast as a conventional, classical dancer" ("Roots of creativity," 2013).[108]

During her presentation, Sarabhai decided to discuss her 1949 production *Manushya,* which she claimed "broke away from tradition in its concept" (295). She proceeded to break down how she used the Kathakali technique to portray the different stages of a person's life along with the cycle of life and death to expose how classical dance could be used to explore contemporary issues. Similarly, in his review entitled "The Dance Seminar: A Resume of Performances," ([1958] 2014) Suresh Awasthi, who served as the SNA Secretary between 1965 and 1975, stressed that the "introduction of new themes in the current practice of any art-form can be meaningful only if artistically integrated with the art tradition" (172).

But as I have shown in this chapter, the "modern" in Indian dance also refers to the practices of Tagore, Shankar, and Bardhan (and their successors), who deployed a different modality of dance innovation. Their relationship to experimentation, individual inventiveness, and aesthetics was unlike the perspective shared by Rajamannar, Sarabhai, Kabir, and Awasthi. In his address, Kabir professed that he opposed "a quest for novelty for its own sake," a position that encourages dancers to "break away from whatever has been deep or potent in the traditions of the country" (145). In contrast, the creative process of Tagore et al. did not foreclose the possibility of breaking away from tradition. Creating new forms meant deliberately selecting, adapting, and experimenting with idioms and ideas from different movement cultures and artistic mediums that most appropriately fit their choreographic intent (including reflecting on contemporary issues), an approach which often did not align with the interests of dominant

[108] Prahlad further goes on to assert that "Contemporary dance in India has survived as a genre, only because classical dancers did not object to the use of 'creative and contemporary' as something different from what they practise" ("Roots of creativity," 2013).

nationalism. Thus I was not surprised to see that the opinions of Rajamannar et al. were preferred in the list of recommendations generated after the seminar.

For Rajamannar et al., the aesthetics of new dance forms needed to be tied to the history and geography of India. I could not find information about who was in charge or present when the recommendations were crafted.[109] But I speculate that the SNA perhaps collected a list of recommendations from the majority of the participants over the course of the event. Nonetheless, the opinions of Rajamannar et al. were privileged in the list of seminar recommendations, as, in my perspective, it aligned with the SNA's mission of preserving and promoting domestic heritage. In point 14[a] of "Recommendations of the Dance Seminar," the following course of action was suggested: "to preserve and systematize contemporary dance content and facilitate the future development and experimentation on proper lines, basing all innovations on traditional art material" (139). According to this resolution, dancers experimenting exclusively with traditional materials (the categories of classical and folk were specifically mentioned) were appropriate for the Indian cultural milieu. The SNA was entrusted with overseeing that creative dance content was encouraged to develop per this directive. Surveying the awards that the SNA conferred in the creative dance category over time reveals that the organization has predominantly honored choreographers who imaginatively extend classical forms to varying degrees.[110]

Those who attended the 1958 Dance Seminar reported that the event was timely.[111] Their impression was that the seminar allowed various exponents, patrons, and writers of Indian dance

[109] What I found striking in my research is that even though Uday Shankar was on the organizing committee for the seminar, I did not find any statements by him during the event (at least not in the documentation of the seminar).

[110] The awardees have included Mrinalini Sarabahi (1970), R.K. Priyagopal Sana (1980), R.K. Singhajit Singh (1984), Maya Rao (1989), Chandralekha (1991), Mallika Sarabhai (2000), Chaotombi Singh (2005), Gorima Hazarika (2006), Daksha Sheth (2009), and Navtej Johar (2014). This number is two more than the non-classical modern choreographers enlisted by me earlier.

[111] My summary is based on the impressions offered by seminar attendees Mohan Khokhar and Guru Gopinath.

to assemble and acquaint themselves with the artistic and academic work occurring in different parts of the country. At the same time, they observed some shortcomings. One attendee noted the heavy schedule, due to which they felt some papers and demonstrations had to be hastily skipped over or given scant attention and treatment. They also wished the performances were structured as lecture demonstrations so that participants could have the opportunity to get an in-depth understanding of their peers' creative processes or forms relatively little known. Despite this, they believed that the knowledge gained from the seminar would help dancers develop their respective styles in the future. Moreover, they wished that one of the takeaways from this event would be that artists in the country cooperate without any ill-feeling towards one another and work with the support of the SNA to strengthen Indian dancing for future artists and scholars.

SNA Support For New Directions in Indian Dance After the Seminar

In the years since the 1958 Dance Seminar, the SNA hosted several festivals focused on showcasing artists extending the horizons of Indian dance. From what I found in my research, these included the "National Ballet Festival" (1976, 1977), "Nrityanataka" (1985), "Navanritya Samaroh" (1986-1990), and "Nrtiyasanrachna*:* A Festival of Choreographic Works" (2007-2015). The SNA also organized special festival editions commemorating Rabindranath Tagore and Uday Shankar, such as "Rabindra Natya Samaroh" and "Uday Shankar Shatabdi Samaroh" (2001-2002), which restaged their well-known productions.[112]

I was bewildered when I learned about the National Ballet Festivals of 1976 and 1977. What did the SNA have in mind for curating these programs amid the Indian Emergency (1975-

[112] During the Uday Shankar Shatabdi Samaroh or Centenary celebrations, a series of dance festivals were arranged by the SNA in New Delhi, Chennai, and Kolkata, showcasing dancers working in the area of new directions in Indian dance. Dancers and choreographers from the new generation shared the stage with their established and senior counterparts (Kothari Ed. 2003).

1977), and how was it even possible to organize them during such an unprecedented national crisis?[113] I first heard about the ballet festivals from contemporary choreographer Bharat Sharma during our conversation in the summer of 2015. To his knowledge, these were the first SNA events in the post-Independence context that exclusively presented new works by modern dancers across India. Ever since my interview with Sharma, I attempted to locate more information about the two events, digging through the SNA archives and searching for their mention in newspaper reports from the time, but unfortunately, this information was nowhere to be found. Despite this, some of the details that Sharma could share with me during our talk were quite insightful.

The National Ballet Festivals were the vision of the then-acting Dance Secretary of the SNA, Mohan Khokhar, who planned the series to "help dance move forward" (Bharat Sharma, interview, New Delhi, July 7, 2015). Both festival editions were held in Kamani Auditorium, a prestigious cultural venue in New Delhi. Moreover, Bharat Sharma's father, Narendra Sharma, performed one of his productions, *Masks*, during the 1976 edition. The only other fact that

[113] Often evoked as the "darkest age of Indian democracy" in public memory, the Indian Emergency is a significant rupture in modern Indian history, declared by incumbent Indira Gandhi Congress government in June 1975. The motivating force for Gandhi to tender such an extraordinary act, was the 1974 Allahabad High Court proceedings which found her guilty of all charges related to misusing government machinery for election purposes. Led by Gandhian leader, Jayaprakash Narayan, opposition parties conducted nation-wide strikes and demanded that Gandhi resign immediately. However, Gandhi, in her anxiety to continue staying in power, gave herself and her son, Sanjay Gandhi, extra-constitutional authority and as a result of their tyrannical instruments, a series of illegal and unwarranted actions followed, including a compromised legal and public administration system and civil liberties and democratic rights being suspended. Kuldip Nayar narrates in *Emergency Retold* (2013) that the day after the Emergency had been declared, media outlets in the country had received instructions that news must be censored. In the eighteen months that followed, the press censorship rules remained in effect and additional forms of pressure were exerted on the media: these ranged from the withdrawal of state advertisements to income tax raids on media owners. Many journalists were arrested for protesting the Emergency or for holding views that were considered inimical to state authority.

Indira Gandhi's tenure as Prime Minister (1966-1977 and 1980-1984) relates to structural transformation of the "Congress system" that she introduced through her split with the original Congress Party in 1969. This included her decision to discontinue internal elections within the party, which resulted in the centralization of the party structure around a personalized and increasingly populist mode of leadership (Roy 2007). Francine Frankel (1978), Lloyd Rudolph and Susanne Rudolph (1987), and Stuart Corbridge and Johan Harriss (2000) have extensively written about this political period in Indian history.

Sharma could offer me was that once the Emergency was lifted and the opposition government came into power, the SNA had to shelve the plan of hosting the National Ballet Festivals altogether.[114] In the Indian Parliament, state authorities raised questions about the "wasteful expenditure" made by the institution on the festival series. This disapproving appraisal is quite striking compared to the government's claim in the 1950s when they regarded culture as an important educational tool for the nation.[115] Spending money on cultural pursuits perhaps seemed less of a priority to the incumbent government in the intervening years after the Emergency when India's social and political fabric was in shambles. The Indian dance world would have to wait several years more till the "East-West Dance Encounter" in 1984 (organized by the German cultural association Max Mueller Bhavan) to take matters forward with new directions in Indian dance. Nevertheless, the ballet festivals attest that the 1984 Dance Encounter was not the first time a cultural institution curated a national exposition on creative dance in India.

The Max Mueller Bhavan (MMB) is known to have enabled a series of cultural events in the 1980s and the 1990s that helped galvanize experimental dance discourse and practice in the subcontinent in the latter half of the twentieth century. The 1984 Encounter certainly prompted the SNA to organize its 1985 festival, Nrityanataka, which presented "imaginative inquiries in Indian dance" (Kothari and Lechner 1993). What was unique about the Encounter was that it brought Indian dancers in dialogue with their international colleagues, with whom they shared and deliberated on their aesthetic sensibilities, approaches to choreography, and ideas on innovation. The Indian dancers who participated in this event included the following individuals:

[114] The government that was formed right after the Emergency ended is often referred to the Janata Interlude (1977-1979), which was an amalgamation of opposition parties led by Morarji Desai, who had served as the Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister in Indira Gandhi's cabinet. Desai was the first non-Congress Prime Minister of India.

[115] I wonder if the move from a Congress to a Janata Dal government accounted for this difference in opinion.

Chandralekha, Kumudini Lakhia, Mrinalini Sarabhai, Mallika Sarabhai, Ileana Citaristi, Sonal Mansingh, Sucheta Bhide, Avanthi Muralikrishna, Yamini Krishnamurthy, Ritha Devi, Uttara Asha Coorlawala, Astad Deboo, Shirin Vajifdar, Chitra Sundaram, and Bharat Sharma, along with their collaborators and students ("East-West Dance Encounter (Special Issue)," 1984). My readers might notice new names on this list, signaling that innovators in Indian dance substantially grew after the 1958 Dance Seminar. This MMB event introduced a new generation of performers shaping the contemporary dance field to India and the world.

Between the 1958 Dance Seminar and the 1984 Encounter, multiple overlapping strains of new dance developed.[116] While many of the figures mentioned above collectively challenged the performance traditions they might have inherited, their departure from and adherence to tradition varied as they investigated different movement possibilities and alternative dance-making approaches. As I delineated earlier, some choreographers went on to expand the dance methods they learned from Uday Shankar. Artists like Shirin Vajifdar and Bharat Sharma drew from elements of folk, classical, and Western techniques that most appropriately fit their exploration. They made dance dramas, ballets, and solo dances that were informed by diverse sensibilities while not being imprinted by any single recognizable form.

The concern of artists like Chandralekha, Kumudini Lakhia, Ileana Citaristi, Daksha Sheth, Mrinalini Sarabhai, and Mallika Sarabhai was not to deny tradition or break away from it, but to revamp the idiom as a personalized form of creative expression. The conventions of classical dance and various physical and martial art traditions served as the foundation for these choreographers' works. They designed non-narrative group compositions and polystylistic narrative dances where the intrinsic dramatic and movement qualities of different forms

[116] My overview here of modern and contemporary dance between the 1960s and 1980s builds on the classification developed by dance scholar Uttara Asha Coorlawala (1994).

represented particular dynamics, energies, and types of characters. Then there were dancers like Astad Deboo and Uttara Asha Coorlawala, extensively trained in one or more Indian traditional movement techniques and multiple non-Indian forms. Their solo and group work was often abstract, non-linear, and multi-medial, emphasizing the relation and juxtaposition of elements and qualities of different vocabularies.

Uttara Asha Coorlawala (1994) observes that all these choreographers held some common dispositions, despite generational and aesthetic differences. They sought to subvert the tendencies of parochial nationalism and Eurocentrism indoctrinating dance production and communicated their resistance to these by traversing dominant performance models of their time, such as classical dance and Euro-American modern and postmodern dance. They engaged with international trends in art and performance while being sensitive about navigating foreign influences. Their works ranged from being mythical, socially-reactive, structure and form-based, gender-oriented to spiritual reflections. Like their early modern Indian dance predecessors, they actively sought interdisciplinary connections and dance's relationship to the contemporary experience of living (272-276).

The MMB chose to invite all these different dance-makers for the 1984 Encounter to represent the multiplicity and cultural particularity of creative dance in the country at the time.[117] Interestingly, the SNA was one of the sponsors of this conference.[118] It also co-sponsored other events facilitated by the MMB in subsequent years, such as the 1985 edition of the Dance Encounter, the 1993 "New Directions in Indian Dance" workshop, and the 2001 festival "Dance

[117] Like the MMB, the SNA's own festival series, Nrityasanrachna, included a wide-ranging program on innovative dance. For instance, the 2007 edition featured Shanti Bardhan's *Ramayana*, Narendra Sharma's *Flying Cranes* and *Antim Adhyay (The Last Chapter)*, Leela Samson's *Spanda,* Chetna Jalal's *Nava Kathak,* Navtej Johar's *Fana'a*, Astad Deboo's *Celebrations*, Manjusri Chaki-Sircar's *Aranya Amrita*, and Santosh Nair's *Game of Dice* (SNA, "Nrityasanrachna: A Festival of Choreographic Works," 2007).

[118] Narayan Menon, the then SNA Chairman served as a moderator for one of the sessions on January 29, 1984.

in India and Europe— New Directions." This participation of the SNA might gesture towards the institution's growing interest in the intercultural as a source for evolving new Indian forms. Sarkar Munsi (2008) argues that since the 1984 Encounter, "the process of using multiple classical and non-classical forms, of crossing borders to use Western and other non-Indian Eastern techniques, of building a secular, open and absorbent movement vocabulary became acceptable and laudable" to cultural actors of the Indian state (78-79). Their acceptance of interculturalism signaled a fresh attitude that sharply contrasted with the early twentieth century, when SNA authorities did not consider dance with transnational aesthetics a legitimate part of Indian culture.

The role of culture in national development began to witness a reconstitution in the 1980s. India started to pivot from a primarily socialist and protectionist economy toward global neoliberal policies that opened up channels for foreign investment and free-market capitalism.[119] Amid this transition, there was an increase in diplomatic and tourist-driven cultural programs organized by the government that hinged on the discourse of material progress and internationalism, like the "Festivals of India" (1982-1989), "Incredible !ndia" (2002), and "India Shining" (2004).[120] These multimedia campaigns reflect attempts by the state to repurpose Indian

[119] The 1990s usually mark a significant break with regard to the Indian government's submission to the free market. However, there are precursors to this moment. For instance, in the 1980s Indira Gandhi curated the Festivals of India series as a diplomatic gesture that hinged on economics, with accompanying events like "India: Your Business Partner"(O'Shea 2016, 94).

[120] Tourism became a major industry in India in the 1980s and 1990s. The Festivals of India series was a joint endeavor of Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher and was launched in 1982 in Britain The successive editions were extended to the United States, France, Soviet Union, Germany, and China (O'Shea 2016, 85-86). Incredible !ndia was launched in 2001 by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, in collaboration with an advertising media company called Oglivy and Mather. It was an aspirational multimedia tourist campaign to draw foreign investors to India. Much like the Festivals of India series, Incredible !ndia offered a compelling vision of a nation attempting to redefine its place in the world by using affective and symbolic means, such as expositions of classical dance and yoga, to advance geopolitical interests (Geary 2013, 36–61).

On similar lines, India Shining, was launched by the Bhartiya Janata Party-led coalition government in late 2003-early 2004 to showcase the significant social, economic, and technological advances made by the Indian state in the neoliberal era. Roy (2007) claims that unlike the modernizing discourses of nation-building, India Shining

cultural forms to project and brand India as a cultural, economic, and political superpower on the world stage. This might also explain the SNA's strategic support of programs that sought to crystalize Indian dance's alliance with world culture during this period, such as the ones curated by the MMB.

In a statement authored sometime in the early 2000s, the SNA acknowledged the positive influence of globalization on Indian arts:

> On one hand, we have inherited such a rich mass of tradition in this country of sub-continental dimensions the depth of which we are still trying to fathom, and, on the other hand, considerable creative energies were unleashed during the last six decades that interacted with the tradition as also with the influence from outside. In such a scenario, the Sangeet Natak Akademi is striving to ensure that its various schemes and programmes, particularly the prestigious honours that it confers, address themselves adequately to the tradition as well as its changing manifestations (SNA, "Awards & Honors").

We need to see this renewed language of the SNA to support tradition and innovation in light of India's move to neoliberalism. Dance scholar Anusha Kedhar (2020) notes that newness and innovation are valuable commodities under neoliberalism. She writes that cultivating a national culture of innovation and creativity is essential for a country's ability to compete in a global economy (32). In the late twentieth century, India was consciously attempting to eschew its past image as an impoverished "Third-World" country weighed down by tradition in favor of a modern ethos, which meant being seen as a significant innovator in the world market. In the Indian context, innovation appears to distinguish creative dance from classical, folk, tribal, and

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proclaimed modernity as an already achieved goal (200). This time too, the Indian Tourism Board hired a multinational advertising agency called Gray Worldwide, to generate publicity materials with images and texts proclaiming "resurgent India"—a phrase that has been used to describe the ascendency of a new middle class and India's global importance as the "world's largest consumer market." The other phrases that were used to project the growing importance of India in the publicity materials included: "information technology hub of the developing world," the "world leader in business process outsourcing," and the "engine of the new global economy"(164). Moreover, between 2000 and 2006, the Department of Culture was reconstituted as the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, after which it solely became the Ministry of Culture. In the "Twelfth Five-Year Plan" (2012-2017), the Indian government delineates how to harness cultural forms and activities as economically productive enterprises.

popular dance. Thus, it makes sense that Indian cultural pandits and the bureaucracy began to acknowledge the cultural capital that creative dance held, leading the SNA to curate several festivals dedicated to new dance, and recognize artists for their productive engagement with the international. "He has created a dance-theatre style which successfully assimilates Indian and Western techniques," read the citation for the SNA award Astad Deboo received in 1995 for his contributions to creative dance.[121]

Like the list of participants during the 1984 Encounter, the SNA included a diverse program on creative dance at its festivals during this period. For instance, the 2007 edition of Nrityasanrachna featured the work of choreographers associated with the early modern dance movement, like Shanti Bardhan's *Ramayana* and Narendra Sharma's *Flying Cranes* and *Antim Adhyay*. It showcased productions by choreographers innovating the classical dance language, such as Leela Samson's *Spanda*, Chetan Jalal's *Nava Kathak*, and Navtej Johar's *Fana'a*. It also presented choreographies that deployed aesthetics of Indian martial arts and dramatic structures borrowed from American modern dance, like Astad Deboo's *Celebrations* and Santosh Nair's *Game of Dice* ("Nrityasanrachna: A Festival of Choreographic Works," 2007).

We see a momentous shift from the SNA narrowly defining and benignly neglecting creative dance to a time when the institution endorses the genre as a critical indicator of India's eagerness to enter the global cultural and economic field. In the early twentieth century, the Indian state expected dance to serve as a site for integrating a sense of national cultural identity. Hence, heritage forms like classical and folk dance were privileged by the SNA. But as the above quote by the SNA suggests, with the onset of neoliberal globalization, it became necessary for

[121] Deboo also received the Padma Shri, the fourth-highest civilian award conferred by the Government of India, for his contributions to Indian dance.

the institution to demonstrate cultural innovation while maintaining tradition. Spotlighting a wide array of creative dances was a step toward this goal.

The SNA also deliberated, somewhat belatedly, how it could best patronize creative dance during this period in a scheme earmarked as "Assistance and Support to Contemporary and Experimental Work on Music, Dance and Theatre" under the ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002). While introducing the rationale for the scheme, the SNA stated: "Individual artists have been making an effort to evolve a contemporary expression and idiom of Indian dance as a distinct entity different from our traditional styles of classical dances. In the last few decades, some dedicated and gifted individuals have made notable contributions in this field and their work has been acknowledged not only in India but also abroad" (SNA, "Assistance and Support to Contemporary and Experimental Work on Music, Dance and Theatre"). The SNA also admitted that it "has done very little in terms of providing financial assistance to support the development of contemporary dance forms" (Ibid.).

The written text outlining this scheme is also the first time I noticed the SNA repeatedly using the term "contemporary." The word contemporary dance seems to have gained traction amongst Indian dancers around the 1984 Encounter.[122] By adopting this nomenclature in the official documentation of this scheme, maybe the SNA was more willing to render Indian dance as an arrived presence—an active, modern, and dynamic force—rather than being situated in a fixed and unchanging past? A few years later, in 2012, the SNA also changed the name of its award category to contemporary dance.[123]

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[122] Contemporary dance was emerging as the popular term in global dance discourse during the time of the 1984 Encounter to denote a consolidation of modern and postmodern movement practices.

[123] The SNA changed the name of its award category from "creative & experimental dance" to "contemporary dance" in 2012, when Preethi Athreya was conferred a "Yuva Puraskar" (Youth Award) (SNA, "Yuva Puraskar").

Offering some context for the scheme, the SNA recalled that the Haksar Committee Report (1990)—one of the four reports commissioned by the Indian government over the years to review the functioning and impact of its cultural bodies like the SNA—allegedly outlined a recommendation for the institution to build and sponsor an institute for training and performance in contemporary dance.[124] But the approach to assistance that the SNA delineated in the scheme contrasted with this recommendation. The SNA explained: "Given the essentially experimental, creative and individualistic nature of such work, it is better to provide support for individuals/groups rather than setting up a centralized institution with public funding" (Ibid.). The SNA adverts to contemporary dance's experimental and individualistic nature as the reason for moving away from the idea of a centralized contemporary dance institute. Its proposal seemed appropriate for a genre that celebrates aesthetic autonomy and would ideally prefer no state interference in the artistic process. This decentralized approach also gestures toward the structural reorganization of statist arts patronage that accompanied the political and economic transformations of India since the mid-1980s. After this period, there was a growing prevalence of other forms of institutional support and the regionalization of government support, with the

[124] One of the major actions of the SNA as a patron was establishing "Model Institutions" to systematize methods of "practical training in performance" (SNA Report 1959, 5-8). In the field of dance these include the Manipuri Dance Academy in Imphal (Manipur) in 1954 and the Bhartiya Kala Kendra in New Delhi, which was renamed Kathak Kendra in 1972 (Khokhar 1999, 8). Additionally, the SNA instituted "Constituent Units" to facilitate dance training like the Sattriya Kendra in Guwahati (Assam) in 2001 and Kutiyattam Kendra in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, in 2007 (SNA, "Constituent Units of Sangeet Natak Akademi"). As the cases show, the SNA focused on institutionalizing classical dance training.

While reviewing the Haksar Committee Report, I did not find a specific proposal for establishing and financing a contemporary dance institute. However, what I did find was a couple of suggestions about supporting experimental work in performing arts in Chapter 6 of the Report. In point 6.58, the review committee recommends the SNA to do more in terms of patronizing innovative and experimental work. Before this, in point 6.57, the review committee notes that "just as traditional forms need support and encouragement, genuinely creative innovations in music and dance—like music ensembles, choreography and 'creative dance'—must also be recognized and supported" (Haksar Committee Report 1990, 115).

SNA in New Delhi retreating from its role as a "centralizing and coordinating" agent for performing arts patronage (SNA Report 1953-1958, 57).[125]

As part of the scheme, the SNA identified concrete steps it would take to enable experimental performance in India: facilitating interactions and networking between choreographers, light designers, scenic designers, costume designers, music composers, conductors, and lyricists, through workshops, sponsorships, production subsidies, commissions, travel grants, and festivals (SNA, "Assistance and Support to Contemporary and Experimental Work on Music, Dance and Theatre"). However, I did not find any specific projects taken up by

[125] Cherian (2016) writes that beginning in the mid-1980s there was a comprehensible change in the government's attitude toward the three Akademies, which parallel a "rewiring of the discursive frames governing the administration of culture" (33). She examines two related moves that embody this change in attitude: (1) the institution of Zonal Cultural Centres (1985-1986) and the setting up of the Haksar Committee (1989), and (2) the placement of the Department of Culture (DoC) as the premier body in the hierarchy of cultural institutions and it being transferred from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs to the Ministry of Human Resource Development, which meant an expanded budget. Cherian interprets the relocation and budgeting of the DoC as an attempt by the government to curtail the increasing clout of the Akademies and secure "constitutionally guaranteed autonomy in their functioning" (35). According to her research, the disparity in the size of the grant to the DoC in comparison to that allocated to the Akademies further compromised their apex status. So did the establishment of the Zonal Cultural Centres (ZCCs).

A brainchild of the former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, ZCCs emerged out of two principal concerns: (1) to find institutional means through which to deal with the Sikh secessionist movement in Punjab and its impact on the nation, and (2) to develop methods that enhanced the popular access to cultural forms and galvanized distributive channels for cultural products. The zone, as Gandhi envisioned it, was "a cultural policy vehicle charged with promoting zonal culture (and in turn national culture) as an ideal form of social solidarity" in light of the political and economic crisis the country was faced with (Cherian, 38). Cherian explains that the ZCCs were established as alternatives "to earlier, post-independence conceptions of centre-state relations built on federal lines" (37). Seven ZCCs have been created till date, and they were intentionally set up in smaller, yet culturally important towns rather than the capitals of the major Indian metros; the seven ZCCs are located in Patiala, Udaipur, Nagpur, Dimapur, Thanjavur, Calcutta, and Allahabad. Another thing to note about ZCCs is that they were a consequence of the peaking interest in the commodification of culture during this time, and were meant to supplement "institutions that produced culture [like the SNA] but failed miserably at either displaying or creating markets for it" (39).

Moreover, Cherian observes that the report produced by the Haksar Committee (1990) captured the "tugs and tensions that characterize the moment of its writing, i.e., the period immediately preceding the 1991 liberalization of the Indian economy" (35). The report included a defense of cultural values and artists in the face of market interventions. But it also offered recommendations to the Akademies about adjusting to newer models of functioning that assured "no vulgar intrusion of the State, or of 'motivated politics,' in this [re: the cultural] domain" (Ibid). Cherian identifies that the report deployed "the term 'networking' to describe new modalities of/for institutional functioning" that it wanted the Akademies to adopt (36). The report suggested the Akademies to collaborate with other state bodies, ZCCs, and even entities of market finance to evolve the cultural infrastructure of the country, as opposed to operating as unilateral decision-making bodies.

the SNA that directly targeted networking and collaborative opportunities amongst experimental artists as alluded above.

What I did find, however, was evidence of the SNA providing financial assistance to contemporary dance initiatives. As part of its "Grant-in-Aid" scheme, the SNA is supposed to offer different kinds of funding to the performing arts: grants for cultural institutions, individual practitioners, and academic research and publication, along with emergency aid for artists (SNA, "Grant-in-Aid"). Contemporary dance has primarily benefited from the first two types of grants, i.e., institutional and individual grants.

The SNA claims to give money to select organizations engaged in music, dance, and drama training and the overall promotion of these fields. According to the scope of this provision, the SNA is meant to offer financial assistance on an annual basis to cultural institutions to (1) help meet their expenditure of paying salaries and stipends of teachers and students, (2) cover artists' honorariums and fees, (3) pitch-in toward rental charges and publicity expenses related to the staging of new pieces, (4) provide concessions for any project of a "specialized nature," and (5) plan and organize festivals, special events, and exhibitions (SNA, "Grants for Cultural Institutions"). The SNA also claims to provide grants to individuals who want to (1) pursue advanced practical training in dance, drama, and music under an eminent teacher or known authority or institution in the field, (2) carry out academic research on performing arts in any part of the country, and (3) undertake "original/experimental/creative work with a group" (SNA, "Project Grants to Individuals").

To discern how these propositions translated to actual practice, I examined a copy of the SNA's *Report on Financial Assistance to Individuals and Institutions for Dance* for the period between April 11, 2008 and March 31, 2018. The document contains evidence of all the grants

disbursed by the institution on a state-by-state basis. In 2013-2014 and 2015-2018, the SNA gave no funding to individuals, ensembles, or institutions dedicated to contemporary dance. In the years it offered grants to the field, support for dance troupes and curatorial institutions outweighed financing for individuals. Uttara Asha Coorlawala was the only individual to receive a grant of Rs. 2,31,000 (approx. US $3017.35) in 2011-2012 for "academic research in dance." This choice to aid institutions over individuals reflects a mindset that has existed for a long time within the SNA circles. During a conversation between Vatsyayan and Erdman on May 11, 1977, the former remarked that the Indian government is not in the business of supporting private careers. Instead, it prefers institutions (Erdman 1983, 265). At the time of this exchange, Vatsyayan was the Joint Secretary of the Department of Culture and would soon become Vice Chairman of the SNA; hence her views were representative of the government. Institution-building remained a priority for the SNA.

Returning to the 2008-2018 report, I identified that the institution primarily supported ensembles and institutions working in contemporary dance through grants for choreographies and the production of festivals and other special programs. It did not offer any financial assistance for institutions developing or imparting contemporary dance training. In 2008-2009, Yogsunder Desai's troupe India Revival Group (New Delhi) received a Rs. 3,00,000 (approx. US $3,918.64) "production grant." The Gati Dance Forum (New Delhi) received Rs. 2,00,000 (approx. US $2,612.43) for programming related to "World Dance Day" in the following year. In 2010-2011, the Artists' Introspective Movement (Bengaluru) received Rs. 10,00,000 (approx. US $13,062.13) for "Bengaluru International Arts Festival" and Anveshna Dance Theatre (New Delhi), run by Narendra Sharma's student Sangeeta Sharma, received Rs. 75,000 (approx. US $979.66) for a dance production called "Alto Rakto Keno?" The next year, the Artists'

Introspective Movement received the same amount of money for their festival, and yet again, the India Revival Group received Rs. 60,000 (approx. US $783.73) for a special program commemorating their creative director, entitled "Celebrations of 90 years of Yogsunder Desai." In 2012-2013, the Artists' Introspective Movement received financial assistance for their festival for the third time, an amount of Rs. 6,00,000 (approx. US $7,837.28). Lastly, the Gati Dance Forum (GDF) received Rs. 2,85,000 (approx. US $3,722.71) for "Ignite! Festival of Contemporary Dance" in the 2014-2015 financial year.

As this particular data suggests, the SNA only bestowed funds to collectives and institutions in New Delhi and Bengaluru, mirroring the regional bias within the SNA's General Council membership I noted toward the beginning of this chapter. The same entities were granted financial support by the SNA multiple times during the ten-year period that I investigated. This decision could imply a few different things, considering the institution did not outline any criteria in the 2008-2018 report that would explain why they chose to fund the specific bodies. Perhaps familiarity guided them over equity, or they viewed the quality of the work of the selected groups better than others, or preferred "established" contemporary dance ensembles and institutions over new ones that may not last in their perception? On researching the SNA's annual reports over the years, I found more clues suggesting that familiarity and engagement with established performing arts institutions have historically mattered to the SNA. For instance, under the Grants-in-Aid scheme, the government initially only offered financial assistance to the 43 dance institutions recognized by and affiliated with the SNA at the time of its inception. In 1964, the rules for financial aid were relaxed, which meant recognition and affiliation to the SNA were no longer deemed necessary for an institution to be eligible for a financial grant. Nonetheless, the SNA continued to repeatedly disburse financial assistance to the original 43

over the next six decades, except for an additional few here or there. It seems like the SNA applied the same biased criteria to assist institutions and ensembles in the area of contemporary dance.

Furthermore, if I was to go by what the SNA outlines in its application form for "Salary and Production Grants," I assume India Revival Group and Anveshna Dance Theatre would have received funding to cover any of the following things: salary renumeration to artists, cost of production or performance, rental for halls and rehearsals, cost of costumes, transport contingencies, or other miscellaneous expenditures (SNA, "Application Form for Financial Assistance For the Year 2021-22"). Moreover, knowing that the GDF had to seek out additional sponsors to cover its 2015 festival expenditure implies that the amount of money that the SNA offers might only partially meet the requirements of dancers and institutions to do their work. Lastly, after examining this document, I can safely say that the small number of grants that the SNA disbursed to contemporary dance between 2008 and 2018 do not even compare to the financial assistance that classical and folk dancers received. It proved that while there has been a wider acceptance of contemporary dance forms on the part of the SNA since the latter part of the twentieth century, this support does not always boil down to adequate monetary terms.

Conclusion

The SNA played a significant role in the production of contemporary dance praxis in India, even though it offered the field substantially less support than the classical forms. In the early part of the twentieth century, the SNA identified contemporary dance to justify and perpetuate the Indian state's desire for a certain veneer of cultural diversity and harmony. Yet it held a marginal position in the eyes of the SNA. The institution, at this time, invested in

developing heritage forms like classical and folk dances to foster an integrated sense of national identity post-British colonialism. Although many extant creative dancers did not subscribe to the narrow framework of heritage politics endorsed by Indian nationalism, the SNA expected that contemporary dancers in India needed to engage regional aesthetics and imaginatively enhance tradition.[126]

From the mid-1980s onwards, the SNA also began to accept choreographers interweaving local and global dance techniques, aesthetics, and choreographic approaches as a ferment for their contemporary dance explorations. The institution enabled more programs exclusively focused on contemporary dance, often collaborating with international diplomacy organizations like the MMB and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. Yet again, the SNA tied the purpose of supporting contemporary dance to the project of nationalism, albeit with a different focus. With the introduction of neoliberal reforms in the 1990s, the SNA showcased and considered assisting contemporary performance forms that foregrounded India's ability to (1) dialogue with the world with ease, and (2) articulate modernity (and even futurity) on the cultural and political-economic front. The SNA continues to piggyback on this rationale as it makes grants to contemporary dance today. But as my research revealed, the SNA's funding to the field has been inconsistent, inequitable, and insufficient.

I interpret this gap in funding as a symptom of the neoliberal logic that came to determine Indian government cultural policy after 1991. This policy dictated that the SNA withdraw from playing an apex role in patronizing the performing arts and instead extend itself to work closely

[126] I also argue that contemporary dancers have long held a shaky relationship with the SNA because many of them problematize the function of citizenship delineated by the Indian state. According to Roy (2007), the ideal citizen of postcolonial India, in marked contrast to the liberal-democratic norm of autonomous citizen, was defined in terms of dependencies upon and the abilities to produce for the nation (20). Contemporary dancers challenged this definition by centering individual creativity and critically engaging with the idea of the nation in their aesthetic productions. They hence did not sit well within state cultural structures.

with other individual or artist-led organizations and foreign, corporate, and private entities to support cultural activities in the subcontinent.[127] This partly explains why the SNA has chosen to co-sponsor initiatives created by the MMB and the GDF. The reduction of government regulation on cultural activities under neoliberalism additionally resulted in the SNA absolving itself of the responsibility for further developing the public infrastructure of performing arts. This created the conditions for organizations like the MMB and the GDF to fulfill that role and become key agents of dance production in the subcontinent. Apart from the above moment of rupture, in its overall history of operations, the SNA has been weighed down by dysfunction, which impacted its ability to fully support (contemporary) artists. My research into the SNA has led me to make similar inferences as Bharucha in his 1992 article:

> Today, if we have to talk about Akademies [re: the SNA, the Lalit Kala Akademi, and the Sahitya Kala Akademi], it would be necessary to acknowledge that they are neither 'learned societies' nor 'cultural organisations' but *bureaucracies* that are extensions of the government. 'Autonomous' in name, they have failed to disseminate and explore cultural activities in their own right, perpetuating the norms of a larger machinery (1699).

Even though the SNA laid down a discrete set of criteria for funding individuals and institutions in the performing arts, it has usually responded to "*ad hoc* situations and the banalities of an essentially… defunct [government] bureaucracy" when extending financial support (Ibid.).

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I have shown in this chapter that, for the most part, the SNA has favored contemporary dance praxis that has clear aesthetic connections to the history and geography of India, while being skeptical about dance experiments that celebrate a more open and flexible relationship with the world. Over time, the SNA started to acknowledge the latter, even though it continues to

[127] You can read more about this is in (Cherian 2016).

disproportionately indulge the former. I have also unraveled that one of the most significant ways that the SNA contributed to the formation of contemporary dance in the Indian context was by enshrining the category and defining it for the nation as a consequence, even as its definition kept shifting over time. But the contours of contemporary dance prescribed by the SNA have not always aligned with the way performers define their practice. For example, the SNA awarding custom comes across as arbitrary and contradictory. It conferred Kumudini Lakhia, who is known to have broken every rule book in Kathak, with an award in classical Kathak in 1982. Mrinalini Sarabhai, who confidently claimed space in the classical dance world, was ironically given the SNA award in creative dance in 1970. Moreover, R.K Singhajit Singh was honored with an SNA award in creative dance in 1984 and then recognized for his contributions to Bharatanatyam in 2011. These examples disclose how the SNA might have boxed in performers by a limited or inaccurate estimation of their engagement with form.

Dancer and choreographer Leela Samson weighed in on the inadequacy of dance categories in a 2014 talk delivered during her tenure as the SNA Chairperson.[128] She exclaimed:

> Categories are the bane of our existence! They lack a generosity of spirit. They are technical terms that have little to do with people. I do not wish to be called a 'classical' dancer if that title turns people away, if the very purpose of the dance is defeated, if it suggests an exclusivity that it is not me and if it is not of the people. The words 'classical' and 'contemporary' are valid English terms, imported from a Western Eurocentric viewpoint. They suggest a linear history. Do the classical, renaissance, modern or postmodern periods of different nations suggest the same thing? (Samson 2021, 227-228)

In a manner of critiquing the organization she represented at this time, Samson problematized the Western codification of performance categories that the SNA upholds. Along the lines of Sarkar Munsi's questions in "Boundaries and Beyond: Problems of Nomenclature in Indian Dance

[128] At the time of giving this talk, Samson was the SNA Chairperson and the Chief of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). Shortly after the 2014 general elections in India when the right-wing Bhartiya Janata Party formed the central government, Samson resigned from both posts: on September 2014 from the SNA and on January 2015 from the CBFC.

History" (2008), Samson wondered whether utilizing English/Western terms for art movements in the Global South is appropriate without querying the location and sensibility of practitioners of that form.

Many performers have denounced the SNA's categorization of Indian dance for failing to reflect the layered and complex character of their embodiment and explorations in dance. Dancer and choreographer Aditi Mangaldas turned down the SNA award in creative dance in 2012, stating that she saw her work as being in the field of classical Kathak. Mangaldas, who trained with Kumudini Lakhia and Birju Maharaj, explained that the award did not satisfactorily represent her life's work or acknowledge that classical dance practices evolve with the contributions of new practitioners. In a series of letters published on the dance website *Narthaki*, Mangaldas wrote:

> All my work has been in the field of Kathak, 80% of which is in the classical idiom and 20% is contemporary work, which is also strictly rooted in Kathak. Over the years, I have persevered towards preserving, making it relevant, letting it harmoniously and homogenously evolve, helping the stream of Kathak to expand and be even rejuvenating and full of energy and life…This is perhaps the right moment to introspect about what exactly is meant by 'Kathak'…Kathak is an amalgamation of a multitude of tributaries that has fed it over the centuries. To reinforce it, maybe we need to make sure that this gushing water is always rejuvenated by fresh input from today's performers ("Roses and Thorns—Turning down Sangeet Natak Akademi Award," 2013).

By turning down the award in creative dance, Mangaldas did not attempt to dismiss contemporary dance as a legitimate and distinct area of aesthetic practice.[129] Instead, the SNA categorizing her work outside of Kathak gestures toward the notion that if a performer wanders

[129] In another article titled "One step ahead, two steps behind," Mangaldas in fact expresses her great admiration for contemporary dance as a distinct field, noting the efforts of Astad Deboo, Uttara Asha Coorlawala, and Daksha Sheth in evolving a new dance idiom and vocabulary. Mangaldas communicates that she cannot claim space within the contemporary dance world like the aforementioned individuals as she is just beginning to venture into this realm. Mangaldas is known to have used her knowledge and experience of Kathak as a springboard to evolve contemporary dance vocabulary in productions like *Timeless* (2006), *Now Is* (2009), *Within* (2013), and *Inter_rupted* (2016).

away from classical dance conventions outlined many decades ago, the institution considers them to have diverged from the form completely.[130]

Mangaldas' rejection of the SNA award re-triggered a stimulating debate on what constitutes "classical" and "contemporary" dance in the Indian context. These two groups generally continue to exist in entirely separate worlds, often with little dialogue or camaraderie. The boundaries and differences between them seem pretty drawn out, despite efforts made by individual artists to generate a confluence. But as established in the chapter earlier, the classical and contemporary belong on a spectrum with ample room for "creative exchange of ideas and inquiries" (Dasani 2017). In addition, the definitions of classical and contemporary dance transform every few decades, fueled and nourished by the interventions of different performers rather than being definitive constructs. For the most part, the SNA has moved slowly to recognize new taxonomies that signal the fluidity and change within and between these fields, yet again, exposing the implications of scarcely involving artists in guiding the present and future developments of their creative practice. In my next chapters, I showcase how the MMB and the GDF elected not to replicate this patronage model to varying degrees.

[130] In the same series of letters published in *Narthaki* in 2013, Mangaldas questioned the approach to historizing Kathak practiced by the Kathak Kendra, a Constituent Unit of the SNA:

> When you say traditional, what does that mean? How far back in history do we go? The structure of the Kathak ang (re: posture, formal vocabulary), musical accompanying instruments, literature, ambience, presentation, costumes have all undergone constant evolution and refinement. Kathak has developed and grown, adapted, changed with a change in context to the community or the ambience. It has been enhanced by the relentless inputs of great artists and dancers. Each dancer, albeit from different gharanas, has constantly expanded the vocabulary of Kathak "Aharya" (re: traditional costumes and makeup) being an integral part of this change ("Roses and Thorns—Turning down Sangeet Natak Akademi Award," 2013).

Chapter 2

The Actions of the Max Mueller Bhavan: Developing Contemporary Indian Dance by Facilitating Indo-German Cultural Relations

This chapter examines how the Max Mueller Bhavan (MMB) has engaged with the field of contemporary Indian dance. The MMB (the name for Goethe-Institut in India) is a network of cultural institutions established by the Foreign Office of West Germany between the late 1950s and 1960s in different locations in the subcontinent to facilitate diplomatic relations between India and Germany.[131] In the first section, I disclose how the mission of the MMB reflects the postwar function of cultural diplomacy, which constituted: (1) establishing "peaceful" and "mutually beneficial" coalitions between countries through an exchange of cultural knowledge, and (2) "developing" the cultures of the Global South, which, I suggest, reflects a neocolonial desire to perpetuate the dominance of the Global North. The MMB programming has been shaped by these two geopolitical and ideological aims. In this section, I also delineate the administrative and financial structure of the MMB, which reveals how the institution has balanced government and creative pursuits on the one hand and German and Indian interests on the other.

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[131] The name for the Goethe-Institut in India is after the German indologist Fredrich Max Müller (1823-1900). Müller's writings on India shaped the invention and politicization of the Aryan race theory in the nineteenth century, an ideology of racial supremacy whose application to European societies culminated in the Nazi doctrine. Some of these works include *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature So Far As It Illustrates the Primitive Religion of the Brahmans* (1859); *Lectures on the Science of Language* (1862); *India, What can it Teach Us?* (1883); *Chips from a German Workshop* (1884); *Biographies of Words and the Home of the Aryas* (1888); "On Thought and Language: A Lecture Delivered Before the Philosophical Society of Glasgow" (1891); and *The Six Systems of Hindu Philosophy* (1899). The Aryan race theory popularized by Müller was also foundational to the interpretation of early Indian history, authorizing the hegemony of upper-caste Hindus. Read historian Romila Thapar (1996) for a detailed analysis of the interconnections between the Aryan race theory, caste, and religion in India. But the Goethe-Institut elides these associations with the Müller name and instead constructs the German academic as embodying a long history of encounter, benevolence, and collaborations between the two cultures, which the institution aims to advance. On its current website, the Goethe-Institut states the following: "The Goethe-Instituts in India…were named after this founder of Indology in honours of the inter-cultural sympathies and understanding he had nurtured through his saintly quest for a common Indo-European brotherhood" (Goethe-Institut, "The Goethe-Institut in India: About Max Mueller").

In contrast to the SNA, which prefers to support heritage forms, the MMB privileges contemporary art in the programs it curates and enables. In the second section of this chapter, I show that this particular focus of the MMB is associated with Germany's interest in supporting art forms that they see as indexing and producing a free, progressive, and democratic society. It is how the country has hoped to impact the world since its formation as West Germany in 1949, and even after the national reunification of West and East Germany into the Federal Republic of Germany today. And the MMB is one of the German cultural associations that was tasked with the responsibility to realize this vision. Many experimental artists in India will tell you that in the face of neglect, censorship, or lack of imagination of Indian state-funded institutions, the support of the MMB has been conducive to their explorations.

In the case of contemporary Indian dance, the MMB was a central force in galvanizing the field in the 1980s and 1990s, when India and Germany were actively cultivating political links after decades of diplomatic indifference. The MMB curated multiple conferences and workshops singularly focused on dance innovations, which introduced the country to a new generation of contemporary Indian dancers, allowed them to meditate on and evolve their practice in dialogue with their peers, and triggered critical deliberations on this subject in the academy.[132] This chapter's third and fourth sections are dedicated to analyzing two events from this time: the 1984 "East-West Dance Encounter" and the 1993 "New Directions in Indian Dance." The first event was framed as a cultural exchange between India and the West, while the second one addressed contemporary dance in the subcontinent exclusively. My examination of these events involves assessing the discursive commentaries by the MMB's representatives and

[132] The 2003 book volume *New Directions in Indian Dance,* edited by Sunil Kothari, was greatly inspired by the engagement with this subject at events curated by the MMB in the 1980s and 1990s. This book was the start of the substantial growth of literature on contemporary Indian dance.

allies, as well as the presentations offered by participating artists. These events featured choreographers approaching innovation from diverse perspectives and, for their time, were unique opportunities for contemporary Indian dancers to create community and imagine a future for their practice. But I also disclose how the MMB pushed for the development of contemporary Indian dance in line with the aesthetics, ideals, and institutionalization of Western contemporary dance.

The last section of this chapter probes the MMB's patronage of contemporary Indian dance in the twenty-first century. Over the last two decades, the organization has nurtured contemporary dance through festivals, masterclasses, residencies, and workshops that foster exchanges between Indian and German (and other Western European) choreographers. Through such programs, the West continues to inform the creative practice of contemporary dancers in India. But during this era, the MMB also pivoted toward aiding programs designed by organizations founded by contemporary dancers. In supporting these initiatives, the MMB has tended to not enforce its Western cultural agenda. Instead, it plays an auxiliary role, being led by what contemporary dancers in India determine as the needs for their field. The MMB shifted its position from being a neocolonial actor to eventually becoming a vital partner to Indian cultural institutions and artists. I deduce that this shift in the MMB's patronage toward a collaborative approach registers the changed power equations between India and Germany since the end of the Cold War and the arrival of the neoliberal era. Due to this changed role, artists have preferred the patronage of the MMB over the homegrown SNA, making it one of the most influential agencies contributing to the efflorescence of contemporary dance in the subcontinent.

Advancing Cultural Diplomacy between Germany and India: The History and Constitution of the Goethe-Institut Indien or MMB

The Foreign Ministry of West Germany (or the Federal Republic of Germany) founded the first Goethe-Institut in Munich in 1951 to implement its external cultural policy after World War II.[133] The Goethe-Institut succeeded the *Deutsche Akademie* (est. 1925), an organization dedicated to researching and disseminating German culture that eventually succumbed to aiding and abetting Nazi ideology during the Third Reich (1933-1945).[134] In contrast, the Goethe-Institut, named after the eighteenth-century German writer and statesman Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, was predicated on ideals of cultural diplomacy and cooperation. It was created with the purpose of healing Germany's international image after the fall of the Nazi regime and the Holocaust.[135]

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[133] After the Allied Powers defeated Nazi Germany in World War II in 1945, they divided the defeated nation into four "allied occupation zones" controlled by a separate power: France, the United Kingdom, the United States and the Soviet Union. But by 1949, these parts formed into two new countries: the market democracy of West Germany, officially called the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), and the Soviet-controlled, communist East Germany, officially named the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Until the reunification of West and East Germany in 1990, a year after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, the former dominated the projection and circulation of German culture abroad (cvce.eu, "The Division of Germany").

[134] When it was first established, the functions of the Germany Academy were similar to the tasks of the Goethe-Institut, i.e., the dissemination of German culture abroad and the promotion of German language. But in the Third Reich, the Academy ruined its reputation by aligning with Nazi ideology and breaking off its previous cultural relationships. In the postwar context, it was inconceivable for West Germany to maintain the original form and name of the cultural institution (Lanshina 2015, 86).

[135] The "Third Reich," often used to describe the fascist Nazi regime in Germany from 1933 to 1945, brought an end to the Weimar Republic, a parliamentary democracy established in defeated Germany after World War I. The last years of the Weimer Republic were afflicted by political deadlock and economic depression, amongst other issues. These years were also marked by leaders, who lacking a strong commitment to democracy, were willing to effectuate emergency legislation as a substitute for parliamentary consent. Following the appointment of Adolf Hitler as Chancellor on January 30, 1933, the leaders of the new government (a coalition of Nazis and German Nationalists) moved swiftly to suspend basic civil rights for all Germans. In the first months of Hitler's chancellorship, the Nazis instituted a policy of "coordination," i.e., the alignment of individuals and institutions with Nazi goals. Within six months, the Nazis either banned or coerced into "voluntary" dissolution all other political parties, including their coalition partner, the German Nationalists. Culture, the economy, education, and law all came under Nazi control. Through use of extensive propaganda, the Nazis also mobilized support from among the civil service elite by making good on electoral promises to abolish the Versailles Treaty, restore Germany to the ranks of the Great Powers, bring the nation out of depression, and squash the "communist threat."

As part of this remedy, the German Federal Foreign Office subsequently established a worldwide network of Goethe-Instituts to convey to its global audience the vital (and progressive) elements of German culture. Dieter Sattler, the head of the Arts Section of the Foreign Office, led the charge in consolidating German cultural centers in Europe, Asia, Africa, and North and South America (Lanshina 2015, 86).[136] In the first decade of the Goethe-Institut network, German foreign cultural policy primarily hinged on models of exporting and presenting the country's national culture. The Goethe-Instituts were charged with the responsibility of imparting knowledge about German culture, society, and politics unblemished by Nazi history, primarily through German language instruction (Paschalidis 2009, 279).[137] The Goethe-Institut continued to serve as the leading German cultural association abroad after the national

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In his status as the *Führer* Executive, Hitler stood outside the legal constraints of the state apparatus whenever he perceived the need to adopt policies and make decisions that he deemed necessary for "the survival of the German race." He had the final say on both domestic legislation and foreign policy. Nazi foreign policy was governed by the racist belief that Germany was biologically destined to expand eastward by military force and that an enlarged, racially superior German population should establish permanent rule in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Nazi ideology called for the elimination of "racially inferior" peoples (such as Jews and Roma) and intransigent political enemies (such as communists) from regions in which Germans lived. In the context of this ideological war, Nazi Germany and its collaborators planned and implemented the Holocaust, the mass genocide of almost six million Jews, whom the Nazi leadership considered to be the primary "racial" enemy (United States Holocaust Museum, "Third Reich").

[136] The first Goethe-Institut opened abroad in Athens in 1952. According to the 2012 *Pressemappe Jahrespressekonferenz*, today, the Goethe-Institut constitutes a global network of more than 158 institutes and 10 liaison offices in 98 countries (Goethe-Institut 2012). The fall of the Berlin Wall allowed the Goethe-Institut to extend its activities into countries in the former Eastern Bloc or GDR, with its branches opening in Dresden and Weimar in 1996 (Goethe-Institut, "History of the Goethe-Institut").

[137] This was a continuation of the approach to cultural diplomacy followed by the region in the early part of the twentieth century. Paschalidis observes that one of the first systematic elaborations of German *Auswärtige Kulturpolitik* (cultural foreign policy) was put forward by cultural historian, Karl Lamprecht at the First Congress of the Association for International Reconciliation in October 1912. Lamprecht's concept of foreign cultural policy aimed to advance Germany's international economic and political status through peaceful means, a "spiritual export of knowledge," and other undertakings, such as coordinating the operations of German business and cultural organizations in foreign lands, supporting German schools abroad, attracting foreigners to higher education institutions in Germany, arranging programmes for scholars and tours for German artists abroad, and so on (279).

reunification of Germany in 1989, and teaching the German language remains one of the institution's core functions.[138]

The first Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and the first Chancellor of West Germany, Konrad Adenauer, initiated diplomatic relations between the two countries as early as 1951, when both leaders were developing their political and economic strategies in the context of the Cold War. Developing a relationship with India was part of Adenauer's larger strategy to solidify his country's position as a critical player in the Western bloc and establish supremacy over the communist German Democratic Republic. Nehru, although a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement, was open to collaborating with a Germany liberated from fascism, as he required its economic aid to achieve his goals for industrializing India.[139] The exchange of ambassadors with India was one of the West German Foreign Office's first actions in 1951.[140]

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[138] During the period of German division, the FRG and the GDR also contended in the field of foreign cultural policy. In the 1950s and 1960s in particular, they competed for political alliances abroad in the context of the Cold War. The Herder Institute in Leipzig started its work in 1951—the same year as the founding of the Goethe-Institut—with German classes for 11 university applicants from Nigeria. In the following years, the GDR opened cultural and information centers abroad, hence facing off the Goethe-Instituts in some of the host countries. The competition for German cultural sovereignty blazed up again in 1971 despite the policy of détente when the GDR insinuated in a press campaign that the Goethe-Instituts globally were nothing more than espionage facilities operated by either the Bundesnachrichtendienst or the CIA, or even both (Goethe-Institut, "History of the Goethe-Institut).

[139] According to the historical research carried out by Rothermund (2010), when Nehru and Adenauer became the heads of state in their respective countries, they were confronted with similar problems, but the context of their actions were quite different. Their views on world politics, specifically the Cold War, also differed. After nearly two centuries of colonial rule, Nehru wanted to establish a new position for India in the world community, with the goal of wanting to industrialize the subcontinent. To achieve this goal, he opted for the Soviet style model of state planning and administration. Adenauer faced the arduous task of building the foundation of a "new" Germany after the devastation of World War II. He opted for a social market economy to organize West Germany. This meant developing strong ties with the Western bloc and warding off the threat of Soviet communism. In contrast, Nehru was drawn to the principles of Marxism and detested fascism, having seen its violent implications at close quarters during his visits to Germany in 1936 and to Spain in 1938. In light of these encounters and after 200 years of British rule in India, Nehru believed that fascism and imperialism were the main threats to the global world order, not communism.

Despite these contrasting points of view, the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Germany was important to Nehru and Adenauer. Adenauer appreciated that India had been one of the first nations to recognize the young FRG when it was formed in 1949. He was also pleased with Nehru's decision to recognize the Hallstein Doctrine, which included not accepting an invitation to visit the GDR in 1956. As receiving economic aid from West Germany was contingent upon recognizing the Hallstein Doctrine, Nehru had to hesitatingly accept the contract to receive support for steel production in India as the second Five-Year Plan ran into financial problems.

Political theorist Gregory Paschalidis (2009) writes that with the breakdown of empires between 1945 and 1989, "external cultural policy was extensively deployed for the preservation or promotion of economic and cultural ties between metropolitan and ex-colonial countries, providing an alternative, new structure of integration" (282). To justify this alternative structure of dominance, this period saw the rise of the development discourse, perpetuated by institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and various U.N. agencies.[141] The development ideology constructed industrialized nations of the Global North, which had largely chosen a capitalist system, as befitting models for societies of the Global South, with the latter increasingly framed as an "infant," dependent on assistance from the former to advance in their direction.[142] Paschalidis and anthropologist Arturo Escobar (1994) observe that despite the rhetorical flourishes of the "development mission" attached to the diplomatic practices of Western powers in this period, the retooling of external cultural policy for maintaining spheres of economic and cultural influence over formerly colonized nations was a quintessential case of neo-colonialism. The expansion of German cultural institutes in the Global South has followed this pattern through development aid and cultural, scientific, and academic exchanges. The Goethe-Instituts in India have also adhered to this practice, even though Germany, along with Italy, is one of the two major European powers with no colonial past in the subcontinent.

Moreover Nehru, who knew about the "German intellectual quest for India," was glad that he could now establish relations with a Germany liberated from fascism (Rothermund 2010, 3).

[140] The first German ambassador to India was Prof. Ernst Wilhelm Meyer, who held this post from 1952 to 1957, and according to Rothermund (2010), under his leadership, Indo-German relations flourished.

[141] To read about the institutional and ideational complex of development that emerged in the post-World War II era, see Arturo Escobar (1994), and Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard (1997). To review a discussion of how the reconfiguration of postwar international order galvanized the process of imperial withdrawal in Africa and Asia, read Neta Crawford (1993).

[142] In reality, as dependency theorists like André Gunder Frank (1978), Samir Amin (1974), Johan Galtung (1972), and Micheal Parenti (1986) argue, the lack of material and cultural resources in the Global South is a direct consequence of colonization and being overexploited by the Western Bloc.

In the early phase of the Cold War, Indian leaders begrudgingly accepted this structure of integration because, despite the ideological investment in socialism and initially recognizing that capitalism and colonialism were part of a singular system of exploitation and oppression, they realized that they needed the capital concentrated by countries of the Western bloc to advance the subcontinent's social and political transformation. Nehru's visit to West Germany in July 1956 was followed by several scientific and academic engagements between the two countries and the establishment of Goethe-Instituts in the subcontinent.[143] The Goethe-Institut has six main branches in India, founded in New Delhi (1957), Kolkata (1957), Chennai (1960), Bengaluru (1960), Pune (1961), and Mumbai (1969), which have been in operation to varying degrees over the decades.[144] These branches, synonymously called the MMB, started by providing German language training in the host cities, a service that they continue to offer today (Goethe-Institut, "Projects"). The MMB branches have also played host to several German artists throughout the years, thus exposing Indian audiences to the current trends in German cultural production. For instance, when jazz became a prime export for West Germany, the Goethe-Institut organized tours for trombonist Albert Mangelsdorf and other jazz musicians in multiple Asian countries in the 1960s and 1970s, including a showcase at the New Delhi MMB in 1975 (Ibid., "History of the Goethe-Institut").

In the post-World War II context, many countries were attempting to bring the war-weary international society back to a conciliatory path by creating "peaceful" and "mutually beneficial"

[143] The establishment of the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University in 1962, in the presence of Indian diplomat and Nehru's sister Vijayalakshmi Pandit, is another example of German interest in India during the mid-twentieth century. This was also around the time which Germany provided economic aid to India and to help build the Rourkela Steel Mill and the Indian Institute of Technology in Chennai (Rothermund 2010, 1, 5).

[144] There are also four Goethe Zentrums (Centers) in Hyderabad (2004), Coimbatore (2007), Ahmedabad (2008), and Trivandrum (2008), which work together with local German-Indian cultural institutions and exclusively impart German language training. Altogether, the Goethe-Institut has the largest international presence in India (Hampel 2017, 69).

cultural alliances.[145] Thus even as the Cold War progressed, the German Foreign Office officially expanded its external cultural policy beyond its national agenda of cultural projection to include "dialogue and partnership" (Ibid., "History of the Goethe-Institut).[146] It committed to "understanding the life of the partner" by nurturing long-term exchanges of knowledge and resources and cultivating the talents of creative individuals from its partner countries (Hampel 2017, 61). Around the late 1970s, the Goethe-Instituts worldwide, including the MMB branches, adopted this additional mission as part of their cultural activities.

Even today, much of the overall budget of the Goethe-Institut network consists of annual grants from the German Foreign Office and the German Press Office.[147] But in 1976, the German Foreign Office and the Goethe-Institut headquarters in Munich signed a general agreement on the governing status of the latter, declaring it an independent cultural organization. I view this as part of a series of measures that Germany has taken to build a cultural apparatus relatively free of government control as a corrective to the history of state authoritarianism under the Nazi regime; freedom of art is protected by law under the current German Constitution.[148]

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[145] Characteristic of this renewed trust in the cultural dimension of international relations was the origination of UNESCO as the main institution of international cultural cooperation in November 1945, a few months after the end of World War II.

[146] This shift was informed by the standards of international cultural cooperation developed by UNESCO. Ralf Dahrendorf, Parliamentary State Secretary in the German Federal Foreign Office published official guidelines for this renewed international diplomacy policy in the 1970s. Hampel shares that German sociologist Wolf Lepenies (1996) further solidified Dahrendorf's model of cultural cooperation, formulating the concept of a "culture of learning" which declares acts of learning from other cultures as the more appropriate basis for carrying out diplomatic endeavors (48, 53).

[147] The Goethe-Institut is mainly financed by the national government of Germany, with an overall budget of 366 million Euros (approx. US $384 million) at its disposal, more than half of which is generated from German language course tuition and examination fees (Goethe-Institut, "Tasks and Targets").

[148] The current German Constitution guarantees the independence of art and culture. According to Article 5, Paragraph 3 of the German Basic Law entitled "Freedom of Expression, Arts and Sciences," which delineates that arts, culture, and sciences should be free and autonomous in their context and expression ("Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany").

Since 1976, the institution claims to operate "independently and without political ties" (Goethe-Institut, "History of the Goethe-Institut"). In regard to the independence of its funding, its various worldwide branches have been able to broaden the scope of their work through self-generated income and contributions from individuals, companies, and patrons outside the sphere of the German government (Ibid., "Partners and Sponsors").[149] In regard to the independence of its administrative structure, positions in the Executive Committee of the Goethe-Institut headquarters in Munich are not filled up by career bureaucrats (Ibid., "President and Executive Committee"). The President and Secretary General posts have been held by individuals with doctorates in the humanities or social sciences, with past experience as professors and language instructors.

The Secretary General is the head of the Board of Directors that manages the content and administration of the overall organization, which also comprises individuals from the above sectors. The President is the head of Board of Trustees that is in charge of including resolutions for guidelines on the institute's work and long-term conceptual planning. The Board of Trustees includes seven members from the German education and culture industries, two representatives from the German federal government (including the Head of the Department of Culture and Communication and a member of the Federal Finance Ministry), and three employees from Goethe-Institut global chapters. The Executive Committee also relies on the counsel of ten specialized Advisory Boards to provide "expert advice" about the institution's projects in different subject areas, who meet for this purpose once a year (Ibid., "Boards").[150] The "Theatre

[149] For instance, while almost 60% per of the Institut's funding for their programming work comes from the German government, the rest of the budget for individual projects are often financed by German corporations, such as Airbus Group, Audi, BMW Group, Commerzbank, and Siemens (Lanshina, 91).

[150] The ten Advisory Boards are in the areas of Fine Arts; Cultural Education and Discourse; Film, Television, Radio, Information and Library; Committee to Goethe Medal; Literature and Translation Funding; Mobility and

and Dance" Advisory Council consists of figures representing major German dance institutions, one member from the German federal government, and one representative from the Board of Trustees. This particular financial and administrative structure has meant that the institution can balance the concerns of the German Foreign Office while also determining the orientation of its worldwide programming beyond state-sanctioned interests. This differs from the case of the SNA in that the Indian government has controlled its funding and operation, and the institution involves cultural experts who are willing or expected to serve as bureaucratic mouthpieces.

Based on my research of the MMB branches, I found that the Directors of the Cultural Programs wings are headed by Germans appointed by the Executive Committee of the Goethe-Institut flagship in Munich.[151] The Cultural Programs Directors have all been individuals with university degrees in arts and culture, often with specialized knowledge of South Asia. Some even have had a long history of arts practice. Besides the Directors, the rest of the staff has included local hires, including Program Coordinators, an Administrator of Cultural Programs, and a Communications Officer, a managerial structure that continues today.[152] From what I could gather, it seems like the presence of a more extensive Indian staff across the different MMB branches is a more recent phenomenon (say in the last 10-15 years).

Migration; Music; Music "Amateur Music and Promotion of Young Musicians;" Theatre and Dance; and Business and Industry Advisory Board (Goethe-Institut, "Boards").

[151] Most MMB branches have the following wings with their separate German Directors and Indian staff: Business Management, Cultural Programs, Information and Library, Language Courses and Examinations, Educational Services, and Administration. All the chapters are also headed by overarching Directors, who are also predominantly German.

[152] To give an example, the Cultural Programs staff of the New Delhi MMB currently includes Farah Batool and Kanika Kuthiala as Program Coordinators, Anita Singh holding the post of Administrator of Cultural Programs, and Shweta Wahi as Communications Officer, with German elect Katharina Görig heading this division (Goethe-Institut Indien, "Staff-Cultural Programmes").

Placing Germans in Director roles has amounted to them arbitrating the agenda of support, often even setting it. But the current composition of all other positions in the Cultural Programs division being held by Indians has ensured that the institution develops programs beneficial for its host cultures. Having a local staff has helped the MMB build cultural competency and maintain an intimate awareness of the context-specific needs of artists, cultural workers, and the general public. The Indian staff usually translates and coordinates between the German constituents and the interests of local artists, helping the institution build culturally-relevant programs and long-term relationships with the people from its partnering cities. There have been times when the goals of the MMB programming and the selection and sponsorship of projects based on these aims have partly depended on the personal interests of staff and management. For instance, Georg Lechner, a very influential Director in MMB history, was particularly invested in cultural programs centered around dance. Moreover, contemporary dance has been the priority for specific chapters of the MMB for several years now, even though the institution is meant to renew the focus of its program activity every four years (Hampel 2017, 71).

Fostering a Culture of Freedom and Experimentation: The MMB's Patronage for Contemporary Art

Contemporary art and new media have been the loci of the MMB's cultural programming. The MMB network has enabled a range of activities in contemporary dance, modern theatre, contemporary literature, performance art, independent film, electronic music, and graphic design (Goethe-Institut, "Culture"). The branches have hosted, curated, or financially supported exhibitions, residencies, concerts, film series, seminars, training courses,

and festivals dedicated to these mediums (Ibid., "Projects - Goethe-Institut Indien"). Some of the events curated by the MMB are more open-ended and process-driven, helping establish bridges between artists across genre and media.[153] While some of the above initiatives focus on creative production, reflection, and reception, others prioritize professional development. Moreover, certain programs have enabled exchanges between practitioners from India and Germany and others exclusively focused on Indian artists.[154]

We need to see the MMB's support for contemporary art in light of how Germany views the role of aesthetic production. In the postwar years, as part of contending with its fascist past, the (West) German state has believed that the arts are the potential site for creating a free society. This explains why Germany's spending on arts and culture continues to be the highest in the world, in addition to the fact that it has the riches to invest massively in the arts. The German government believes that its support for artistic practices embodying innovation and diverse expressions has catalyzed its progress toward becoming a modern, democratic society. Heralding contemporary art has been a way for the country to propagate this message, and enabling this field is part of how it attempts to influence the world.[155] This mission has shaped the orientation of German cultural institutions abroad, including the MMB. During my interview with the

[153] Often, the projects that the MMB launches are interdisciplinary. "Five Millions Incidents" engaged a group of actors, dancers, visual artists, filmmakers, photographers, writers, educators, and social and cultural activists, to explore the notion of art as an extension of the everyday experiences of life. Participating artists attempted to experiment with the possibilities of public space and time, to develop new forms of artistic and intellectual work, and invigorate existing art forms with new thought and content (Goethe-Institut Indien, "Five Million Incidents").

[154] The "bangaloREsidency" is a long-term collaboration between the MMB (Bengaluru) and various contemporary art and cultural spaces and partners in the city which attempts to create a generative context for German artists, including dancers, to develop work while interacting and collaborating with their Indian counterparts (Goethe-Institut Indien, "bangaloREsidency"). On the professional development front, in 2019, the MMB in Bengaluru and the MMB in Kolkata initiated a training program in dramaturgy for Indian theatre-makers (Ibid., "Using Dramaturgy").

[155] Berlin's transformation into one of the most significant global hubs for experimental arts after the national reunification in 1990 is one example of the country manifesting this belief.

Programs Coordinator of the MMB in New Delhi, Farah Batool, she shared that the various branches of the institution focus on art practices that demonstrate novelty, experimentation, and independent thought (interview, New Delhi, September 3, 2018).

In a 2014 retrospective video celebrating 50 years of the MMB network in India, prominent art critic Geeta Kapur characterizes the institution as "a hotbed of avant-garde art" in the country (Goethe-Institut Indien, "MMB and Me"). In her perspective, considering that India has lacked state-run and public institutions interested in curating experimental programs, the MMB has played a vital role by partaking in the changing art language in the country through the services it provides. In yet another moment from the above retrospective video, new media artist and curator Shuddhabrata Sengupta credits the MMB as an essential catalyst of diverse cultural processes and qualifies the climate the institution creates for artists as "free of intimidation and censorship" (Ibid.). One MMB representative shared with me that as an institution founded on the belief that art should be free of government control, it has been committed to safeguarding cultural ideas and practices that increasingly face censorship by the Indian state today.[156]

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In the following two sections of this chapter, I examine events by the MMB which played an instrumental role in revitalizing the discourse and practice of contemporary dance in the subcontinent in the latter part of the twentieth century. First, I analyze a conference called "East-West Dance Encounter" in 1984, and next, I investigate the 1993 workshop titled "New

[156] In 2019, the New Delhi and Kolkata chapters of the MMB, in collaboration with the Raqs Media Collective, produced "Five Million Incidents." This year-long series of events marked the centenary of the Declaration of the Independence of the Mind, signed by an international consortium of artists, intellectuals, and philosophers that included Rabindranath Tagore, Albert Einstein, and Romain Rolland (Goethe Institut Max Mueller Bhavan 2019, 2). While speaking to a MMB representative a year earlier, she mentioned that the institution was initiating this project and concept in light of the intellectual and imaginative challenges being faced by artists and cultural workers as a result of the wide-ranging censorship drives by the Modi administration.

Directions in Indian Dance." But before I do this, I want to lay out the nature of relations between India and Germany in the decade between these events.

After the initial spark of interest, the two countries experienced diplomatic indifference between the mid-1960s and mid-1980s due to a particular set of political and economic developments.[157] But after the West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl visited India in 1986 and Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi reciprocated in 1988 by traveling to West Germany, Indo-German relations gained new momentum. The subsequent Indian Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao, continued these efforts: Apparently, his trip to launch the "Festival of India" in Germany in 1991, just four months after assuming office, proved to be a turning point for the relationship between the two countries. Festivals of India was a cultural phenomenon of the 1980s and 1990s that enabled India to cultivate links with the global powers of the time. The series was launched in Britain in 1982 and then expanded to other regions, including the US, France, the Soviet Union, China, and Germany, and it was officially sanctioned by the governments of India and host nations. These diplomatic endeavors occurred when India started slowly moving away from a primarily socialist and protectionist economy toward adopting global neoliberal policies. The festivals were an example of the state sponsoring cultural

[157] Rothermund (2010) reports a series of political and economic reasons that resulted in this period of diplomatic indifference. After the great drought of the mid-1960s, India experienced a long period of stagnation as far as industrial growth, and this diminished the interest of German industry in India. Moreover, in the 1965 India-Pakistan War, Germany seemed to side with Pakistan. When Indira Gandhi came into power as the Indian Prime Minister, she attempted to advance the discourse on "self-reliance" propagated by Nehru when he was the head of the country. Her restrictive legislation, such as the Monopoly and Restrictive Trade Practice Act of 1969 and the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act of 1973, vastly increased the powers of the bureaucracy and stunted industrial growth. In addition to this, the Emergency imposed by her between 1975 and 1977, made German actors feel that she had endangered Indian democracy, causing them to distance from the subcontinent. India also seemed to get increasingly attached with the Soviet Union in those years, and this further hindered Indo-German friendship (6).

During this period, Rothermund notes, diplomatic relations included just a couple of peace-driven and economic missions. The activities of the German Academic Exchange Service continued throughout this period, but the number of German scholarships that were offered to Indians amounted to less than 40 per year, and the 10 scholarships that India offered to Germany were hardly utilized by Germany according to his research. While students and staff members of the South Asia Institute in Heidelberg did intensive fieldwork in India, and some Indian scholars were invited to the establishment, but according to Rothermund these activities were marginal in the larger scheme of things (6-7).

programs at this time to create an active interest in Indian aesthetic products, promote tourism, and drive up foreign investment in the country.

The 1990s saw a substantial transformation in India's international relations. The end of the Cold War with the collapse of the Soviet Union dealt a massive blow to India as, since the 1970s, it had become increasingly dependent on the former for diplomatic, economic, and military assistance. The P.V. Narasimha Rao government initiated a market-oriented reforms process in 1991 that involved, among other things, the easing of trade and foreign investment regulations and the liberalization of the financial sector. This move was related to India having to build a new relationship with the US after years of intimate relations with the Soviet Union and anti-Americanism during the Cold War era.[158] After Communist rule ended in Eastern Europe amid the revolutions of 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, Germany was reunified as a capitalist democracy, becoming a full member of the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and one of the closest allies of the US.

As part of adapting to a new international order, India sought to mediate its relationship with Germany on new grounds. According to a report from the time, during the second day of his 1991 visit to Germany, Rao attempted to convince German officials and industrialists about how his government's recent economic reforms could benefit them ("Germany's Festival of India Opens Minds and Hearts," 1991). Germans understood the potential in this paradigm shift. They chose to act on the certitude that the liberalization of India would unfurl new opportunities in trade, technology, and investments and help build the political and economic power of the German state, which was reunified just a year prior (Rana 2000, 28). This conviction of mutual

[158] The US tried to condition its financial and humanitarian aid to India by extracting promises of allegiance to its agendas during the Cold War, which India refused to do as part of its Non-Aligned position. For instance, it requested food aid in the 1960s from the US, but, given its particular position, it rejected the US deal and focused on developing the domestic agenda of the "Green Revolution" instead.

advantage led to the creation of a think tank called "Indo-German Group" in 1991, which brought together a body of eminent business leaders, academics, scientists, and cultural and media figures from both countries to consider ways to advance mutual relations (Ibid.). A couple of years later, in 1993, the German Bundestag published the "Asia Concept" policy paper, calling upon German politicians and companies to take into account the economic and political power of India in the future and re-enliven science, technology, security, educational, and cultural cooperation with the subcontinent (Ibid.). Against this backdrop, the MMB enabled several colloquia of note in the subcontinent that addressed the contemporary dance field, two of which I analyze below.

A Dialogue on Dance Innovation: The 1984 "East-West Dance Encounter"

Between January 22-29, 1984, the MMB hosted the "East-West Dance Encounter," a program that proved formative for Indian dance innovators at the time. It was initiated by the institution's then Director, Georg Lechner, who occupied leading positions in the Goethe-Institut for over forty years, twenty of which he spent in India, serving Mumbai, New Delhi, and Kolkata branches. It was the second in a series of cultural, scientific, and academic exchanges between 1983 and 1986 organized by him amidst the rejuvenation of Indo-German diplomatic relations after a period of benign neglect.[159] At this point, India was still strongly allied with the Soviet Union, so, interestingly, the MMB, as a representative of the West German state on the opposite side of the Cold War, initiated this event. Lechner described the initiative as follows: "[A] series of East-West dialogues involving authors, composers, musicians, theatre experts, choreographers, dancers, painters, sculptors, philosophers, and scientists, who are invited to

[159] The Music Encounter occurred 1983, the Philosophy Encounter happened in 1985, and the Theatre Encounter took place in 1986 (NCPA 1993).

participate in an inquiry into the possibilities of creative work and thought today, drawing from Indian and Western sources" (Lechner 2004, 92). The intention was to cultivate an exchange between artists and academics from various disciplinary backgrounds to explore the potential of creative-intellectual work between the two geographical regions, and help build a sense of connection amongst cultural workers across nations. The purpose of this series exemplifies the activities that transborder agents like the MMB were involved in to keep the Cold War from turning into a hot war by striving to create conducive environments for improving East-West relations. Of course, in the case of the Encounter, India was synonymous with the East.

The 1984 Dance Encounter took place in Mumbai at the National Center for the Performing Arts (NCPA), one of India's prominent cultural venues instituted in 1969, with a long history of showcasing traditional and experimental performances.[160] Lechner invited the NCPA Vice Chairman at the time, Jamshed J. Bhabha, to serve as the creative consultant for the event. As I noted earlier in this chapter, involving a local cultural producer has been part of the MMB's operation strategy. Engaging Bhabha was a way for Lechner to validate the legitimacy of a foreign institution intervening in the Indian context while also ensuring that a local cultural expert could inform the framing of an event on Indian dance. But the involvement of Bhabha, an elite figure whose family had played a central role in the building of modern India, was no coincidence.[161] Bhabha had founded the NCPA, intending to build a world-class art and cultural

[160] Established in 1969, the NCPA is claims to be committed to preserve and promote India's rich and vibrant artistic heritage in the fields of music, dance, theatre, film, literature, and photography, as well as present new and innovative work by Indian and international artists from a diverse range of genres including drama, contemporary dance, orchestral concerts, opera, jazz, and chamber music. Today, the NCPA hosts more than 700 events each year, making it India's largest and most holistic performing arts centre ("Introduction to National Centre for the Performing Arts").

[161] His father, Jamshed J. Bhabha, a founding director of Tata Institute of Fundamental Research and Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, is colloquially known as the "Father of the Indian nuclear program." He was appointed by Nehru to design India's nuclear weapons' technology.

institution. Thus the NCPA was an ideal location to host an international encounter on contemporary dance.

Along with the SNA, the co-sponsors of the Dance Encounter included diplomatic and philanthropic organizations like the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), the Alliance Française, the British Council, and the Time and Talents Club (*NCPA Quarterly Journal* 1984, front matter).[162] The presence of state institutions like the SNA and the ICCR (a body established by the Indian government in 1950 to carry out its foreign cultural policy) holds importance. It signals their interest in being associated with a conversation on innovation and internationalism in dance because it could showcase India as a modern and dynamic force, ready to play an active role on the global stage during this critical historical juncture. But it makes me wonder that if the SNA, at this time, was so invested in India's image as a modern global force, why didn't it emulate the MMB by creating similar forums for contemporary Indian dance, instead of just co-sponsoring its efforts? Did the SNA and the Indian government then intend to "outsource" the responsibility of fostering contemporary dance to others while they focused primarily on heritage forms?

The Dance Encounter was unique, as it brought together Indian dancers and their global counterparts for a focused conversation around the subject of innovation. To my knowledge, this might have been the first event of its kind in India. The SNA Dance Seminar of 1958 included presentations on this matter, but it was among the many deliberated during the program and took up a very small part of the agenda. The National Ballet Festivals organized by the SNA ten years

[162] The Time and Talents Club was a Parsi-owned philanthropic organization. The Parsis, whose name means "Persians" are descended from Persian Zoroastrians who emigrated to India (chiefly Mumbai) to avoid religious persecution by Muslims almost 1300 years ago. Parsis played a significant role in building modern India. The Parsi community adapted swiftly to British colonial rule, and its merchant class furnished connections with India's diverse communities. After independence, they came to occupy key roles in trade, industry, and science. Parsi trusts bankrolled affordable housing projects and scholarships, and founded important cultural institutions like the NCPA and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Kumar and Mashal 2021).

prior did not include an international scope. The Dance Encounter spotlighted a new assemblage of innovators in Indian, European, and North American performance with diverse approaches to dance-making.

Lechner brought in 29 individuals from India, Germany, France, the UK, and North America to participate in the event. The list included dance choreographers, their collaborators, and performance critics.[163] The number of participants tells me right off the bat that the focus of the event was depth of conversation rather than packing in breadth like at the 1958 SNA seminar. That did not mean that the MMB abandoned variety. The Indian dance contingent who participated in the closed sessions included practitioners from the states of Gujarat and Odisha, the cites of Delhi, Chennai, Mumbai, and a few artists from the diaspora in the US and the UK.[164] A couple of them were also foreigners practicing Indian dance in the subcontinent. The decision to include Indian performers from the diaspora and non-Indian practitioners of Indian forms seems connected to the rationale of having conversations about the intercultural and the international while deliberating about dance innovation. While some of the invitees are today recognized as well-known figures of the contemporary dance movement in India, they were still developing their styles at the time of the Dance Encounter. For many, such as Chandralekha, Uttara Asha Coorlawala, and Astad Deboo, the Dance Encounter became a reason for their future visibility as noteworthy names associated with the field. Most artists in this group were operating ostensibly within the domain of traditional forms, either discovering new aspects of

[163] The critics in attendance included Sunil Kothari, Sadanand Menon, Anne-Marie Gaston, and Shanta Serbjeet Singh, out of whom a couple presented during the daytime discussion sessions (*NCPA Quarterly Journal* 1984, 1-4). For instance, Kothari offered a talk on how Indian movement forms and themes have informed Western concert dance since the nineteenth century (32).

[164] To remind my readers, the list of Indian dancers included Chandralekha, Kumudini Lakhia, Mrinalini Sarabhai, Ileana Citaristi, Sonal Mansingh, Sharon Lowen, Sucheta Bhide, Avanthi Muralikrishna, Yamini Krishnamurthy, Ritha Devi, Uttara Asha Coorlawala, Astad Deboo, Chitra Sundaram, and Bharat Sharma (Ibid.).

Bharatanatyam, Odissi, Manipuri, Kuchipudi, and Kathak or redeeming from oblivion earlier forgotten or distorted dance elements within these forms. A handful of practitioners were venturing into the dialogue between Indian and Western techniques. The international participants were self-identified modern and postmodern dance choreographers from countries that were allies of West Germany during the Cold War and made up the Western bloc.[165] It is why the cultural embassies of France and the UK partnered with the event.

What I found intriguing while reading Bhabha and Lechner's opening remarks during the Dance Encounter was how they framed the relationship between India and the West. While introducing the Indian dance scene at the time, the two made the following observation: "a certain openness to innovations, no doubt, an inevitable result of the constant contact with the West, is discernible among dancers of the present generation" (*NCPA Quarterly Journal* 1984, 5). They consider a regular interaction with the West as a compelling reason for motivating Indian dancers to move in a contemporary direction, which assumes the West as the origin point of modernity. In another moment from the event, Lechner declared that India "encountering" the West was necessary because of the "lack of a competitive and challenging local dance scene favouring experimentation" (Lechner 1984, 43).[166] I wonder whether the Indian contingent was frustrated or angry to hear such a chauvinistic and erroneous comment from a foreigner?

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[165] The list of international performers included French choreographers Dominique Bagouet, Elisabeth Mauger, and Andréine Bel, as well as French composer, Igor Wakhévitch, German *Tanztheater* exponents Gerhard Bohner and Susanne Linke, Italian choreographer Patrizia Cerroni, American choreographer Carmen DeLavallade, and British dancer Stephen Long. The only international scholar invited for the Encounter was German scholar Rolf Garske, who offered a presentation titled "Illustrated Talk on the Contemporary German Dance Scene."

[166] However, some participating artists, like Chandralekha, did not accept this viewpoint assumed by the event organizers. During her session at the Dance Encounter, she asserted that change in dance does not require "going West." Instead, she advocated for the necessity of finding new directions from within the Indian movement and aesthetic traditions.

I evaluate the above statements through the prism of development ideology that became globally hegemonic during the Cold War. External cultural policy during this time was utilized by Western Europe and North America to realize a new structure of geopolitical integration based on the notion of "development." According to this discourse, as institutionalized by these regions, postcolonial societies in the Global South, like India, were characterized as lacking prosperity across the board and needing aid. Scholars like David Ludden (1992) and Partha Chatterjee (1993) argue that this particular discourse of development drew upon colonial registers of historicist thought and the accompanying dichotomies of advanced and primitive societies. It was based on an evolutionary schema that assumes the West as "civilized" and the non-West as "backward." As per this hierarchical classification, the latter can only achieve modernity—across culture, politics, society, and economics—through the normative and material intervention of the former, assumed to be at the pinnacle of progress.

This kind of thinking likely undergirded the views held by Lechner, as captured in his two declarations: (1) that Indian dance has witnessed a move in the contemporary direction due to its exposure to the West, and (2) that Indian dancers require an encounter with the West to further develop in this area. In my view, Lechner needed to apply this development logic to legitimize the intervention of the organization he represented, as well as the presence of the British and French cultural institutes at the event. Perpetuating this rhetoric was a way for the West to preserve arenas of economic and cultural influence in the non-West, which exemplifies a classic case of neocolonialism. It is also essential to understand why Bhabha might have partaken in this discourse. As head of the NCPA and a co-organizer of the event, we can see Bhabha as representing the cultural stakes of India at the institutional level. India, since the 1950s, had actively participated in the structures of development, considering it paramount to

becoming a modern nation.[167] Despite the problematic assumptions grounding development discourse, promoting it meant maintaining a strategic alliance with the West to achieve the socio-political and economic advancements India hoped for in the 1980s. Thus perhaps from Bhabha's vantage point, the contemporaneity of Indian dance was embedded within this dynamic of progress and internationalism.

Bhabha and Lechner also put forward the structure for the event in their introductory address: "to create a forum for a meeting of minds and exchange of information, where the respective artistic basic concepts, dance styles and work modes pertaining to India and the West will be analyzed in depth" (Ibid., 7). To galvanize a debate and dialogue about forms, theories, and experiments in Indian and Western performance traditions, Bhabha and Lechner formatted the event in the following way. A major component of the Dance Encounter included daytime sessions, with participants offering lecture demonstrations and academic presentations. On most days, daytime sessions were followed by evening performances at the NCPA's Tata Theatre and Little Theatre.[168] Additionally, there were film screenings that introduced the gathering to exponents and works that had paved the way for dance innovations in India and the West.[169] The idea was that Encounter participants had the chance to partake in a multi-modal exchange of information about the history and current state of dance innovations in both regions. Admission

[167] Sangeeta Kamat's 2002 book *Development Hegemony* analyzes the structuring effect of development ideologies on the field of postcolonial Indian politics, both during the time of state planning in the early twentieth century and economic liberalization (which Kamat links with the "NGO-ization of civil society" in India).

[168] There was a performance showcase of "Contemporary Western Dance" by Susanne Linke on January 22, Carmen Delavallade on January 25, Gerhard Bohner on January 27, Elizabeth Mauger, Stephen Long, and Patrizia Cerroni on January 29. Yamini Krishnamurthy, Chitra Sundaram, and Sucheta Bhide performed "Bharatanatyam" on January 22, 25, and 26, respectively. Sonal Mansingh performed "Odissi" on January 23. The recital program also included performances of "East-West Dance Forms" by Astad Deboo on January 23, Uttara Asha Coorlawala on January 26, and Ritha Devi on January 29. Chandralekha and Kumudini Lakhia performed under the category of "Group Choreography" on January 27 and 28, respectively ("East-West Dance Encounter Recital Program," 1984).

[169] The list of screenings included *Pas de Deux* (1962), *Ballet Adagio* (1972), *Kalpana* (1948), excerpts of *Maya Darpana* (1972) and *Shakuntala,* and *Bala* (1976) (*NCPA Quarterly Journal* 1984, 38).

to the daytime sessions was restricted to participants and invited observers who many believed to be part of Lechner's "inner circle," but the performances were open to the public (Shankar Menon 1984).

Including lecture demonstrations as part of the schedule was novel. As my readers might remember, this was a feature that artists wished would have been part of the 1958 SNA gathering. In a 2018 conversation with Ileana Citaristi, one of the invited dancers at the Encounter, she noted that the daytime sessions were very productive. For many like her, it was a unique opportunity to talk about their creative process, showcase excerpts from works in development, and receive feedback from their peers in an intimate setting. She also enthusiastically recounted that after her daytime session, she had a chance to participate in a playful exercise with Bharat Sharma, Sharon Lowen, and Susanne Linke. All four improvised a movement score based on the sound of sea recorded by Citaristi near Konarak temple (in Odisha), bringing their different aesthetic sensibilities to bear.[170] Lastly, Citaristi shared that by adding a performance component to the Encounter, Lechner's interest was to provide the Indian public access to new experiments in Indian dance and international dance currents (interview, Bhubaneswar, August 29, 2018).

The lecture demonstrations and academic presentations generated stimulating deliberations on innovation in Indian dance. According to a report published in the June 1984 issue of the *NCPA Quarterly Journal*, the Indian contingent shared a variety of ideas and

[170] There is a mention of this moment from the Encounter in the documentation of this event in the June 1984 issue of the *NCPA Quarterly Journal*. The text mentions that during this improvisation exercise, Lowen emphasized the permanence of the waves through unceasing repetitive movements. To various degrees, Sharma and Linke played around with forever-changing movement patterns to capture the ebb and flow of the sea and the crashing of waves against the shoreline. Citaristi chose a middle ground, alternating between the movement qualities her peers were exploring (30).

approaches on contemporary dance during the daytime sessions; I recount and analyze a select few below.

Lechner commenced the first morning session on January 23 by posing the following guiding questions:

> Does Indian dance feel the need for developing choreography to express new themes? Is it meaningful in the Indian context? Is it being done professionally or is it just an imitative process? What does it mean to be open to new cultures, or stepping out of one's culture into another? (9).

Lechner wanted dancers to probe the nature and relevance of experimentation in Indian dance. As the representative of an institution dedicated to cross-cultural mediation, it made sense that he involved this specific subject as a springboard for deliberating pathways for generating new choreography. The presentations by Uttara Asha Coorlawala, Bharat Sharma, and Astad Deboo were dedicated to this theme. During her January 24 session, Coorlawala discussed how, in her work, she juxtaposes the way relations between movement and space are organized in Bharatanatyam, *Hatha* Yoga, and American modern dance (specifically the Graham technique). She also performed *Winds of Shiva*, a piece she created in collaboration with French musician Igor Wakhévitch. A striking piece of information I found about this production was that Lechner commissioned it for the Encounter, which tells me that he purposely wanted to present a concrete example of how Indian dancers could mobilize international cooperation to produce new choreography. During his session on the same day, Bharat Sharma disclosed that "Even though [he] began training in some Indian styles, such as Chhau and Kathakali, [he] only found [his] moorings outside the classical framework and more into the kind of free movement offered by Western-style modern dance" (*NCPA* 1984, 19). But he credited his readiness to receive intensive training at American modern dance institutions to his formative experiences learning

with modern Indian dancer Narendra Sharma, who would encourage students "to improvise and create freely in class" (Ibid.).[171]

The next day, on January 25, Astad Deboo narrated significant milestones within his dance journey that have informed his distinct movement language. Deboo traced his training in Kathak, study of modern dance at the School of Contemporary Dance (London), and immersion in the Kathakali technique under the guidance of eminent exponent of the form, K.C. Panicker. Deboo also referred to his more recent work with Pina Bausch, the Wuppertal Dance Theatre (Germany), and Pilobolus, an American dance company. He additionally shared that watching a show by the American modern dance company, Murray Louis Dance Group, inspired him to explore the immediacy of the performative moment, the flow and fluidity of movement, and issues and themes of contemporary relevance in his dancing. To offer an example of how he amalgamates his heterogenous dance encounters in his choreographies, Deboo talked about incorporating the focused attention given to facial expressions in Kathakali *abhinaya* with the modern dance principle of moving the whole body as a singular unit.[172] Perhaps Lechner chose these three figures to be part of the Encounter for their specific engagements with the modern and postmodern dance traditions from North America, West Germany, and the UK. It was his way of displaying the productive effects of interweaving aesthetics, movement principles, and choreographic approaches developed in these regions of the world to create new Indian forms.

The Dance Encounter also included artists who were adapting and translating traditional grammars and principles to demonstrate the formal possibilities of modern Indian choreography.

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[171] In the later 1970s, Bharat Sharma received a scholarship to study dance at Jacob's Pillow at Massachusetts and later the Asian Cultural Council's grant to study dance in the US. This equipped him to study with Hanya Holm, Alwin Nikolais, and Murray Louis (Ibid.).

[172] *Abhinaya* constitutes a technical component of Indian classical dance. It includes expressive choreography, focusing on facial expressions, narratives, and representations. This part of the technique emphasizes *bhava* (the emotional state embodied by the performer) and *rasa* (the essence/atmosphere created by the performance event).

To explain the reasoning underlying this inclusion, Lechner clarified: "We are not saying that the old traditions should be relegated. Side by side is the evolution of new experiences; this is what the whole gathering should address" (*NCPA* 1984, 10). Working with tradition was a valid approach toward innovation in his perspective. But he additionally wanted dancers to challenge the applicability of their movement paradigms in connection to the changes they encountered in society. So let us see what some of the artists shared in response.

In her January 23 session, Mrinalini Sarabhai spoke about the process of creating one of her earliest choreographic works, *Manushya*, which she also deconstructed during the 1958 Dance Seminar organized by the SNA. Rehashing some of her comments from this time, Sarabhai advocated for imaginative approaches to traditional aesthetics to narrate contemporary stories.[173] Consistent with her earlier position, she considered the contemporary to signify individual creativity within Indian classical dance. On the same day, Chandralekha shared her thoughts on generating choreography based on deriving principles from Indian classical tradition. She noted that Bharatanatyam's formal structures could be intentionally reconstructed to create dynamic relationships between body, space, and movement. She also suggested that exploring *tala* or traditional rhythmic patterns in classical Indian music can serve as a generative site for explorations with time in dance. Working during an era when she felt that art in the subcontinent was "becoming mummified, fossilized," Chandralekha declared that she was committed to revitalizing tradition (Ibid, 10).

[173] She discussed how discarding the use of traditional costumes in Kathakali and only foregrounding its rich physical language enabled her to effectively communicate the theme of her production, i.e., the cycle of life and death (*NCPA* 1984, 9).

During a daytime session on January 27, Chandralekha expanded on this declaration.[174] She put forth critiques and concepts that she believed would help imbue the classical dance scene in the subcontinent with "much-needed contemporary vitality" (Chandralekha 1984, 61). Chandralekha cautioned her fellow attendees about a set of developments in the Indian classical world that she found problematic. She denounced the insularity of the classical dance field and its unresponsiveness to the significant cultural, social, scientific, and historical changes in the modern world. She condemned the deification of dance on stage and classical dancers' resistance to contemporary progressive values. She also dispraised the cooption of classical dance by national governmental agendas, the form's commodification by the international dance circuit, and its commercialization in urban settings. Earlier in her talk, Chandralekha urged her peers to re-evaluate how the mediation of the West has also shaped India's current preoccupation with revivalism, nostalgia, purity, exclusiveness, conservation, and preservation in the dance field. She referred to how colonial structures, institutions, and values have informed the modern creation of India's traditional arts.

In addition to laying out this context, Chandralekha introduced what she prioritized as the criteria, parameters, references, and directions for making "new" or "contemporary" dance in the Indian context. She believed that "the East" did not need to use "the West" as a crutch to be "contemporary" in their expression.[175] Instead, she declared: "To me, to be 'contemporary'

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[174] The original title of Chandralekha's presentation during the Dance Encounter was "Contemporary Relevance in Classical Dance— A Personal Note." An adapted version of this note is documented in the 2003 article "Reflections on new directions in Indian dance" and is today widely circulated as the choreographer's manifesto.

[175] In fact, towards the end of her presentation Chandralekha pointed toward how contemporary dance and theatre movements in the West have taken from the "tremendously rich and powerful" conceptual foundations of classical dance, which in her opinion, suggested these forms' "formal richness and contemporaneity" (64). She lamented over performing artists in the subcontinent being oblivious to the avant-garde ideas about the body, the stage, and presentation delineated in traditional Indian aesthetic texts like the *Abhinaya Darpana* (dated between 7-10th centuries CE) .

would mean to understand and express the East in its own terms; to explore the full linkages generated by valid inter-disciplinary principles common to all arts and central to the creative concept of *rasa*" (61).[176] She countered the codification of the Indian aesthetic concept of *rasa* in the classical dances of her time and chose to interpret it as the "autonomy of the individual [to be integrated] with himself, with his society and with nature in an epoch of social fracture" (Ibid). She experienced "dance as a sensual language of beauty…a language of coordination against alienation" (Ibid.). Rustom Bharucha (1995) argues that by applying the theory of *rasa* in this way, Chandralekha foregrounded the liberational possibilities of (classical) dance, its unwavering capacity to "recharge" and regenerate human beings from the everyday mechanization and brutality of modern, industrial life (129).[177] It was also this potential of dance that according to Chandralekha "constitutes its contemporaneity" (Chandralekha 1984, 61).

Additionally, Chandralekha highlighted how her approach to choreography derived from "the principles of wholeness and relatedness that form the core of [Indian] traditional thought" (63). She explained that her engagement with art forms outside the dance sphere had nourished her choreographic experiments. While talking about how she attempted to combat the conservatism of the Indian classical dance world through one of her productions, *Navagraha*, Chandralekha noted: "Very deliberately, I pursued an inter-disciplinary approach involving leading vocalists, instrumentalists, graphic designers and film makers" (64). She spoke about

[176] *Rasa* is a central aesthetic concept explicated in Sanskrit dramatic theory. Bharata, a figure known to have authored the *Natyasastra*, describes *rasa* as the residue of an elemental human emotion like love, fear, pity, heroism or mystery, which shapes the dominant note of a dramatic piece. This dominant emotion, as received by the audience, has a distinguished quality from that which emerges from real life. According to another Sanskrit scholar, drama is a synthesis between the visual and aural arts. Drama, dance, and poetry work together to arouse a state of consciousness in the spectator which is perceived intuitively and concretely by them as *rasa* or the emotional essence (Wallace Dace 1963, 249-50).

[177] Bharucha qualifies this intervention by Chandralekha as strikingly "modern": she refuses to wholly reject the principles offered by Indian traditional thought and expression such as *rasa,* and at the same time, she reserves the right to interpret it according to her needs (Ibid.).

integrating and abstracting various iconographies and disciplines of thought in creating this choreography, drawing from *Tantric* forms, colors, symbology, the inner-outer connectivity of Yoga, and the formal structures of Bharatanatyam.[178] It is this openness to coalesce a diverse assemblage of artistic and philosophical mediums that Chandralekha encouraged her classical dance peers also to pursue.

In a similar vein as Chandralekha, on January 28, Kumudini Lakhia described feeling oppressed by Kathak's religious underpinnings and arriving at a significant crossroads in her dance journey: "I came to a stage when I wanted to divorce from Krishna" (*NCPA* 1984, 34). She explained that rather than restaging stories of Krishna—a mythic-religious figure whose stories performers centrally depict within the traditional Kathak repertoire—she chose to look outwards at society, such as representing the plight of modern women in a production like *Duvidha*.[179] She also wanted to make classical dance relevant to the intellectual problems of the time. As Lakhia presented an *abhinaya* piece and her students demonstrated some of her innovations with group choreography, the dancer exclaimed: "we must have our own laws of expression," emphasizing the importance of individual prerogative to change Kathak's vocabulary and presentation (Ibid.).[180] To this effect, Lakhia noted encouraging her students to question what they are learning, a pedagogical approach different from the one typically prioritized in a classical dance education following the *guru-shishya parampara*.[181]

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[178] *Tantra* philosophy, which Chandralekha often yielded in her choreographies, is speculated to have emerged in India around the sixth century.

[179] According to Lakhia's claim during the Encounter, she was criticized by the Kathak world for this shift.

[180] During her session, Lakhia also recounted the changes that occurred in the Kathak form over the twentieth century, describing the different influences that shaped the practice, thus proving that the subcontinent's dance tradition permitted freedom and change (*NCPA* 1984, 35).

[181] In classical dance training that follows the *guru-shishya parampara*, the transmission of knowledge is typically prescribed as uni-directional, flowing from teacher to student. It approaches students as passive containers into

Other artists wanted to maintain the customary function of the classical form in their innovation process. At her January 25 session, Bharatanatyam and Odissi dancer Sonal Mansingh advocated for the power that lay in the thematic and performance conventions of classical dance, which afforded a dancer to choreograph an esthetic experience for audiences that was distinct from the toils of their everyday life. On the same day, Sucheta Bidhe shared her process of synthesizing Bharatanatyam and Hindustani music and rhythms to construct a classical dance style for the state of Maharashtra.[182] She explained, "I am not trying to replace anything...just trying to expand the horizons, to add new dimensions to this [dance] technique which I love so much. My main objective is to bring Bharata Natyam closer to audiences in North India" (Ibid., 23). Bhide associates experimentation with devising a new classical form, and this for her meant "keeping intact" the formal Bharatanatyam technique and "maintaining the identity" of Hindustani music and its *tala*-s while also finding points of contact between the two (24-25).

According to their introductory remarks, Bhabha and Lechner had expected the trajectory of conversations during the Encounter to go as follows: "At the focal point of this inquiry may well be aggression and experiment on the side of modern Western dance; stagnation and authenticity on the side of Indian dance" (*NCPA* 1984, 7). Their ideological division between Western and Indian dance signaled and reinforced an Orientalist taxonomy that links the former with forceful action and innovation and the latter with stasis and passive adherence to tradition.

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which information is deposited by the teacher (seen as the expert), thus creating a hierarchical relationship between the two. Usually, this system does not create room for critically approaching dance learning and making.

[182] During her talk at the Encounter, Bhide referred to the research on the *Tanjavur* dance tradition initiated by Paravati Kumar, which focused on the Marathi and Hindu compositions for Bharata Natyam by the Maratha rulers of Tanjavur, like Sarfoji Mahraj and Shahji. Bhide speculated why a classical dance tradition local to Maharashtra was absent when sculptural evidence all over the Deccan implied a rich dance tradition, based on the *Natyasastra,* up to the Yadava period or at least before the start of the Mughal empire (Ibid., 23).

Indian performers showcased the active ways in which they interacted with or re-imagined tradition and an awareness of the dynamic relations they were building between Indian and Western aesthetics in their work. Some were even critical about conceding to a Western framework of modernity. There might have been some who might not have demonstrated self-reflexivity regarding unchecked or reified notions of tradition; nonetheless, they were relatively uncompromising about their chosen aesthetic visions. Despite this, the dichotomy projected by Bhabha and Lechner in their opening statements was maintained even after the event concluded.

In a comment he offered to journalist Anees Jung a few days post the Encounter in February 1984, Lechner stated that except for a few individuals, Indian dancers were not prepared to ideologically grapple with the problems of classical dance in a contemporary context. In his opinion, some dancers during the Encounter had failed to look beyond the imagined securities of this tradition. Ritha Devi, during her session, had shared her process of employing Odissi vocabulary to depict the status of women in Greek, Roman, and Jewish mythological themes. In response, Lechner stated that, "Employing traditional techniques for parallel myths is only a variation on a theme and hardly innovative" (Ibid., 31). For Lechner, dancers who did not demonstrate the propensity to question tradition, develop a critical distance from it, and evolve it to reflect on changing times, were not contemporary.

In the same interview with Jung, Lechner added that unlike their Western counterparts, Indian dancers do not enlarge upon their repertory, repeating the same compositions without any sense of self-ownership or impulse to choreograph something new (Jung 1984, 54). He continued to believe that Western dance has an exclusive right to modernity, innovation, and autonomy, and in contrast, Indian dance is comfortable being old-fashioned and conformist. Earlier in the interview, Jung had asked German choreographer Susanne Linke, one of the international

participants at the Encounter, the following question: "Are they [Indian dancers] also innovative, searching, aware?" and Linke responded: "Indians do not question…the Indian way is perhaps to accept life. They do not ask or question or change things as we do. To search for new things in creative work is not yet a need for them" (52). Like Lechner, Linke also generally characterized Indian dancers as being uncritical and resistant to change in their creative practice. She even qualified her presumption by putting forward an argument for evolutionary progress (!). In addition to being far from the truth, Lechner and Linke's statements captures the institutionalization of the Western prejudice of contemporary dance in the postwar performance world that inevitably served to perpetuate the cultural hegemony of the West and its putative position as the owner of modernity.

The perception that contemporary dance outside the Western context often seems old-fashioned is a reflection of a larger, structural, Western-centric mindset. Postcolonial studies scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty, in *Provincializing Europe, Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000), characterizes the issue as historicist thinking. He writes:

> Crudely, one might say that [historicism] was one important form that the ideology of progress or "development" took from the nineteenth century on. Historicism is what made modernity or capitalism look not simply global but rather as something that became global over time, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside of it. This "first in Europe, then elsewhere" structure of global historical time was historicist; […] It was historicism that allowed Marx to say that the "country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future." […] Historicism thus posited historical time as a measure of the cultural difference (at least in institutional development) that was assumed to exist between the West and the non-West (7).

This historicist comprehension of history as a global, single, linear progression underscores Lechner and Linke's understanding of Indian dance during the Encounter, perpetuating the hierarchical equation of the West with the contemporary (the present) and of the non-West with the past (an anachronism). There is also the suggestion that Indian dancers could become more

innovative if they developed a sense of individualism (that allowed them to question traditional communitarian norms) and an openness to exploration and change, which Lechner and Linke saw as ideals heralded by the West. As per this proposal, too, for Indian dance to be contemporary entailed a process of Westernization. As noted earlier, it was in Lechner's interest to promote Indian choreographers who were engaging with Western aesthetics to produce contemporary dance. He was not opposed to those who chose to work with Indian aesthetics exclusively but expected them to assimilate the above ideals that he assumed to be the property of the West.

Despite the asymmetries of power between "East" and "West," the 1984 Dance Encounter was undoubtedly instrumental in advancing the discourse and practice of innovative dance in India. As the above snapshots from the event show, the Indian dance contingent was able to contemplate a variety of subjects with their peers, such as choreography, dance pedagogy, and the relationship between dance and everyday life. They put forward diverse ideas, approaches, and propositions for creating new dance. Inviting exponents who experiment with and intermix Indian and international movement vocabularies as part of the Dance Encounter was one of the most important contributions of the MMB. It validated the intercultural as a generative site for pushing the boundaries of Indian dance. Of course, it suited the agenda of the MMB to showcase these forms as it helped perpetuate their narrative that interaction with the West can make Indian dance more "advanced," "sophisticated," "contemporary." But this also ended up benefiting artists. Before this event, cultural bodies of the state, including the SNA, hardly acknowledged dancers drawing on international aesthetics to innovate Indian dance. But after the Encounter, the SNA changed its position on contemporary dance of this kind, including it as part of its programs. It suited the SNA to do this because, in the time after the event, bodies representing

the Indian government were attempting to re-establish the country's position on the world stage by showcasing cultural forms that signaled India's assimilation with global culture.

Considering that the professional structures for contemporary dance in India were still relatively scant during the early 1980s, on the last day of the Dance Encounter, participants agreed on the need for more platforms through which they could deliberate on and develop their creative practice (*NCPA* 1984, 36). During this decade, the MMB continued to support innovative dance in India through similar exchanges.[183] Being recognized by a cultural institute of international stature granted the artists who participated in MMB events a certain degree of prestige. For some, it resulted in the meteoric growth of their careers. They would become known faces of contemporary Indian dance in the country and worldwide. From the 1990s onwards, however, the institution shifted away from curating events based on the polarities of the "East" and "West." As a representative of the institution explained to Hampel (2017), the MMB no longer considered this framework appropriate for structuring their endeavors (136). I think this had to do with the change in geopolitical classifications and alignments with the end of the Cold War and neoliberalism approaching.

Deliberating on the Parameters and Ecosystem of Contemporary Indian Dance: The 1993 Workshop on "New Directions in Indian Dance"

[183] In March 1985, the MMB hosted the second edition of the East-West Dance Encounter. The following November, it organized "A Dance Choreography Workshop: Possibilities for Extending Tradition" in collaboration with the NCPA and the SNA. The November workshop was also a "closed doors" program during which Indian and Western participants traded information about improvisation techniques (Ileana Citaristi, interview by Singh, Bhubaneswar, 2018). According to the information Citaristi shared with me during our conversation, some of the participants included Kumudini Lakhia, Chandralekha, Manjusri Chaki-Sircar, Lakshmi Srinivasan, K.S. Srinivasan, Sunil Kothari, Jackie Tanfall, and Susanne Linke. Citaristi shared that the new perspectives that Indian dancers gained from their dialogue with global counterparts during this workshop enabled them to break away from conditioned reflexes inculcated in their classical dance training.

In 1993, the MMB hosted the "New Directions in Indian Dance" Workshop, a vital successor of the Dance Encounter, organized by the institution to realize a different purpose for nurturing contemporary Indian dance. It was also developed by Lechner, who was still the MMB Director, and he, in turn, invited Indian dance critic Sunil Kothari to co-facilitate the event with him. It occurred between September 27-October 2 at the India International Center (IIC) in New Delhi, an institute where state officials, diplomats, policymakers, intellectuals, artists, writers, and scientists from India and around the globe have met to initiate exchange of new ideas and knowledge since 1958 (IIC, "History"). Unlike the Encounter, which hinged on an exchange of knowledge between Indian dancers and their Western counterparts, the 1993 Workshop was meant "to take stock of the last decade of innovations in Indian dance" (*New Directions in Indian Dance,* 1993; official program booklet). While reviewing the list of invitees, I noticed a sharp decline in international presence at the workshop: only one German choreographer and two Indian-American dancers were included at the event, as opposed to the ten who partook in the 1984 Encounter.[184] 15 Indian choreographers from different regions in the subcontinent, such as New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, and Thiruvananthapuram, along with their collaborators and students, made up the majority of participants.[185] Lechner also invited well-known Indian dance critics and scholars.[186] The attendees' list included individuals who had formerly

[184] As per the program booklet, the international invitees included Susanne Linke and two Indian choreographers from the diaspora: Yasmine Mehta from the US and Roger Sinha from Canada (*New Directions in Indian Dance*, 1993).

[185] The list included Aditi Mangaldas, Maya Rao, Bharat Sharma, Vishwakant Singha, Navtej Singh Johar, Astad Deboo, Uttara Asha Coorlawala, Chandralekha, Chetna Jalal, Ranjabati Sircar, Daksha Sheth and her collaborator, Australian-born musician Devissaro, American-born Bharatanatyam dancers, Justin McCarthy and Sharon Lowen, Italian-born Odissi dancer Ileana Citaristi, and French Kathak dancer Veronique Azan. Some of these individuals also came with their students and collaborators (Ibid.).

[186] The invitees list also included well-known newspaper critics of the time like Arundhati Subramanian for the *Independent,* Leela Venkatraman for *The Hindu*, Pattabhiraman, N. for *Sruti* magazine, Sadanand Menon for *Economic Times*, Shanta Serbjeet Singh for *Hindustan Times*. Independent scholars, Roshan Shahani and Rustom Bharucha were also part of the attendees list (Ibid.).

participated in the 1984 Encounter, and a large percentage of them were first-timers. Thus the MMB yet again introduced the national scene to a new set of experimentalists in Indian dance.

As per the official program booklet, the 1993 Workshop had two main, complementary goals: (1) "to present and inform about ongoing innovative work" and in doing so, (2) "to develop quality criteria and critical standards governing experimental work" (Ibid.). Part of the event's purpose was to build a contemporary Indian dance taxonomy, which explains the involvement of Kothari, an established scholar and critic of Indian dance. Lechner designed a multi-modal schedule for the 1993 Workshop to realize these two goals, which followed a similar pattern as the Encounter: it included morning sessions devoted to lectures and practical demonstrations by attending choreographers about their artistic choices and movement explorations.[187] This was followed by afternoon sessions where dancers and critics came together to productively debate the place of traditional parameters in creating contemporary dance in the Indian context. These components of the Workshop were closed to everyone but the invitees. Almost every evening, dance participants performed excerpts from their works that were open to the public. Lechner saw this part of the event as an opportunity to educate the Indian public about contemporary dance.[188]

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[187] Each day in the morning there were three demonstrations. According to the program schedule, on September 27, Astad Deboo, Chetna Jalal, and Aditi Mangaldas presented lecture demonstrations; on September 28, Chandralekha, Susanne Linke, and Maya Rao offered their choreographic explorations; on September 29, Roger Sinha, Daksha Sheth, and Ileana Citaristi shared their creative processes; on September 30, Ranjabati Sircar, Justin McCarthy, and Sharon Lowen displayed their innovations; and on October 1, Yasmine Mehta, Uttara Asha Coorlawala, and Bharat Sharma introduced their work (Ibid.).

[188] In continuation of the 1993 workshop series, the MMB also showcased several films on dances between October 4-12, including filmed versions of *Blaubart* (1977) and *Café Mueller* (1978) by Pina Bausch; *Susanne Linke in her Solos* (1992); *Sahaja* (1988), conceived and scripted by Chandralekha and directed by G. Aravindan; a filmed version of Chandralekha's *Lilavati* (1990); *Bhavantarana* (1990), a film on Odissi exponent Kelucharan Mahapatra, by Kumar Shahani; *Duet with Automobiles,* which included extracts from choreographies by British South Asian dancer Shobhana Jeyasingh; and *Subhadra* (1993), a film by Ein Lall featuring Maya Rao (Ibid.).

I focus on the criteria for experimental work in India generated by the attendees through their demonstrations and discussions during the morning and afternoon sessions. My sketch is based on the fragments of information about the event from a video recording filmed by director Ein Lall, the coverage of the program by several newspapers of the time,[189] and my interview with Ileana Citaristi, who also participated in the 1993 Workshop. Instead of being prescriptive about which directions the creation of innovative dance in India *should* take, as was his position during the Encounter, it seemed like Lechner gave the Indian participants ownership over determining the same. While reviewing documentation of the event, I noticed the relatively lesser space that Lechner took up in the mediations. Within the predetermined format that he crafted, artists got to decide what ideas they wanted to hash out about the aesthetics and politics of their practice.

This MMB event became a site for Indian participants to share and develop multiple frames for creating contemporary dance. The criteria produced during the Workshop's morning sessions, included: (1) work with the grammar of classical dance but extend its traditional content to make room for diverse representations and imaginaries,[190] (2) use traditional compositions as a structural backbone of experimental work,[191] (3) derive kinetic and

[189] Some of the articles published in 1993 that covered the event, included Ashish Mohan Khokhar's "A symposium on Indian dance sans critics" for the *Times of* India; Rajini Rajagopal's "Crossing Frontiers" for the *Indian Express*; Kavita Nagpal's "Dance and its critics" for the *Business Standard*; Kothari and Lechner's co-authored piece for the *Pioneer* called "Letters to the Editor: Dance, workshop and criticism;" Sadanand Menon's "Exploring all fresh footprints in the sand" for the *Economic Times*; Prasanna Ramaswamy's "From seeing to feeling" for *The Hindu*; and Arundhati Subramaniam's "I'd prefer to be felt more than seen" for the *Independent*.

[190] Aditi Mangaldas shared that while she intended to work with the vocabulary of Kathak, she was seeking alternatives to representations of female characters in the traditional repertoire. She wanted to move beyond the Radha-Krishna trope and explore her personal identity as a woman working within the Kathak form. She illustrated this through a movement score called *Main Kaun* (Lall 1994).

[191] Daksha Sheth performed an excerpt of *Yajna,* which is a dance-theatre piece based on an adaptation of *Rigveda* translated by Wendy O' Flaherty. The full-length version of the choreography is in three parts, mirroring the structure of a Vedic sacrifice ritual, and based on Vedic myths and chanting (Sheth 2003, 99-101).

choreographic ideas from other performance genres, physical traditions, and artistic media, from India or abroad,[192] (4) engage improvisational techniques or synthesize different principles of established movement techniques to yield a new dance language,[193] and (5) employ dance as a tool to express liberal and progressive commentary on issues of history, society, and politics.[194]

During the afternoon sessions, participants discussed the place of tradition in making new dance work. On the one hand, artists shared the need to depart from the constraints of their received classical dance training to redefine their movement capacities. On the other hand, they displayed an awareness of the tremendous wealth within the Indian tradition they could reanimate.[195] The role of narrative in contemporary Indian dance was also examined by invitees. While some called for the importance of playing with the narrative form, others advocated for repudiating narrative altogether and considered abstraction an appropriate mode to pave the way

[192] Maya Krishna Rao discussed the importance of seeking out other cultural forms and artistic disciplines to extend new directions in Indian dance (Nagpal 1993, 9). To showcase her unique performance practice, Rao showcased *Khol Do,* in which she uses Kathakali movement principles, theatrical codes of staging socio-political commentary, and an intermix of Māori ritual music and Philip Glass' composition *Glassworks*. Sheth talked about how discovering the martial art form of Chhau changer her career as a Kathak dancer and was a trigger for her early dance experiments. Roger Sinha displayed how he explores the relationality between objects and the body to express intercultural concepts in his work (Citaristi, interview by Singh, Bhubaneswar, 2018).

[193] Sinha spoke about the importance of improvisation in germinating his works (Ibid.). Ranjabati Sircar demonstrated training exercises related to *navanritya,* a methodology of formal innovation she co-developed with her artistic collaborator and mother, Manjusri Chaki-Sircar, in the 1980s (Ibid.). *Navanritya* is an eight-part system of movement groups, depending on the body's relation to space. To craft this structure, the Sircars weaved together several different sources, including Indian classical forms (like Bharatanatyam, Manipuri, Kathakali, and Odissi), postures in Indian temple structures and paintings, martial arts such as Chhau, and body positions of Yoga.

[194] Rao's production *Khol Do* is based on a short story of the same name by celebrated South Asian writer Saadat Hasan Manto, in which a father searches for his daughter amidst the horrors of the 1947 partition of the subcontinent.

[195] Mangaldas suggested that even when she opts for delving into new ideas, she cannot help but explore them through the language of Kathak that she has internalized for decades: "When one is trying to look for new directions…what happens is that tradition, which one has woken up and slept with, comes in from the backdoor" (Lall 1994). Rao described her need to continually return to Kathakali as "not just simply to get virtuosity, but to, find a new imagination in it" (Ibid.). Navtej Singh Johar explained how Bharatanatyam has informed his desire to experiment, nothing that "Bharatanatyam is where I started, but now I feel the need to let my impulse exceed [its] stylized vocabulary and play" (Ibid.).

for new interpretations of human motion and emotion.[196] Looking at the nature of these conversations makes me think that maybe Lechner chose particular participants for their ability to critically engage with their practice and demonstrate an openness to new ideas and hybrid aesthetics, which aligned with the Western project of dance modernity.

Despite the criticism Lechner received for his "closed doors" attitude from artists excluded from this program (Coorlawala 2003), the sessions were constructive for the individuals present. Coorlawala, one of the participants, shared that the atmosphere created during the Workshop allowed dancers to "openly accept and take inspiration from each other" and be more willing to contemplate and extend their practices (Lall 1994).[197] The 1993 Workshop created another occasion for dance innovators from the subcontinent to congregate, network, and piece together some semblance of community. When national bodies like the SNA were slowly warming up to contemporary Indian dance, the MMB continued to be the only institutional patron creating platforms like the 1993 Workshop that impacted the practice on a macro scale.

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[196] Rustom Bharucha advocated for an engagement with narrative that moves beyond the mimetic and representational aspects of classical dance, i.e., using facial expressions and *hasta mudras* (hand gestures) to dramatize the meaning of a sung poetic text. He vocalized his aversion to performers who deploy classical dance vocabulary "to tell stories in very predictable, literal ways" (Ibid.). He alternatively implied that the formal quality of experience through time that performance engenders is inherently narrative, and thus there is no need for dance to translate a story verbatim. Chandralekha proposed life experience as the potential form of narrative in dance performance: "For me, there is a need for a narrative. There is no need for a story [here, she refers to mythological tales often depicted in classical dance]. Instead, it could be a story of your own life, your own experience, all the things you felt inside you—the ecstasy, pain, everything" (Ibid.). Johar voiced the need to start with a text to initiate dance and then be able to layer it with personal impressions in the moment of performance. He stated: "For me to do a piece, I think it is extremely important to have a narrative, from which I bounce off. And then what the eyes do and the rhythms do generate something in you…your own personal narrative" (Ibid.). As these statements indicate, gathered participants considered narrative an essential element of contemporary Indian dance. They endorsed approaching narrative vis-à-vis the experiential, i.e., being concerned with the feeling, mood, or sensation communicated through the physical language of dance. Interestingly, this awareness echoes the aesthetic principle of *rasa*.

[197] Several of the performers who had previously participated in the 1984 Encounter agreed that during the 1993 Workshop they no longer felt afraid to disclose their challenges, frustrations, and vulnerabilities of making new work with their peers (Lall 1994).

While Lechner did not attempt to dictate terms regarding the creative and ideological aspects of contemporary Indian dance as he had during the 1984 Encounter, his intention to formalize criteria and critical benchmarks for the field is where the MMB's influence becomes evident. In my research I found that this particular aim was meant to serve as a baseline for what the MMB hoped to do in the future, i.e., enable an ecosystem for contemporary Indian dance. The official program booklet for the 1993 Workshop claims that the afternoon sessions would address this topic. The document lists the following items for discussion: (1) developing new techniques and training for dancers, (2) the role of critic and audience in giving innovation its due place, (3) different modes of institutional promotion of new dance forms, like festivals, seasons, tours, grants, and workshops, and (4) interdisciplinary cooperation of choreographers with theatre experts, filmmakers, stage designers, painters, sculptors, and composers (*New Directions in Indian Dance,* 1993). The details on what participants discussed regarding these items are unavailable, but the fact that these were even part of the agenda for this event fascinates me.

We can understand the MMB's motivation to include deliberations on the parameters and ecosystem for contemporary Indian dance as perhaps being informed by the status of contemporary dance in Germany. Germany, after the reunification, was attempting to formalize pedagogical, institutional, professional, and production networks for this field. Contemporary Indian dance during this time—lacking basic infrastructure, with a scattered history of solitary and individual attempts, relegated to the margins within the Indian cultural domain, and with insufficient engagement by critics and the public—might have also seemed in "need of structure" to the MMB. The organization most probably thought that the standardization, professionalization, and institutionalization of contemporary Indian dance as in the German

context would assure its "development." This belief maintains the historicist assumption that Germany remains an influential actor in the production of modernity, and Indians can access this privilege by following a Western codification of knowledge and systematization of cultural production.[198] In this way, the MMB again evaluates contemporary Indian dance through the paradigm of the international (read: the West).

The 1993 Workshop set a precedent for considering structural issues related to the growth of contemporary Indian dance. Only four years later, the SNA initiated its scheme "Assistance and Support to Contemporary and Experimental Work on Music, Dance and Theatre," which similarly intended to solidify a network of initiatives, artistic collaborators, and other stakeholders for contemporary Indian dance. In the next decade, organizations set up by contemporary dance groups like the Gati Dance Forum would go on to build programs that addressed the items listed in the 1993 Workshop booklet, with support from the MMB.

The MMB's Patronage of Contemporary Indian Dance in the 2000s

The neoliberal era has brought about dramatic changes, leading to the redistribution of power, and the emergence of a multipolar world, with India becoming a rising political and economic center. This and the subcontinent's attractiveness to German multinationals as an investment destination became essential reasons to continue solidifying relations with India in the twenty-first century. In light of this, the MMB has continued to engage with contemporary Indian dance through exchange and development programs. An endeavor that inaugurated these efforts in this period was the "German Festival of India" commissioned by Lechner, which took place between September 2000-March 2001 at 27 venues across India and included programs on

[198] I credit Bojana Kunst (2002) for contributing to my analysis of the power dynamics underlying the institutionalization of contemporary dance.

dance, visual arts, crafts, sports, fashion, music, and film ("Festival of Germany from Sept 30," 2000).[199] Conceived as a delayed counterpoint to the 1991 Festival of India in Germany a decade before, this event intended to rejuvenate the diplomatic partnership between the two nations after a period of estrangement from 1994 to 2000.[200] A few months before this festival, Germany and India signed a formal framework entitled "Agenda for German-Indian Partnership in the 21st century," to deepen their ties in the neoliberal era (today Germany is India's most important trading partner in the European Union).[201] Thus it comes as no surprise that the cultural departments and arms of the Indian and German governments co-sponsored the event, including the MMB (Mumbai), the SNA, the Department of Culture (Government of India), and the German Federal Foreign Office (*German Festival in India,* 2001; official brochure).[202]

Part of the six-month German Festival was a program called "Dance in India and Europe—New Directions," hosted at the NCPA (Mumbai) between March 15 and 19, 2001. Unlike the 1991 Festival of India in Germany which primarily showcased classical and folk

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[199] The festival was worth approximately 2.7 million Euros (approx. US $2.84 million) and this budget was provided by the German Federal Foreign Office (Daniel Niklas 2005, 83).

[200]As I noted in an earlier section, between early 1980s and 1993, the diplomatic relations between India and Germany surged. But after 1994, linkages between the two countries waned due to India's backsliding on specific liberalization programs and the political flux witnessed in the region after the elections in 1996 and 1998 (Rana 2000, 26-27). Rana reports that trade between Germany and India rose from the pre-1992 plateau but after 1997 further growth ended. German foreign direct investment flow into India was modest between 1992 and 1998. In terms of bilateral aid, India traditionally has been Germany's leading recipient, but after the nuclear tests of May 1998, this suspended. Germany was also slow to act on the opportunities provided by the Indian software industry. Despite the above, Germany remined the second largest partner for technology collaboration agreements (34-35). Moreover, as per the figures from 2000, less than 100 students went from India each year for full-time university education to Germany, a striking contrast to the 1960s when each major German university had several hundred Indian students. Rana observes that there was a similar deficit in the scholarships offered to Indian students, in comparison with other Asian countries, predominantly because was no strong demand made by India. He speculates this might have been because of language-related barriers in German educational and professional settings (36).

[201] Germany is India's sixth most important trading partner worldwide. The volume of trade between the two countries has been rapidly accelerating. To read more about the achievements and challenges of Indo-German relations in the twenty-first century, see the 2009 report authored by Marian Gallenkamp.

[202] The event was jointly inaugurated by the then Indian President K.R. Narayanan and his German counterpart, Johannes Rau ("Festival of Germany from Sept 30," 2000).

dances from the subcontinent, this 2001 event predominantly featured figures who came to be associated with Indian dance experimentation.[203] Occurring at a time when the Indian republic was celebrating its golden jubilee and Germany had completed a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the program sought to commemorate practices in dance that signified the change, progress, and advancement of the two countries ("Festival of Germany from Sept 30," 2000). India at this time was invested in broadcasting the innovations it had made in the spheres of culture, economics, and politics to establish itself as an emerging regional powerhouse with the potential to impact the world significantly. These might have been the reasons to include dancers of the modern and contemporary ilk in the festival programming.

Coinciding with the Uday Shankar Shatabdi Samaroh (Centenary Celebrations) organized that year by the SNA, Dance in India and Europe was dedicated to the memory of Shankar, who was dignified as the "Father of Modern Indian Dance" in the official brochure (*German Festival in India,* 2001). The MMB tied the legacy of Shankar to the Indian dance showcase at the event, although none of the individuals forwarding his modern style at the time were invited to talk or present work, making it a symbolic tribute.[204] Even so, we can see the MMB honoring Shankar as part of the institution's strategy to evoke a long and fruitful history of Indo-European relations in dance. The Indian dancers that Lechner included in the program were those whose choreographic practices had matured alongside the MMB's initiatives since the 1980s, a move I interpret as intending to tie the emergence of contemporary dance in India with the intervention

[203] The performance showcase at the Festival of India in Germany included: Theatre director Ratan Thiyam's *Leela,* Kathak dance by Birju Maharaj and his disciples, Kumudini Lakhia, Maulik Shah, Saswati Sen, and other dancers from Kathak Kendra. Various programs for the folk arts were held in open-air spaces in Berlin, Stuttgart, Bonn, Köln, Darmstadt, Hamburg, and Chemnitz ("Germany's Festival of India Opens Minds and Hearts," 1991).

[204] The only way that Shankar was remembered was through a screening of excerpts from his 1948 film, *Kalpana,* inaugurated by Amala Shankar on the morning of March 15 (*German Festival in India,* 2001).

of the institution.[205] In a format similar to earlier programs organized by the MMB, this 2001 event included performances, lecture demonstrations, discussions, and academic presentations between Indians and their counterparts from Germany, the UK, and France.[206] The mission was to share how far dance innovations in both geographical regions had developed and to expand understanding of cultural differences and connections through the realm of this exchange.

The MMB network has continued to prioritize contemporary Indian dance through programs enabling bilateral relations between Germany and India in the past two decades.[207] For instance, during the "Germany+India 2011-2012: Infinite Opportunities," a 15-month-long series of events across India commemorating six decades of Indo-German collaborations in art, politics, business, sports, education, science, and technology that the MMB co-sponsored with other German institutions, it commissioned an intercultural production between Berlin-based choreographer Sasha Waltz and Chennai-based contemporary choreographer Padmini Chettur called *Dialogue 13*.[208] In the last ten years, the MMB chapters have also chosen contemporary

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[205] The Indian dance participants included Kumudini Lakhia, Sonal Mansingh, Chandralekha, Daksha Sheth, Ileana Citaristi, and Astad Deboo.

[206] European dance participants included Susanne Linke, Reinhild Hoffman, Susanne Kirchner, and Sasha Waltz from Germany; Imlata Dance from the UK; and Arun Sairam and Marion Pochy from France. The program brochure enlists the following items: On March 15, following the inauguration of *Kalpana,* Linke and Hoffman performed at the Jamshed Bhabha Theatre in the evening; on March 16, Sunil Kothari presented a lecture called "Dance in India-New Directions" and Jochen Schmidt presented a lecture titled "Dance in Germany and Europe-New Directions," in the afternoon Linke and Hoffman introduced and discussed their work, and in the evening, Waltz and Imlata Dance performed at the Tata Theatre; on March 17, in the morning, Waltz introduced and discussed her work, followed by Lakhia and Mansingh's lecture demonstrations, and the in the evening, Sheth performed at the Experimental Theatre; on March 18, Citaristi and Kirchner introduced and discussed their works, followed by Sheth and Deboo's lecture demonstrations, and in the evening, Shakuntala along with Sairam and Pochy performed at the Tata Theatre; and March 19 morning began with a lecture demonstration from the latter, followed by an early evening performance by Kirchner at the Prince of Wales Museum and Chandralekha's performance at the Tata Theatre later in the evening (*German Festival in India,* 2001).

[207] The events of 9/11 reaffirmed for the Goethe-Instituts worldwide the vital need for promoting international cultural dialogue and cooperation to "strengthen civil society and prevent conflict" in the twenty-first century (Goethe-Institut, "History of the Goethe-Institut").

[208] The other organizers included the German Federal Foreign Office, the Asia-Pacific Committee of German Business, and the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The program was initiated by the former

choreographers from its host cities to partake in exchange programs—in the form of residencies and festivals—located in Germany funded by the Goethe-Institut headquarters in Munich (Goethe-Institut, "Theatre and Dance"). In my conversations with emerging contemporary Indian dancers, a few of them shared that they had opted to be part of exchanges to cross-subsidize their work through an alternate sponsor and avoid the red tape and bureaucracy of government-funded bodies like the SNA. For others, creative collaboration with a dancer from another country is what they are looking for as a means to experiment and expand their choreographic practice. In such a scenario, the MMB is seen by them as an appropriate catalyst. By participating in exchanges, contemporary Indian dancers have additionally been able to perform at German festivals and theatres, helping them build critical international acclaim and, in turn, contributing to their gaining legitimacy on home ground. Exchange programs facilitated by the MMB have thus ensured that, to some measure, the production of contemporary Indian dance and its values continues to be mediated by Western influence.

Building on the seeds sown during the 1993 Workshop, the MMB has also aided the advancement of professional contexts for contemporary Indian dance over the last decade. This action aligns with the bilateral agreement between India and Germany in the twenty-first century, according to which the latter proposes to support development programs in India with a structural impact (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, "India").[209] It

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German Chancellor, Angela Merkel and former Lok Sabha speaker Meira Kumar ("'Infinite opportunities' to celebrate 60 years of Indo-German ties," 2011).

[209] In 2019, Germany committed a record amount of 1.1614 billion Euros (US $1.22 billion) for cooperation with India (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, "India"). According to the German Federal Foreign Office, development cooperation with India in the twenty-first century targets the following areas: (1) energy and energy efficiency, (2) sustainable urban development, and (3) environmental and resource protection. They also claim to support the economic participation of women and the setting up of a practice-oriented (dual) vocational training system, as well as provide stimulus for social policy and start-ups (Auswärtiges Amt 2022). Additionally, the agenda includes support for developing the cultural infrastructure in the Indian subcontinent.

seems like this particular move by the MMB was additionally informed by *Tanzplan Deutschland* (Dance Plan Germany), an initiative of the German Federal Cultural Foundation between 2005 and 2010 to improve the framework conditions for dance in Germany and establish it as an art form of equal value alongside opera and theatre in the public and cultural-political perception.[210]

The MMB has assisted a similar mission in the Indian context by providing multiple forms of support to contemporary dancers who, in the absence of state subvention, have chosen to set up organizations to produce opportunities and platforms for education, creation, and presentation. This practice of the MMB signals a re-thinking in the institution's approach toward contemporary Indian dance. While the MMB involved local cultural experts in their prior endeavors, it was often the German voice (especially Lechner's) imposing what they thought the field needed. And often the suggestion was to develop in the direction of the West. This began to slightly shift in the 1990s in response to increasing questions posed by Indian artists and critics about the credibility of a foreign institution prescribing the scope and development of contemporary Indian dance.[211] But it was only in the twenty-first century that the MMB formally adopted a more symmetric approach, electing to support contemporary Indian dancers in designing programs that reflect their needs and visions.

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[210] The recent boom in contemporary dance across many regions of Germany against the backdrop of *Tanzplan Deutschland* (Dance Plan Germany), an initiative of the German Federal Cultural Foundation from 2005 until 2010. Equipped with a budget of 12.5 million Euros (approx. US $13.14 million), *Tanzplan Deutschland* became a catalyst for the blossoming of (1) dance houses, dance centres, and dance forums dedicated to movement and choreography; (2) mobile self-organized, often temporary art collectives; (3) new education programs at art academies and universities; (4) academic and artistic research; (5) professional journals on dance and choreography; and (6) artistic work in dance projects at schools, in other cultural and educational institutions or in urban areas and public spaces (Kulturstiftung Des Bundes, "Tanzplan Deutschland").

[211] Coorlawala (2003) reports that in light of the 1993 MMB workshop, some artists and critics chided "who are these foreigners trying to tell us what Indian dance should be?" (168).

This patronage strategy mirrors the broader cooperation policy that the German Foreign Ministry currently embraces. In a multipolar world, with the power equations having shifted, German leaders must have realized that they could no longer overtly dictate terms to the countries with whom they have diplomatic relations. The Ministry thus directs German emissaries to trust the competence and expertise of their Indian partners while bringing about projects, with the latter frequently taking the lead (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, "India"). This model correlates with what Farah Batool, the New Delhi MMB Programs Coordinator, shared with me about the institution's way of engaging with the local art scene. She explained that the German MMB Directors attempt to match their resources to initiatives that creative practitioners in their host cities would like to see nurtured, and the local Indian staff like her are responsible for this negotiation (interview, New Delhi, 2018).

The MMB in Bengaluru has been a long-standing partner of the Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts, an institution launched by choreographer Jayachandran Palazhy in 1992 to grow the visibility of contemporary dance in the subcontinent. This particular MMB chapter has been one of the main funders of the ensemble's eponymous contemporary dance festival, the "Attakalari Indian Biennale," during its ten-year run.[212] Palazhy created the event to promote interaction and exchange of ideas between artists from different cultures and facilitate international co-productions, which explains why the MMB spends money on this particular program by Attakkalari. Often the MMB selects and brings in German artists to participate in the Biennale, but including a German artist in the festival is not a prerequisite for their support. Regardless of whether a choreographer from their country is represented at the Biennale or not,

[212] The tenth edition of the Biennale (2021-2022) was supported by the International Relief Fund for Organizations in Culture and Education co-jointly provided by the international Goethe-Institut network and the German Federal Foreign Office (Goethe-Institut Indien, "Performances: Attakkalari India Biennial 2021/2022").

the MMB has granted aid to Attakkalari's festival due to its overall mission of nurturing dance internationalism.

Similarly, since 2017, the MMB branch in Chennai has been a host and co-organizer of "March Dance," an experimental festival launched by Basement 21, an artists' collective founded in 2011 by Padmini Chettur, Preethi Athreya, K. Pravin, and Maarten Visser to investigate contemporary thought and action by creating programs that center the artistic process. Mrinaanlini Narain, the Cultural Coordinator of the MMB in Chennai, suggests this chapter has also been "interested in the process of making" and thus keenly supports the activities initiated by Basement 21 (Basement 21, "Dance-films, Dance-works And Much More In March Dance 2022"). It is also the reason why the institution decided to commission four emerging choreographers to create live and filmed dances for the 2022 edition of March Dance.[213] According to Katharina Görgen, the Director of the MMB branch in Chennai, they offered these new production funds to assist younger dancers facing the financial repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic (Ibid., "Looking Forward To March Dance 2022"). This instance suggests that the MMB cares for the well-being of artists and is invested in making their projects possible. It is perhaps the reason artists today prefer seeking out this institution for beneficence over attempting to navigate the opaque provisions of the SNA.

I have experienced first-hand New Delhi MMB's advocacy and support for GDF during the latter's active years. On innumerable occasions, the organization gave the GDF short and long-term endowments and venue support for their residency and festival series.[214] It also

[213] The March Dance 2022 grantees included Malavika PC, Ainesh Madan, and Priyabrata Panigrahi from Bengaluru, Vaanmadi Jagan from Chennai, Pradeep Gupta from Villai, and Meghna Bhardwaj from New Delhi (Basement 21, "March Dance").

[214] The MMB served as a principal partner and financial supporter for all editions of the Gati Summer Dance Residency and Ignite! Festival of Contemporary Dance. The New Delhi MMB's Siddharth Hall served as a venue

sourced artists from Germany to serve as guest teachers and interlocutors for these initiatives and the classes and workshops the GDF hosted. Again, this was not a condition set by the MMB for supporting the GDF. Rather it came out the GDF deciding to include events led by international artists in their regular programming for local dancers. As a patron that has been interested in making an impact on contemporary dance at a macro level, it should come as no surprise that the MMB was one of the first agencies to support the GDF when it decided to pursue a project on revitalizing spaces for rehearsals and performances in New Delhi. Moreover, it offered money and consultations to the GDF throughout this project and helped them identify the appropriate stakeholders and experts to help them achieve their objective.

As opposed to state-accorded SNA funding, which, artists have expressed to me, often comes with a few strings attached and, at worst, repressive guidelines about what a dance artist or organization can explore, the MMB did not project its demands on the nature and function of the GDF projects. In the case of initiatives where the MMB served as donor, the GDF invited representatives of the Delhi branch to offer feedback. However, the GDF took final decisions on a project's vision and intended outcomes. And while the GDF had to submit final reports to the MMB at the end of a financial year, and the institution did oversee the project budgets, the GDF had the freedom to choose how to spend the money they received from the MMB.

Compared to the SNA, the MMB has taken substantial actions toward supporting contemporary Indian dance in the 2000s. As the SNA began to slowly retreat from playing a central role in the welfare of the performing arts during this period, the aid from international bodies like the MMB became even more crucial for individuals in this field. The MMB has been able to productively contribute to contemporary Indian dance in the twenty-first century because

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for many performances, masterclasses, networking seminars, and workshops that the GDF curated as part of these programs.

of its changed position as a patron. The institution has opened up to working with local artists and experts to build culturally-responsive initiatives rather than audaciously rolling out programs that impose foreign-governmental agendas. We can see this benevolence of the MMB in connection to the larger German inclination toward projecting itself as a democratic force in the world. The MMB situating itself as a body that listens to and safeguards the agenda of artists against government interests (both national and foreign) is part of making this impact.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the MMB has supported contemporary Indian dance to advance cultural relations between India and Germany since the latter half of the twentieth century. Since then, the MMB has attempted to fill the void left by the SNA in terms of holistically enabling the growth of new and innovative forms. Through the different initiatives the MMB has organized, contemporary dancers have gathered together to critically dialogue and debate about their practice, mark the aesthetic and ideological parameters of their field, share techniques and ideas on choreography, and co-imagine a future for their field. The MMB has generated far more professional opportunities for contemporary dancers to create and perform their work than the SNA. Out of major, non-dancer-led institutions in India, the MMB has had the most significant impact in shaping the contemporary dance space in India and contributed to its flourishing.

Promoting Indian choreographers who employ Western movement, improvisational, and choreographic techniques to generate contemporary work was a considerable contribution of the MMB. Its advocacy led the SNA to accept interculturalism as a legitimate paradigm for making contemporary dance in India in the late 1980s. But the MMB's thrust to promote an aesthetic

engagement with the West was based on a historicist approach to the development of contemporary Indian dance. It also applied this thinking to push Indian dancers working with traditional form and content to foster creative methodologies that mirrored values of hyper-individualism and hyper-independence practiced by the West. Moreover, due to its mission of enabling different forms of contemporary art in the subcontinent, the MMB encouraged interdisciplinary collaborations as the basis of contemporary dance explorations. Over the years, the MMB has consolidated and patronized these varied notions of contemporary Indian dance.

From the start, programs by the MMB have cultivated links between Indian choreographers and their counterparts in the West, facilitating a generative exchange of transnational knowledge about dance experimentation. The case of the MMB however shows how the geocultural and geopolitical inequities formalized during the Cold War and sustained during the neoliberal period has charged the West with the power to determine which contemporary dancers meet and who they collaborate with. It has meant that for many Indian performers today, their points of reference for what contemporary dance could look like are imported. In this way, the production of dance modernity in India continues to be arbitrated by and routed through the West due to the exchange programs galvanized by the MMB.

Over the last two decades, the MMB has also acted as a wellspring of resources and funding for contemporary Indian dancers who have started organizations to create cultural infrastructure for their practice. This is different from the approach they took in the 1990s, wherein they again applied a historicist approach to address the perceived lack of institutional structures for contemporary Indian dance. Part of how they have been able to effectively establish long-term initiatives is through the strategic re-funneling of wealth concentrated by Western European powers through emissaries like the MMB. Members of the GDF shared with

me that they prefer to collaborate with the MMB over the SNA. In their opinion, while the latter has continued to operate as a dysfunctional bureaucratic body, the former has been more open to centering the needs of contemporary dancers and helping generate programs that are pertinent for their creative and professional development. The MMB during this period moved away from imposing preferences and demands that solely represented the special interests of Germany and instead invested in giving the lead to Indian artists and cultural experts to set the design and orientation of programs. This, combined with an increased presence of local staff, has assured that the MMB intervenes in the contemporary dance field in a synergistic and culturally-sensitive manner.

Chapter 3

The Actions of the Gati Dance Forum: Artist-Centered and Ecological Approach toward Enabling Contemporary Indian Dance

This chapter examines the case of the Gati Dance Forum (GDF), an organization launched by dancemakers with the sole goal of creating "a sustainable environment for the development of contemporary dance" in India (GDF 2013). The SNA and the MMB have respectively influenced the broader field of performance and contemporary art in India for over five decades. They represent institutions that, to different degrees, have been directed by governmental agendas when intervening in the contemporary dance field. In contrast, the GDF was a small-scale nonprofit based in the capital city of New Delhi, operated by a dedicated collective of artists between 2007 and 2020 who wanted to play a central role in making decisions about the resources, tools, and platforms that their practice needed.

The founders of the GDF felt that there had been insubstantial state support and funding for contemporary dance in India. In their perception, cultural representatives and institutions of the Indian state had chosen to preserve traditional performance forms over encouraging experimentation and innovation. The SNA and the MMB had organized critical events in the twentieth century that brought together contemporary dancers to deliberate on and share their creative practices and opened opportunities for them to perform for the public. However, these gatherings were few and far between, and while they created forums for dancers to interact, the institutions did not cultivate tangible resources for contemporary dance training, research, and creation, which remained largely isolated enterprises in the absence of a formal network before the GDF entered the picture. By the twenty-first century, a fast-growing number of Indian dancers wanted to express their views through movement explorations that evolved or moved

beyond inherited repertoires. Relative to this, there were still few prospects and settings in the country to foster this trend.

These factors rendered an extraordinary situation for the GDF, which then had to generate both the ecosystem for contemporary Indian dance and durable production structures to foster the creation and circulation of new work. In this regard, it devised and produced varied initiatives, including several residencies (most prominently "Gati Summer Dance Residency"), a dance festival ("Ignite! Festival of Contemporary Dance"), a performance infrastructure revitalization and community building project ("Working in Research Advocacy and Policy/Dance Union"), a dance education program ("MA in Performance Practice (Dance)"), and a dance publication ("Gati Reader"). The GDF had a physical location in Khirkee Extension (a neighborhood in South Delhi), which included two dance studios, a library and video archive, and a community café space. At this location, the GDF would host technique classes, performances, workshops, reading groups, rehearsals, improvisation jams, and work sharings throughout the year. This chapter will analyze how the GDF enabled the creative practice and context of contemporary Indian dance through these offerings. In addition to relying on formal archival and ethnographic research, my experiences working with the GDF between 2012 and 2014 and my association with the organization in the ensuing years shape many of my observations in the chapter.

The GDF team adopted an artist-centered approach when building the above programming. In their opinion, government interference in the arts sphere had been more debilitating than enabling and had not prioritized the interests of artists. Thus the GDF consistently consulted with practitioners to decide what kinds of initiatives should receive precedence. And other times, they drew from their own experiences as creators to determine the

direction of their projects. It formed a model of institutional patronage wherein artists led and felt represented in determinations regarding the development of their field. This was opposite of the approach leading the MMB and the SNA in the twentieth century, and remains the case for the latter even today. In the Indian classical dance lexicon, "gati" denotes "in-motion" and appropriately captures how the GDF functioned.[215] The institution had a notable impact on contemporary dance in the twenty-first century because it intentionally introduced programs in response to the creative and professional needs of exponents, despite the predicaments of running a nonprofit.

The GDF approached contemporary Indian dance in an expansive way. Contemporary dance was the official nomenclature that the GDF used to describe the field of dance experimentation in India. According to one of the GDF founders, choreographer Mandeep Raikhy, contemporary dance is a *lens* through which a dancer critically examines their body and its relationship to the surrounding world (Doordarshan National 2015). According to him, what distinguishes contemporary artists is their penchant for provoking questions about the form of dance and performance through their choreographic explorations. Characterizing contemporary dance in terms of a particular philosophical disposition allowed the GDF to encourage a plurality of perspectives and support the broadest range of voices, as its official brochure claims: "our activities are open to artists from all aesthetic viewpoints and cultural backgrounds" (GDF 2010). The GDF encountered a landscape where it had become widespread for dancers from the subcontinent to train in and explore multiple movement languages, whether from India or internationally. With the normalization of the transnational flow of ideas, bodies, capital, and media since the arrival of neoliberal globalization, dancers in India were increasingly exposed to

[215] Despite its association with classical dance, I think the founders saw the tern "gati" as relevant for dance at large.

and able to nurture exchanges with world forms, which, in turn, have productively influenced their aesthetic visions and expanded their knowledge on choreography. Simultaneously, there are dancemakers in the country for whom exclusively working with traditional Indian movement systems as a ferment to produce contemporary work remains meaningful. The founders of the GDF, who themselves embodied these multiplex realities, ensured that their activities nurtured the same.[216] While the GDF did not sanction aesthetic classifications for contemporary Indian dance like the other two case studies, it was overall invested in encouraging progressive values through the works it selected to nurture or showcase in its programs.

The programs the GDF rolled out were meant to galvanize *not* dictate the creative process of choreographers,[217] and concurrently facilitate a milieu in which a contemporary Indian dance practitioner could thrive. Its projects (1) generated frameworks for dance making, training, and exhibition, (2) stimulated networking for choreographers, and (3) built an audience that would value their art. The concept of the "ecology" became very popular in the GDF circles while qualifying the institution's engagement with contemporary dance. It was even utilized as a frame of analysis for the book produced by the institution entitled *Tilt Pause Shift: Dance Ecologies in India* (2016). In the introduction, editor Anita E. Cherian describes the idea of an "ecology of culture," drawing from the works of Ann Markusen (2011) and John Holden (2015), as the

[216] For instance, the classes that the GDF hosted at its studios included an introduction to global dance techniques, like Tai-Chi, Hip-Hop, Flying Low and Passing Through, and Contemporary Release technique. The class offerings also included a study of Indian movement forms, like Bharatanatyam, Yoga, Kalaripayattu, and Chhau.

[217] Its monthly workshops reflect this intent, such that it invited artists from a range of disciplines and geographies to facilitate young makers to build their bodily awareness and unlock their creative process. For example, Indian movement artist Sheela Raj offered "Moving Breath," a session directed toward enhancing dancers' improvisational skills and releasing their "creative impulse" by integrating an exploration of dance, yoga, sound, and silence. The GDF also brought in German photographer David Bergé and New York-based choreographer Trajal Harrell to give a workshop called "Choreo-Photo-Graphy: Compositional Frameworks for Dance." As the name suggests, Bergé and Harrell worked with attendees on spatial exercises and movement explorations using cameras to generate approaches to choreographic organization. At another time, the GDF hosted French dancer Kitsou Dubois, who facilitated an "Underwater Movement" workshop, guiding participants to explore internal physical perception with the bodily restraint of being underwater (GDF monthly newsletters 2011-2015).

"complex interdependencies that shape the demand for and production of arts and cultural offerings" (2). She further argues that the designation of ecology is more productive than using the term "contemporary" to describe experimental dance in India and the conditions that make it possible, "without either resorting to the deceptive clarities of taxonomy or falling prey to the hierarchization of forms" (19). For the GDF, contemporary dance constituted an arena of self-identified innovators who wanted to originate new works in Indian dance, which the institution sought to support. Moreover, its determination of the contemporary went beyond creative practice to address the infrastructural possibilities for the field. In this chapter, I investigate the numerous strategies and means the GDF harnessed to materialize an ecology for contemporary dance in India.

Of, By and, For the Dance Community: An Introduction to the GDF

Dancer-choreographers Anusha Lall, Mandeep Raikhy, and Mehneer Sudan co-founded the GDF to build critical resources, opportunities, and infrastructure for India's experimental dance scene.[218] The beginnings of the GDF trace back to when Lall and Raikhy met over the summer of 2005 whilst the latter was visiting Delhi from London, where he was pursuing contemporary dance professionally. As the "origin story" of the GDF goes, Lall and Raikhy spent that summer collaborating on a dance project at the former's studio apartment in Khirkee Extension. Over a series of conversations about the creative process, they realized that other than

[218] Mandeep Raikhy trained in jazz dance at The Danceworx Studio in Delhi and went on to study BA in Contemporary Dance at the Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance in London. While working in London for Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company, he further trained in Bharatanatyam, Kalaripayattu, contemporary dance, and ballet. Anusha Lall trained in Bharatanatyam under Leela Samson in Delhi and later studied at the London Contemporary Dance School. Like Raikhy, Mehneer Sudan also completed her modern and contemporary dance training at The Danceworx Studio and served as the Creative and Administrative Head of one of its branches in Delhi for four years. All three further pursued careers as independent choreographers, creating multiple original works over the years.

themselves, they had no one else to give critical feedback on the work they were developing. They expressed their frustrations about having almost no funding for contemporary dance in India[219] and wondered who would make up the audience for the kind of experimental work they were creating other than a small circle of family and friends. In a videotaped dialogue with Kirsty Alexander, former Co-Director of Independent Dance UK, Raikhy shared that Lall and he concluded by the end of that summer that "first we needed to build an ecology [for contemporary dance], before we even gave ourselves the rights to be called artists" (Sailo and Ramamurthi 2016).

In the same conversation, Raikhy qualified the GDF as initially being an "artist's response" to the absence of a conducive environment for promoting innovative dance practices in the subcontinent. I found further explanation about what the GDF perceived as the absence in a grant application they submitted to one of its eventual funders, the Royal Norwegian Embassy (New Delhi)[220]:

> The historical decision during India's independence movement to preserve classical forms as symbols of its national cultural identity, has long prevented both the Indian state and its cultural elite from envisioning a future of Indian contemporary dance. The failure to imagine, and therefore to invest in the field, as evidenced in the glaring absence of resources, opportunities and infrastructure dedicated to an evolving and contemporary dance practice, has grave implications. It has negatively impacted the lives of several artists who struggle, often in isolation, to work as professionals in non-traditional contexts, compromising the quality and impact of their work as artists and thinkers. It has undermined the production and transfer of new cultural knowledge and imagination that are born of self-reflection, interrogation and critical engagement with shifting, contemporary realities. Most lamentably, it has artificially frozen traditional movement systems, denying them natural processes of evolution so necessary for the creation of contemporary vocabularies that are indigenous, unique and relevant (GDF 2014).

[219] At this point in time, there was a very small pool of project-based grants offered by non-profit arts organizations like the India Foundation for the Arts and foreign cultural institutes like the MMB, which experimental dancers could apply to, to support the making of work.

[220] You can look at footnote 227 to read about why the GDF approached the Royal Norwegian Embassy in the first place.

As per the claims of this statement, cultural agents of the Indian government, like the SNA, and Indian national elite had failed to develop endeavors for the creation and circulation of contemporary dance forms, which had dramatic material and cultural implications for the Indian dance field as a whole. We can understand the conception of the GDF in response to such conditions as a form of "artistic citizenship." Performance scholars Randy Martin and Mary Schmidt Campbell (2006) argue that artistic citizenship involves the political commitment of artmakers to self-organize and become executors of their future in the face of obsolete and exclusionary institutional structures and patronage practices of the state.

The opportunity to lay down the foundations of the GDF came in 2007, when Lall's aunt asked her if she wanted to utilize the basement of a Nizamuddin East residence for dance rehearsals. Lall decided that she could use this space to host a series of monthly events, and for the next two years, she organized a handful of workshops, discussion circles, and film screenings. She was able to bring in a critical mass of people from Delhi who regularly attended the events and dialogued, debated, and co-imagined the needs of the local experimental dance community. By 2009, Mehneer Sudan officially stepped down as one of the core members of the GDF, and in the same year, Raikhy permanently moved back to Delhi from London. From thereon, Lall and he began to work on an official framework of goals for an organization committed to building a more viable culture for contemporary dance locally but with an impact that they hoped would be felt at a national scale.

With consultation and feedback from dance makers, artists from other disciplines, and other experts in the Indian cultural field, the two envisaged the following list of objectives for the GDF: (1) strengthen the connections between members of the dance community through critical dialogue and sharing of interdisciplinary practices; (2) create education programs for young

dancers to develop skills in choreography through mentorship by established performing arts experts; (3) propel the production and dissemination of innovative work by emerging and established choreographers; (4) advocate for the improvement of local performance infrastructure; (5) enable a critical discourse on contemporary dance through original research and writing that reflect the concerns of practicing artists; and (6) nurture public interest and engagement about contemporary Indian dance (GDF 2013). The SNA and the MMB had *contemplated* some of these ways to assist or support contemporary dance. But the GDF intentionally designed each of its initiatives mentioned in this chapter introduction to *realize* one or more of these goals. As I show in the following pages, addressing these heterogeneous areas through a thoughtful curatorial practice made the GDF a definitive voice and arbitrator of contemporary Indian dance in the twenty-first century.

In 2009, Lall and Raikhy incorporated the GDF as a public charitable trust with tax-exempt status, registered under the Indian Trusts Act. The GDF operated as a typical small-sized nonprofit. At any given moment in time, it consisted of 5-6 staff members. Lall and Raikhy respectively served as the founding Director and Managing Director, leading the creative envisioning and financial management of the GDF. In addition to them, the permanent staff who took care of daily operations included a Studio Manager, a Programs Director, and two people for General Support.[221] Other than this core group, Lall and Raikhy sought out other individuals to direct various projects. In turn, these project heads brought in 2-3 team associates who worked together to visualize and manifest the particular initiative. Most of the office and project-related

[221] The Studio Manager position was initially held by Kanishka Bagga and later by Poushali Dutta. The General Support staff included Govind and Kaviji. Parvathi Ramanathan held the post of Programs Director for some time, and eventually Ranjana Dave was appointed to serve this role.

staff changed over the years.[222] The GDF was overseen by a volunteer Board of Trustees, which included influential voices in the dance and cultural sector.[223] It was responsible for advising the GDF on the effective development of its projects, ensuring that the organization continued to function for the benefit its dance constituents, keeping a check on its fiscal health, and acting as its advocate in the larger arts field.

Jennifer Alexander and Kandyce Fernandez (2020) note that "as mediating institutions situated between people and the state, nonprofits are [often] credited with… provid[ing] the locus and opportunity for active citizenship [and]… functioning as change agents," among other things (367). These organizing principles of a nonprofit seem to align with what the GDF was attempting to do: to transform contemporary dance's existing conditions by mobilizing artistic citizenship. The ideal of a collective was central to how the GDF operated and measured its impact. The nonprofit status additionally suited its philosophical-political mission to represent, advocate for, and attend to the needs of the contemporary dance "community." In her critical analysis of the dominating presence of nonprofit organizations in community-based work, scholar Miranda Joseph (2002) writes that when the "imaginary of community is invoked [in

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[222] Abantee Dutta was brought on as Director of the physical infrastructure and community advocacy initiative, for which Virkein Dhar, Manjari Kaul, and I served as Research Associates. After Dutta, Persis Taraporevala and Bhakti Nefertiti led this project, with the latter being assisted by Manishka Baul and Jahnvi Sreedhar. Dhar served as the Director of the 2015 and 2016 editions of the GDF's festival series.

[223] The GDF's Board of Trustees appointed in 2013, included Leela Samson, Sadanand Menon, Preethi Athreya, Gautam Bhan, and Karthika Nair. In the documented meeting minutes between the GDF (represented by Raikhy and Ramanathan) and the Royal Norwegian Embassy (represented by Tone Slenes, Signe Gilen, and Manu Arya) on January 22, 2014, the institution offers a rationale for selecting the particular individuals as its trustees. It states that Samson was chosen because of her experience in institution building and for the influential position she holds in the classical dance and government circles. The GDF saw Bhan playing the role of an advisor, institutional builder, influencer, and financial and leadership evaluator due to his varied experience as a gay rights advocate, writer for independent press like *Kafila* and *Yoda,* and a founder of Indian Institute for Human Settlements. Furthermore, it selected Athreya and Menon as advisors and sounding boards because of their substantial work in the contemporary dance field in India. Lastly, Nair was picked for her arts management experience in the international contemporary dance scene. I know that the earlier Board of Trustees included dance and performance scholars Anita E. Cherian (Associate Professor at Ambedkar University) and Urmimala Sarkar Munsi (Associate Professor a Jawaharlal Nehru University)t, as well as Anmol Vellani (former Director for India Foundation for the Arts).

civic society], nonprofits are a central feature and, conversely, nonprofits are imagined to be expressions of community"(70). The GDF functioned through collaborations and partnerships, even though at first it grew out of Lall and Raikhy's creative process, and the pair were officially in charge of the organization. The two did not work in isolation. Instead, they determined the GDF programming by working with people and groups from dance and dance-adjacent domains to pool ideas, resources, and build networks. The individuals hired to run the GDF's programs were, in different capacities, engaged in dance—whether as a performer, a choreographer, a dance educator, an arts manager, a performance architect, a researcher, or an expert in law and cultural policy.

Moreover, the GDF consulted and partnered with choreographers, movement experts, exponents of other performance mediums, scholars, and others who had stakes in nurturing the experimental dance scene in India. Unlike the SNA's patronage model, which is informed by the priorities and whims of government bureaucrats, the "inputs and suggestions from the artists' community fed directly into [the GDF's] functioning" (GDF 2013). For instance, past participants of the GDF's dance-residency series were invited back to plan successive editions. The GDF brought in established members of the contemporary dance and performing arts field to serve as teachers, mentors, or facilitators for the GDF residency, workshops, classes, and so on. The group also sought out the assistance of other contemporary dance collectives and studios in Delhi to draw in new and more audiences for its festival series.[224] Furthermore, the GDF did not promote the artistic work of its core team members, a decision that Raikhy believes helped them to maintain the goodwill of dancers over time (Sailo and Ramamurthy 2016). The GDF staff

[224] Several dance companies and studios across the National Capital Region helped spread the word about the 2015 edition of the GDF festival, such as Aura School of Dance, Big Dance Centre, Choreotheque School of Contemporary Dance, Banjara School of Dance, and Musical Dreams (*IGNITE! 2015 Narrative Report*, 5).

were all Indians, but its consultants and guest collaborators were a mix of Indian and international artists.

In its status as a nonprofit, the GDF had the necessary permissions to receive support from a mix of government, foundation, international, and private funding. It is a good example of an institution that has enabled the aesthetic heterogeneity of contemporary Indian dance by incorporating heterogenous forms of support (Shannon Jackson 2012). The following breakdown of the GDF's general financial structure is based on the data I gathered from its various project brochures and a 2016 Asia-Europe Foundation report prepared by Juee Deogaokar, Chitra Roy, and Pooja Sood. Initially, Lall and Raikhy's financial strategy was to start a project and then raise money to fund it. This is the funding method they used between 2009 and 2011, for the first couple editions of its residency and its first festival.[225] But as the team grew and preparations were being made to shift operations from the obscure basement in Nizammudin East to a permanent building in Khirkee Extension (neighboring KHOJ International Arts' Association, a preeminent contemporary art institution that incubates experimental and transdisciplinary creative practices), the GDF knew that it needed to revise the funding model, with substantial resource allocations to infrastructure expenses (administration and salaries), rent (of the Khirkee building), and programs.

Eventually, different types of funding were divided between managing these major costs. The GDF accumulated support from the Royal Norwegian Embassy (New Delhi) for salaries, rent, and rudimentary project costs, which was disbursed by the latter as two rounds of institutional funding over six years—first in 2011 and then in 2014 (refer to the footnote to read

[225] In an interview with broadcast journalist Priya Kanungo, Raikhy explained that he and Lall were prompted to establish the GDF as a nonprofit in 2009 when they had to raise substantial funds (around Rs. 5-6 Lakhs; approx. US $6,440-7720), for their first major event, the "Gati Summer Dance Residency" (Doordarshan National 2015).

about how they ended up funding the GDF).[226] As a result, Lall and Raikhy had to shift their efforts from working informally and executing ideas spontaneously to guiding an institution and organizing project deliverables in three-year-grant cycles.[227] To transform a former photography studio in Khirkee into a multi-purpose building—where residencies, rehearsals, classes, performances, and workshops occurred—the GDF initiated a fundraising campaign, "Donate a Dance Brick." This campaign raised Rs. 1,700,000 (approx. $21,362) from 150 donors, who were friends, family, colleagues, and other professional acquaintances.[228]

For each of its projects, the GDF utilized a different funding model. For its residency series, the GDF took on a patron model of fundraising, which included a circle of art connoisseurs, private philanthropists, and figures from the Indian art and performance world.[229] The only costs related to the GDF's performing arts infrastructure revitalization and community-building project were team members' salaries, which came out of the institutional budget noted

[226] According to an application submitted by Lall on April 21, 2014, the Royal Norwegian Embassy (RNE) offered the GDF an institutional grant from 2011-2013 and then from 2014-2017. The grant scheme was titled "Cultural Cooperation" and the unit responsible for disbursing the grants was the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As the story goes: Lall and Raikhy had approached the RNE to host the closing party for their first festival edition in late 2010 on the pretext that a Norwegian artist was featured in the event. At the time, they were also desperately seeking to raise a significant sum of money to cover half of the festival budget (about Rs. 45-60 Lakhs/approx. US $57,960-77,280). When they mentioned to the RNE representatives during the meeting, the latter decided to remunerate the full amount. More significantly, on hearing about the work that Lall and Raikhy were set out to do with the GDF, the RNE decided to offer them a three-year institutional grant (DD National 2015). Other than this anecdotal reference, at this time, I do not have an official comment from the RNE about what prompted them to offer this grant to a contemporary dance institution.

[227] As shared by Raikhy to Kanungo during the 2015 DD National interview.

[228] In my knowledge, the GDF also requested for a sum of Rs. 50 Lakhs (approx.US $64,571) from the Indian government to help with the building renovations. According to a letter penned by Lall, dated July 26, 2013, the GDF applied under the building grants scheme of the Ministry of Culture (Government of India). Her request in the letter reads as follows: "The grant is sought under the scheme to support us build, renovate and extend parts of the GDF building as well as procure equipment, acoustics, light and sound systems and other portable assists for the GDF studios.

[229] For instance, some of the individuals who supported the 2015 residency edition included Brinda Dutt, Anita Ratnam (Arangham Trust), Bunty Chand, Sanjay Roy, Mukesh Panika, Mohit Satyanand, Sanjna Kapoor, Vivan Sundaram, and Vivek Sahni (*All Warmed Up: New Propositions in Dance,* 2015).

above. Its educational initiative was incubated as a two-year MA affiliated with a state-funded institution, Ambedkar University (Delhi), with a subsidy from one of the oldest corporate philanthropists in India, the Tata Trusts.[230] Lastly, the GDF's book project was supported by international cultural associations, Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia and the MMB (New Delhi), and the Indian arts nonprofit, The Raza Foundation.

The GDF's festival series was funded by foreign cultural organizations (including the MMB), art institutions affiliated with the Indian government, Indian private art foundations, and Indian corporates.[231] Moreover, the 2015 festival was also supported through one of the most successful crowdfunding campaigns for contemporary dance in India. I noticed that to mobilize people to make financial contributions, the crowdfunding campaign highlighted the GDF's contributions to the contemporary dance "community." Joseph (2002) writes that while the funds that nonprofits accumulate cannot be distributed for profit, these institutions are hardly non-capitalist, and especially not anti-capitalist (70). Nonprofits, according to her theorization, is an institutional form in which community complements capital.[232] The GDF strategically deployed the rhetoric of community to proliferate capital for its contemporary dance festival.

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[230] The Tata Trusts include a consolidation of philanthropic activities that was founded by the Tata group founder, Jamsetji Tata, known as the "Father of Indian Industry" in 1892. One of the many sectors that the Tata Trusts have served over the years is arts and culture.

[231] For instance, the sponsors of the 2015 festival edition were the MMB, the RNE, the SNA, the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia, Infrastructure Development Finance Company, the British Council, Institut Française India, Outset India (an Indian charity by private philanthropist Feroze Gujral), the Japan Foundation, National Arts Council Singapore, Instituto Cervantes, and Gandharva Mahavidyalaya (one of the oldest Indian classical and music institutions of India).

[232] In her book, *Against the Romance of Community,* Joseph offers a critique of the dominant discourse on community. She observes that "Community is almost always invoked as in unequivocal good, an indicator of high quality of life, a life of human understanding, caring, selflessness, belonging. One does one's volunteer work in and for 'the community'… Among leftists and feminists, community has connoted cherished ideals of cooperation, equality and communion" (vii). Jospeh argues against such an idealization of community, asserting that capitalism, and more generally, modernity depends on and advances a discourse of community to legitimize social hierarchies (viii-ix). Joseph does not suggest that claims to communities are inauthentic. Rather, she is interested in how invocations and practices of community have complex relations to capital.

The ability of the GDF to create a dense mix of projects which could have a meaningful impact on the contemporary dance field was possible due to the increasing availability of heterogenous forms of aid since the 1990s. Indian government institutions like the SNA did support the GDF's activities, such as serving as its 2015 festival partner, which lent it greater legitimacy in the public eye. But overall, their assistance was meager, and many of the other requests that the GDF made to the SNA to back its projects never saw light of day.[233] As I noted above, it was organizations independent from the Indian government that predominantly supported the GDF. The GDF garnered the support of cultural institutes of foreign countries, like the MMB, who took a more collaborative stance in their diplomatic endeavors since the twenty-first century by facilitating culturally-sensitive programming curated by local arts organizations. Moreover, the GDF has relied on the donations of high net-worth individuals and funding from private philanthropic trusts and art foundations, which have spectacularly expanded due to the growing prosperity in India since the liberalization era.[234] These agents are committed to projecting India as a globally innovative force with a booming international contemporary art market.[235]

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[233] In a letter dated October 24, 2015, by the GDF staff member Juee Deogaokar to the SNA Secretary Helen Acharya, the former inquired whether the SNA would again be interested in being a festival partner for the 2016 edition of Ignite (the SNA was a festival partner for the 2015 edition) by providing "the venue, technical requirements and honorarium of the artists performing in the Meghdoot Theatre Complex." According to a follow up letter by Raikhy to Acharya, dated January 1, 2016, the SNA processed the GDF's venue request by booking Meghdoot III for the festival. In the same letter, Raikhy asks the SNA to additionally book Meghdoot I, II and IV for multiple performances on each day of the festival. But eventually, due to logistical and financial conundrums, the 2016 edition of Ignite! was held in the black box space of OddBird Theatre and the SNA did not serve as festival partner.

[234] A small enclave of individuals belonging to upper-castes and the corporate class have benefited from economic liberalization. India is a country of deep contrasts, where 22 percent of the population still lives below the poverty line, and at the same time, it is home to over 80 of the world's billionaires. Top 1 percent of Indians own around 50 percent of the country's wealth.

[235] See Anand Giridhardas' 2018 book *Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World* on why it is a problem that states and civil societies often outsource the responsibility for problem-solving to billionaires, charities, and philanthropic groups. His central argument in the book is that the practices of these agents are often self-serving

The GDF's institutional patrons also offered non-monetary assistance, like event promotion, venue support, networking opportunities, and project consultations. To my knowledge, none of the patrons sought to control how the GDF devised or implemented its projects. The extent to which they had some say was offering feedback on the design or outcome of a particular initiative. Depending on the conditions set by a given foreign cultural institute, the GDF may or may not have been required to include an artist or cultural expert in one of its projects from the former's respective country. The GDF would, however, seek out these foreign cultural bodies for sourcing international artists to serve as guests or consultants on its projects. Now that I have introduced readers to the GDF, I will analyze the major projects that it curated for contemporary Indian dance for over a decade.

Propelling New Choreographers and Works in Contemporary Indian Dance

The first major annual event created by the GDF was the "Gati Summer Dance Residency," (GSDR) which took place in 2009. Lall and Raikhy initially conceived the GSDR to address the burgeoning demand in India for a dedicated space to learn and make choreography. At most dance schools in India, training in dance technique often outmatches choreographic training. As I show later in this chapter, there are just a handful of institutes that offer training in choreography. Moreover, the GDF noticed that there was a growing number of young performers in India from varied dance training backgrounds, including contemporary dance,[236] who desired to devise self-authored works and were looking for opportunities to cultivate the same. Taking

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and that instead of helping the disenfranchised, they uphold and even multiply the wealth, power, and status of elites.

[236] Many were either former students/ members of modern and contemporary dance institutes/ ensembles from India or had returned to India after attaining a high degree in contemporary dance and gaining professional experience in dancing for choreographers abroad.

this into consideration, the GDF designed a ten-week residency series that gave 3 to 5 dancers every year the opportunity to propose and realize original productions under the mentorship of experienced senior artists in the performing arts world (*Gati Dance Forum: Performance, Practice, Research,* 2010).[237] GSDR mentors were artists from different regions of India and abroad, including exponents of diverse dance and theatrical traditions and practitioners of performance-related production design, such as sound designers and scenographers.[238] The aim was to try supporting residents in all aspects of making a dance. A heterogeneous mix of mentors enabled residents to stay rooted in culturally-specific concerns, aesthetics, and dramaturgy and, simultaneously, learn from choreographic strategies generated in other geographical contexts. The selection of international mentors depended on the foreign cultural organizations sponsoring the residency during a particular year and the choices they made about the artists sent for an exchange to India.

In addition to mentorship support, participants received access to rehearsal spaces; an honorarium of about Rs. 30,000 (approx. US $387) for the entire duration of the residency; and a production assistance grant of up to Rs. 15,000 (approx. US $194) to spend on the props, costumes, and sets for their choreographies (Sreedhar 2015).[239] Moreover, participants from outside Delhi received an extra amount of Rs. 3000 (approx. US $40) per week to cover their

[237] The last edition of the GSDR (in 2016) however was for three weeks.

[238] Some of the people who served as mentors for the GSDR editions between 2009 and 2016 included New Delhi-based dancers and theatre practitioners Maya Krishna Rao, Navtej Singh Johar, Zuleikha Chowdhury, and Amitesh Grover; German choreographers Urs Dietrich, Susanne Linke, and Chris Lechner; Swiss multidisciplinary artists POL and Jonathan O'Hear; exponents of the Flying Low and Passing Through technique David Zambrano (Venezuela) and Vangelis Legakis (UK); Chennai-based choreographers Padmini Chettur and Preethi Athreya; Japanese choreographer Daisuke Muto; Australian performer Victoria Hauka; French scenographer Jean Christophe Lanquentin; and Kerala-based theatre director Sankar Venkateswaran.

[239] Since 2012, the two GDF studios in Khirkee Extension were used by residents for rehearsals. For the editions before this time, the GDF would book rehearsal spaces spread across different locations in Delhi for the GSDR. Moreover, while the GDF was not liable for any medical injuries or costs faced by participants during the residency, there was a first aid box at hand on the premises (Sreedhar 2015).

daily subsistence and local transport costs and were separately renumerated for their flight or train travel back to their home state (Ibid).[240] Lall and Raikhy felt that offering residents basic accommodations of money and space would allow them the time they needed to dig deeper into their creative process—a privilege usually hard to come by in a country wherein performing artists generally face financial precarity. Many independent dancers in India pursuing experimental work often rely on platforms like the GSDR that serve as short-term working laboratories to refine their choreographic craft and build their professional repertoire.

From its origin in 2009 until its last edition in 2016, the GSDR became a significant rite of passage for many early-career choreographers from India and the broader South Asia region, supporting around 48 dancers in developing new and original choreographies (GDF 2017, 1). A Gati resident was typically an artist with a few years of experience performing with established choreographers or dance companies in India or internationally or had started to make their own work while continuing to dance in other people's productions. For instance, the 2015 GSDR guidelines indicated that candidates from India with training in classical or contemporary dance, or a background in any other performance or art practice, were encouraged to apply (Sreedhar 2015). Reviewing the roster of past residents verified for me the GDF's intent to support diverse candidates.

To give my readers an idea of the individuals who partook in the residency series: one of the 2009 GSDR participants was Veena Basavarajaih, who was initially trained in Bharatanatyam, Kalarippayattu, and contemporary dance in Bengaluru. Additionally, Basavarajaih has worked with UK-based ensembles like Angika and Shobhana Jeyasingh Dance

[240] According to one of the eligibility criteria stated in the application guidelines for the 2015 edition of the GSDR, prospective candidates were expected to be available in Delhi for at least 80 percent of the time of the residency (Ibid.).

Company. She has since collaborated with various Indian contemporary dance companies such as Attakalari Centre for Movement Arts, Kalari Academy, Nrityaruta, and Yana Lewis Dance Company. Lokesh Bharadwaj, a 2010 GSDR resident from Delhi, like Basavarajaih, also studied Bharatanatyam, although at the Shri Ram Bhartiya Kala Kendra. He also danced in numerous recitals and productions by his Bharatanatyam teachers, Justin McCarthy and Navtej Johar, as well as attended the London Contemporary Dance School. The same residency edition featured Shilpika Bordoloi, from Jorhat (Assam), who identifies as a contemporary choreographer with many years of experience in Manipuri, Bharatanatyam, modern dance, dance-theatre, and Tai-Ji-Quan. Closely observing the GSDR when I was working with the GDF, I noticed that dancers came in with an impulse to find new connections with an established performance or physical tradition and explore ideas and concepts personally meaningful to them. As writer Ranjana Dave (2015) suggests, the GSDR participants commonly shared an alertness to the possibility of a productive rupture from a practice they had inhabited for years. To further illuminate this point, I discuss the works created by residents during the 2011 GSDR, which is the only edition of this program that is well-documented in a 2011 short film called *The GATI Summer Dance Residency*, commissioned by the India Foundation for the Arts (IFA). I base my analysis on having reviewed this film.

Like the other editions of the GSDR, the 2011 one included some dancers who sought to reimagine classical dance vocabularies. Rukmini Vijayakumar, while developing her piece entitled “ ,” embraced the idea of finding dance material through a series of structured improvisations that utilized her training in Bharatanatyam, ballet, and contemporary dance (the space with italicized quotes was the official title of Vijaykumar’s piece). In her creative process, Mayuka Ueno Gayer yoked the movement principles of Odissi and ballet to unearth the in-

between space between gravity and anti-gravity, vertical and horizontal planes, and the quotidian and the sacred. For this piece, which she eventually called *floating sphere,* Gayer reinterpreted classical idioms to explore the concept of liminality. Other dancers decided to take on explicitly political subject matters to base their movement explorations during the residency. Deepak Kurki Shivaswamy produced a work titled *LVOE: A non-romantic solo* to provoke his audience to think about their unquestionable devotion to capitalism and material things. In *onevoice,* Surjit Nongmeikapam engaged his Kathak, Manipuri, and contemporary dance knowledge (he was trained at the Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography in Bengaluru) to communicate the realities of ongoing Indian military-inflicted violence and oppression in the Northeastern state of Manipur.

Other participants of the 2011 GSDR treated movement more expansively. Investigating the intimate contact between a female masseuse and her female client, Mehneer Sudan problematized the notion of what constitutes dance. In a description of the work, Sudan explains that "release and relief, intimacy with unfamiliarity, and the effect of touch on the body" are some themes that formed the basis of the choreographic process for *inside body, talking comfort* (*Ignite Festival of Contemporary Dance* 2012, 10). Niranjani Iyer was the only 2011 resident who was not a professional dancer; she had a background in performance art and theatre. Thus as part of her creative process, Iyer deployed expression, text, and movement to probe her experiences with geographical displacement and relocation in *around the wandering shadow*.

The GSDR encouraged participants to think about their dance practice in terms of the artmaking process. Events by the MMB that I analyzed in the last chapter had also encouraged dancers to reflect on the same. But the GSDR allowed residents to apply what they were learning about their process to the work they were developing. In the 2011 edition film, Lall shared the

following remarks about the dancers who participated in the program: "they know that they do not have answers, they only have questions, and this residency becomes one more step or opportunity to explore, to experiment, to investigate in that search, in order to at some point resolve something in their journey" (IFA 2013). This emphasis on exploration is even foregrounded in the GSDR application. Usually, prospective candidates were only required to present an outline of an idea they wanted to excavate further in the period of the residency, not a scene-by-scene description or technical plan for their proposed work (Sreedhar 2015).[241] Once they joined the residency, participants' ideas were deconstructed and questioned each week relentlessly through morning technique classes, rehearsals, mentor meetings, and peer-sharing workshops. Dave (2015) appropriately characterizes the residency as "Critical Thinking 101." Dancers had the time to marinate on their inquiries, to work out the origins and where they hoped to arrive in their choreographies.

In the first week, residents were provided the space to present starting points for their proposed dances, and they received feedback from their mentors and fellow participants. During this stage, mentors usually helped demystify some mainstream portrayals of contemporary dance. Chettur, a mentor for the 2013 GSDR edition, recounted that she pushed dancers to discover what their particular "intellectual quest" meant in terms of movement practice (Dave 2015). In her opinion, this provocation prompted residents to see that contemporary dance does not have to look like "twirling, running, hopping, and falling on the ground"– an image that has

[241] As per the application guidelines for the 2015 edition of the GSDR, some of the materials that prospective residents had to submit included: (1) a personal statement and project proposal, (2) a resume providing details of their dance education and work experience as a performer and choreographer, (3) videos along with synopsis of two performances or choreographies by them, and (4) two letters of recommendation from professionals in the performance field. According to the claim in the application packet, the submissions were evaluated by an external board of reviewers, and shortlisted candidates were called for interviews to make final decisions (Sreedhar 2015).

been popularized by American dance reality shows and regurgitated in similar programs in the subcontinent (Ibid).

Every week subsequently, residents would attend morning classes facilitated by the dance or theatre mentors. As both the residents and mentors had different training backgrounds and aesthetic interests, the morning classes did not focus on the learning of codified techniques. Instead, they attended to somatic principles foundational to the particular form practiced by the mentor. The purpose of the morning classes was to help residents uncover (and activate) new mobility through the fundamentals of breath, alignment, energy work, and sensory awareness. In the classes, residents learned to see the body from within and value their *own* ways of moving rather than regard the body from the outside—what it should look like in the mirror or according to the aesthetic conventions of a codified dance tradition. The morning classes increased the residents' capacity for individual expressivity, which they needed as the basis to generate new and original work.

As I mentioned earlier, the mentorship offered by senior artists was a unique and integral feature of the GSDR. Besides leading morning classes, mentors worked with residents one-on-one to help them devise their pieces. The mentors' task was to serve as an "outside eye," to ask residents questions, brainstorm potential movement ideas, and redirect them when they got stuck (Sreedhar 2015). Speaking about his residency experience, Shivaswamy stated that he "found an objective, neutral audience in multiple mentors. It gave him a keen sense of what the work communicated early on in the creative process. This allayed the uncertainty of waiting for the performance to gauge the audience's response" (Dave 2015). From my observation, another vital component of the GSDR was the regular peer-sharing sessions. When I was documenting the

2012 edition, I noticed that sharing circles between fellow residents empowered them to shed light on the challenges and milestones they encountered while developing choreography.

The GSDR would typically culminate in the tenth week with either a "work-in-progress" showcase, or, at times, a premiere of full-grown performances at a well-known theatre in New Delhi.[242] While the public recitals offered residents the opportunity to showcase their original choreographies at a prestigious venue in the capital city, they were not the central aim of the GSDR.[243] In other words, it was not a teleological approach, where the residency would culminate in a polished "production." In galvanizing intercorporeal relations between residents and their peers and mentors, the GSDR emphasized the importance of the artmaking process.[244]

In a 2016 interview with Larisa Crunteanu, dance theoretician André Lepecki talks about the power of "co-" in contemporary dance, which he describes as a situation of co-inhabitation and dialogue within works-in-progress formats. Lepecki observes that while contemporary dance is an expression of creative individuation, other people co-imagine the work with the author, including the audience, the critic, collaborators, presenters, and so on, who contribute to the working structure or the performance intent. By privileging the modality of work-in-progress, the GSDR formulated contemporary dance as a dynamic, collective practice, enlarged by the contribution that each person makes.

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[242] The GSDR performance venues have included the Shri Ram Centre, India Habitat Centre, the British Council Auditorium, and the MMB New Delhi's Siddharth Hall.

[243] Although, the GDF did help residents with publicity for their final performances, including a professional photoshoot for brochure and newspaper advertisements.

[244] Dance scholars like Bojana Kunst (2009 and 2015), Lepecki (2006), and Dunja Njaradi (2014) have analyzed in detail how an emphasis on the process centrally defines the nature of contemporary dance labor today. The last edition of the GSDR in 2016 was redesigned as a three-week laboratory for young choreographers which culminated in residents sharing short "sketches" at the GDF studios, instead of final performances (GDF, "GSDR 2016: Sharing of Choreographic Sketches," 2016).

So the GSDR was about emphasizing the creative process. Nonetheless, every year until its run, it introduced more contemporary dance works to the performance ecosystem in India. The GSDR helped to add a new piece to an emerging choreographer's repertoire and increased their chances of being featured in a national or international dance festival spotlighting original productions. Speaking of festivals, in the next section, I analyze the GDF's very own platform of this nature: the "Ignite! Festival of Contemporary Dance."

Enabling Visibility and Networks for Contemporary Indian Dance via a Festival

The GDF launched the "Ignite! Festival of Contemporary Dance" in 2010 and hosted three more editions in 2012, 2015 and 2016. During my interview with two-time Ignite Director, Virkein Dhar, she shared that the event was developed keeping in mind "independent choreographers who felt that they were working in a bubble and there was no audience for their work" (interview, New Delhi, November 29, 2017). Thus the festival committed to making diverse forms of contemporary dance in India more visible. It was also devoted to building networks for contemporary Indian dance by connecting artists, academics, funders, producers, curators, and audiences. To realize these goals, the GDF designed a multi-lateral festival, with performances, masterclasses, film screenings, exhibitions, workshops, seminars, conferences, and informal gatherings.[245]

While Ignite primarily had a national focus, to varying degrees, it also included individuals from the Indian diaspora, Asia, and other international regions. The GDF festival team selected artists to be featured at the festival in a few different ways. Some they selected

[245] The GDF made sure to have a festival hub at each edition, which became a central meeting and information point for festival participants and audiences. The New Delhi MMB premises and the GDF building in Khirkee served as festival hubs. These venues remained alive throughout the festival, with informal conversations, parties, and gatherings bringing artists and the community together.

based on an open call. Others they invited due to prior engagement or because they had seen a particular work by the artist which they thought would make an essential addition to the festival bill. These decisions sometimes involved accepting suggestions from colleagues in the broader arts community or the sponsors supporting the event. While anyone could attend the festival, the guest artists or speakers for various events in addition to the performance showcases were chosen by the GDF. On the whole, the GDF festival team had curatorial control.

The scale of the activities and invitees varied across the four editions, with the festival significantly expanding between the 2010 and 2015 editions.[246] I offer an analysis of a handful of examples from each to illuminate Ignite's significance for contemporary Indian dance. I base my interpretation on reviewing brochures, fliers, emails, blogposts, program notes, reports, and newspaper reviews on the four editions; details shared by Dhar during our interview; my first-hand impressions of attending the 2012 edition; and documentation of the dances featured in the festival over the years, sourced from GDF's archives.

I first observed the sheer variety of contemporary dance choreographies showcased during Ignite. The GDF team included artists who have been pushing the boundaries of classical and folk dance forms to create hybrid compositions. The 2015 edition featured *Inner Images* by Santosh Nair, in which he interweaves the physicality and dynamics of Kathakali and Mayurbhanj Chhau with a play of light, sound, and visuals to generate a series of abstract images of the moving body. Other pieces that the GDF festival team selected to showcase were contemporary interpretations of Indian narrative traditions. The 2016 festival featured a solo by

[246] In 2010, the festival occurred over four days, represented 45 artists and 8 countries, featured 14 performances across 6 venues, and hosted several collateral events like meet-the-artist sessions, workshops, masterclasses, film screenings, a research seminar, and a dance photography exhibit. Whereas, the 2015 edition was eight days long, with 80 artists and 10 countries in attendance, 22 performances showcased across 8 venues, and all the above collateral events in addition to a three-day conference (*Ignite! Festival of Contemporary Dance October 2016,* 2).

Nimmy Raphael called *Nivdravathwam*, a Sanskrit phrase that translates to "sleep approaches" or "sleep descends." Raphael stages a conflict between two important yet secondary characters in *Ramayana*—Lakshmana and Kumbhakarana—specifically their respective sleeplessness and sleepfulness. She delightfully punctures the grandeur of the epic by embodying the characters never as heroic figures but instead as whimsical, situating the story in the quotidian.

Ignite also featured contemporary dance productions that were based on intercultural collaborations and engaged with other artistic disciplines. An example of the former was the staging of *Saṃhāra* during the 2012 edition, which was co-created by Nrityagram Ensemble from India and Chitrasena Dance Company from Sri Lanka. A drawing together of Odissi and Kandyan dance, the piece explored the resonances between the aesthetic philosophies and formal principles of the two South Asian dance cultures. In another instance, the 2015 festival presented *Wall Dancing* by Padmini Chettur, a work that sits at the intersection of performance and visual art. The piece unfolded over three hours and was composed of a series of movement scores executed by five dancers within a gallery space on the premises of Instituto Cervantes. Dancers took on different configurations within the room and relationships to the walls, choreographed to appear as an installation of bodies, and intended to challenge spectators about what constitutes dance.

Through the performances it chose to feature during Ignite, the GDF was additionally interested in encouraging conversations about the interrelationships between body, politics, and society. The 2016 edition presented *Unseen* by Kalyanee Mulay, which emerged from her critique of the sexism underlying Rabindranath Tagore's thoughts on womanhood in an 1891 letter penned by him in response to a speech delivered by Indian social reformer Pandita Ramabai called "Ramabai-er Baktritar Upalakhse." Through sound installation, physical scores,

and reciting excerpts from Tagore's letter, Mulay devised scenarios reflecting how patriarchy perceives femininity. At the same edition, Preethi Athreya was invited by the GDF to present *Conditions of Carriage,* a production involving collective movement and physical intimacy between ten dancers, which in my opinion, intended to offer an alternate experiential moment to the culture of hyper-individualism and alienation spawned by contemporary capitalism. The GDF also curated "Remembering Chandralekha" during 2016 Ignite, which was an exhibition of forty in-process and performance photographs from the choreographer's oeuvre. I imagine that by activating the legacy of a figure who, through decades of interrogation, provocation, and creation, generated an "emancipatory politics of the body," the GDF wished to engage attendees in a reflection about the liberatory possibilities of dance at a time when India is facing intense governmental repression.[247] At the same time, I cannot ignore the irony in this decision to display an exhibition on Chandralekha, considering the choreographer explicitly noted that she did not want a "legacy" represented in the future, in line with her view about the immediacy of the "contemporary."[248]

The second thing I observed is that Ignite, like the GSDR, offered support to young and emerging choreographers in contemporary dance. In addition to presenting the work of luminaries and reputed ensembles, each edition highlighted works by an upcoming generation of artists, who were usually included as part of the short recital program called "Mixed Bill." Reviewing the brochures of the first three editions, I noticed that the GDF featured the works that emerging dancers had made as part of its GSDR series. That series seems to have served as a

[247] Eminent Telgu poet and historian Arudra used this phrase to describe Chandralekha's aesthetic sensibility.

[248] Past observers have written about how Chandralekha had no desire to create a legacy for her dance practice by establishing a permanent dance company, a systematized pedagogy, or a computerized archive of her choreographies (Rustom Bharucha 1995, Tishani Doshi 2007, Geeta Doctor 2008, and Malini Nair 2016).

springboard and professional pipeline for emerging choreographers to present their original works at one of the few contemporary dance festivals in India.

Additionally, the GDF created opportunities during Ignite for budding choreographers to engage with the practices of elders in the wider experimental performance community, by programming masterclasses and "Meet the Artist" exchanges.[249] In this way, the GDF helped facilitate intergenerational relations between practitioners of contemporary dance theatre in India. Besides providing upcoming choreographers the chance to learn from seniors in the field, the GDF also curated open spaces for them at the festival to brainstorm ideas about a piece or score they might have been developing. For instance, in 2012, the GDF hosted "Three Minute Ideas," encouraging attending dancers to share short movement drafts and receive feedback from peers as well as consultation from individuals with a longer experience in choreography (*Ignite Festival of Contemporary Dance* 2012, 27). The GDF would host similar platforms throughout the year in its Studios at Khirkee Extension that allowed young dance makers to develop works in dialogue with others belonging to the performing arts world.[250] Such initiatives were, in my opinion, one of the unique contributions of the GDF.

A third thing that set Ignite apart was how the GDF found ways of engaging the Indian public with contemporary dance. Most city-dwellers in Delhi are exposed to a sheer volume of

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[249] To give a few examples, according to the flier for the 2010 Ignite, the festival included masterclasses and "Meet the Artist" exchanges with Shobhana Jeyasingh, Padmini Chettur, Sudesh Adhana (Chhau and Kathakali dancer), and Chris Lechner (*Ignite Festival of Contemporary Dance*, 2010). Similarly, during the 2012 edition Bijayani Satpathy and Surupa Sen offered a masterclass that introduced attendees to the Odissi training method they developed at their institution Nrityagram (*Ignite Festival of Contemporary Dance* 2012, 24). Moreover, the 2016 edition hosted a masterclass on performance energy by Vinay Kumar, the Artistic Director of Adishakti Laboratory for Theatre Arts Research, in which he invited participants to learn how to control their emotional expressions through the play and manipulation of breath (*Ignite! Festival of Contemporary Dance New Delhi Schedule* 2016).

[250] One such work-sharing initiative for young choreographers that the GDF curated beyond the festival was "6Cube." As the title might suggest, it was a showcase of six performances, six minutes-long, hosted every six months ("August at Gati!," 2016).

classical Indian dance programs and staged presentations of folk dance, and relative to this, they are often less acquainted with experiments in Indian dance. Ignite's "Meet the Artist" series was also intended for audience members to interact with choreographers participating in the festival and learn about their creative practices up close, to help the public gain knowledge about the field. While the GDF booked many well-known proscenium theatres for Ignite performances, at times it also found alternative modes of disseminating dance at the festival.[251] This was often led by the performance requirements of the featured choreographers. For instance, the GDF team reserved a gallery space for Chettur as it fit her intent to reorder or challenge the usual tenets of dance reception in *Wall Dancing*. Inviting audiences to view choreography with renewed attention was one of the festival team's main reasons for hosting the Delhi chapter of the 2016 edition at the OddBird Theatre, originally a grain mill, now transformed into an intimate black box venue for experimental performance in Chhatarpur (south Delhi).[252]

The selection of non-traditional dance formats for circulating dance was a way for the GDF to also reach a wider audience. The festival team organized events like "Intersections" in 2012, which included mobile screenings of the 2011 "Yellow Line Project" (YLP) residency dance films projected onto various architectural sites in Delhi, on view for the general public. The YLP was itself an initiative through which the GDF sought to push dance out of the proscenium context by enabling collaborations between choreographers and media artists to

[251] Some of proscenium spaces that the GDF utilized for the first three editions of Ignite, included Kaman Auditorium, Shri Ram Centre, British Council Auditorium, and the SNA's Meghdoot Theatre Complex.

[252] The black box usually refers to a small or medium-sized hall with bare, often black walls, with flexible utility, i.e. it can be repurposed to meet the requirements of each creative production. Black boxes are often considered an ideal venues for experimental theatre and dance. Black box first gained popularity in the 1960s, particularly on university campuses, which crystalized as an ideological site after the publication of two key performance books in 1968—Jerzy Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre* and Peter Brook's *The Empty Space* (Bishop 2018, 30). Grotowski and Brook sought to eliminate theatrical trappings—the elaborate technology and sets—to galvanize the actor-audience relationship, which in their opinion, was central to theatre (Ibid.).

generate works that aesthetically responded to different physical sites across Delhi. Allegedly, the GDF reached almost 2000 new people due to the YLP dance film screenings during the 2012 festival ("Annual Meeting: Royal Norwegian Embassy," 2014). Similarly, the GDF initiated a program called "Dance on the Street" leading up to the 2015 Ignite, which involved displaying two dance works in outdoor locations in different neighborhoods of Delhi, such as Shadipur, Nehru Place, Hauz Khas Village, and Green Park Market (these sites include a large concentration of businesses and thus are always bustling with people from across the city). Noting the impact of this program in its post-festival report, the GDF team stated that "by taking dance to where the people were instead of trying to bring people into theatres," they was successful in moving a step forward toward generating new audiences for contemporary dance (*IGNITE! 2015 Narrative Report*, 10).

As part of its hope to take contemporary dance to new publics and spaces, the GDF also produced a two-day satellite festival in Jaipur in 2016. This condensed version of Ignite occurred at Jawahar Kala Kendra, a prestigious multi-arts centre located in the city, with local dancers and audience members attending the select performances and workshops, apparently in large numbers (Dance Domains, "Festival Updates," 2016). Dhar, Ignite's Festival Director, noted that the GDF team was treating this event as a pilot project for what they hoped to do in the future: develop similar satellite festivals in other Indian cities (interview, New Delhi, 2017). In her imagination, the GDF would organize these festivals in collaboration with local venues and program managers, equally taking on curatorial, logistical, and financial responsibilities. The idea was to create a network of spaces committed to expanding an audience curious about experimental performance that would also make regular touring circuits possible for

contemporary artists. But with the official closure of the GDF in 2020, this dream of "igniting" these satellite festivals, alas, remained a dream.

The fourth element I want to point toward is that at the festival, the GDF team created forums dedicated to the creative process, professional development, and community-building. In addition to the "Meet the Artist" series, they organized short research seminars, like "In the Making" and "Conceiving Connections" from the 2010 edition onwards, to serve the above purpose. At such gatherings, contemporary dancers got to contextualize and discuss their dance-making practices. Unlike the MMB symposia from the 1980s and 1990s, these were open to public, so audience members could educate themselves about contemporary dance. Some of the seminars involved a dialogue between choreographers, academics, funders, producers, and other cultural workers about capacity-building and networking in the contemporary dance field. The GDF team eventually consolidated these components of the festival by curating three-day conferences during the 2015 and 2016 editions.

The GDF team invited writer and dancer Ranjana Dave and choreographer Vikram Iyengar to curate the 2015 Ignite conference, "Joining the Dots: Points of Shift, Pause, Discontinuity or Rupture," hosted at the premises of MMB chapter in New Delhi. This event sparked engagements with contemporary choreographers "across boundaries of form, genre, or region of work" through a medley of formats (Dave and Iyengar, 2014). There were panel discussions and lecture demonstrations by established exponents from the contemporary dance field, who presented details about their making process, foregrounding moments of personal discovery and reasons that motivated them to disrupt an established dance or performance convention.[253] A younger crop of dance makers had the chance to showcase excerpts from their

[253] The panel discussion series included a conversation between Raikhy and Maya Krishna Rao in which the latter talked about the process of creating two of her cross-media works, *Deeper Fried Jam* (2002) and *Heads Are Meant*

works, then elaborate on the images and ideas fueling them.[254] An "open rehearsal" of a choreographic piece being developed by Chettur was yet another entry point into the creative process of a contemporary dancer. These platforms were all unique opportunities for artists and their audiences to intimately encounter and exchange impressions about a diverse range of histories, concerns, values, and formal inquiries associated with contemporary Indian dance.

The 2015 conference also addressed critical issues that surround and support creative practice. The festival curators designed "clinics" where dancers and choreographers could have one-on-one sessions with experts in law, marketing, fundraising, and physical therapy.[255] The experts helped dancers understand a range of topics, like how the Indian law on intellectual property might apply to them; how to brainstorm effective publicity and grant writing strategies; and how to improve their muscle strength, conditioning, and range of motion, as well as prevent injuries. By enabling access to these skills and resources, the GDF festival team intended to assist artists in taking care of themselves and sustaining their creative practice. Unlike the 1958

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for Walking Into (2005). Rao shared details about the political concerns that steered these productions, the choreographic methods she pursued, and how she engaged with multiple art disciplines to produce the desired effect (*IGNITE! 2015 Narrative Report*, 11-12). Another exchange part of this series was between Preethi Athreya and cultural journalist Sadanand Menon. The two engaged in a discussion about how Athreya forges new relationships with the dancing body in her piece, *Light Doesn't Have Arms to Carry Us (2013)*. Moreover, Navtej Johar, Justin McCarthy, and writer Rizio Yohannan Raj deliberated on how the authority and sanctity endowed to ancient Indian aesthetic texts bears on the freedom and span of an artist's imagination in the subcontinent (Dance Domains 2015). The conference also included two lecture demonstrations. Odissi dancer-choreographer Sharmila Biswas posited her work as a contemporary practice that interprets traditions. While unveiling an excerpt from one of her productions, Biswas spoke about discovering and creating movements based on a research of performing arts traditions of Orissa (Ibid.). During her time, Jhumka Basak traced the *navanrtiya* (new dance) methodology developed by her colleagues, Manjusri Chaki-Sircar and Ranjabati Sircar, through a combination of personal narrative and practical presentation (Ibid.).

[254] Four choreographers from different parts of the country shared the intentions behind their work and how they inhabit the Indian performing arts world as up and coming artists (*IGNITE! 2015 Narrative Report*, 12). The four choreographers were Mirra from Bengaluru, Rajyashree Ramamurthi from Pune, Raphael from Pondicherry, and Sanjukta Wagh from Mumbai.

[255] Mary Therese Kurkalang was the expert on outreach, marketing and communications, Lawrence Liang was the legal expert; Rashmi Sawhney focused on writing as an essential component of fundraising; and Dr. Katherine Kulp was a certified functional manual therapist invited to run one of the clinics.

SNA Dance Seminar and the 1984 MMB Dance Encounter, the 2015 Ignite conference went beyond deliberations about aesthetics to include concrete ways of addressing the well-being and lived experience of dance makers.

The fifth and final aspect of Ignite that I noted was that it included an engagement with the international dance community. While Ignite prioritized contemporary dance within India, throughout its various editions the GDF invited participants from neighboring Asian countries and beyond. Thus for the GDF, unlike the MMB, the international did not exclusively mean Western Europe or North America. In some cases, the GDF team first identified which international participant they wanted to include at Ignite. Then they would approach the cultural embassy of the associated country to help bring them to the festival. In other instances, the foreign cultural associations sponsoring Ignite would suggest who the GDF could feature at Ignite.

In whatever way they made their decisions, the GDF festival team chose international participants keeping in mind their work's relevance to the Indian context. For example, to advance the long history of transnationalism in contemporary Indian dance, the festival team opted to spotlight experimental choreographies produced by South Asians in the diaspora. British South Asian choreographers Shobhana Jeyasingh and Aakash Odedra have shown their works as part of Ignite, as have Indian dance experimentalists from North America and Europe, like Sheetal Gandhi and Post Natyam Collective, and Swedish Indian choreographer, Rani Nair. Ignite also featured international productions that raised critical issues concerning the Global South. For instance, in 2015 Venuri Perera showed *Tratriot,* which drew on the experiences of violence and oppression faced by Sri Lankan Tamils persecuted by the majority Sinhalese government in the context of the country's civil war between 1983 and 2009. It served as a

chilling reminder to Indian spectators about the dangers of religious majoritarianism when wielded by governments. During the same edition, Ignite premiered *Made in Bangladesh*, a piece co-choreographed by Vikram Iyengar from India and Helena Waldman from Germany. Iyengar and Waldman attempted to capture, through the language of Kathak, the worker exploitation that occurs in sweatshops in Bangladesh by giant garment industries of the Global North.

In addition to performing artists, the GDF festival team also invited international curators and producers to some editions of Ignite. For instance, Japanese director and curator Takao Norikoshi served as an international observer for the 2015 edition. Explaining why they invited him, the GDF team stated that his "interests and contribution to the discourse on dance in the Asian context, became an important aspect in bringing a new perspective to the discourse of contemporary dance in the country" (*IGNITE! 2015 Narrative Report*, 9). I would be interested in knowing how exactly Norikoshi was instrumental to the process the GDF team characterizes above, but for now I can assume that by welcoming him, the GDF was hoping to facilitate future connections between the experimental dance scenes in India and Japan. Other invitees during the 2015 Ignite included curators and producers of prestigious international contemporary performance festivals, such as Micheal Stolhofer of Impulstanz (Vienna), Jørgen Knudsen of the Barents Danse Festival and Gisle Frøysland of the Pikselfestival (Norway), Jayachandran Palazhy of the Attakkalari India Biennial, and Tang Fukuen, who previously curated the Singapore Arts Festival. Requesting the presence of these individuals might have been advantageous for two reasons. One, it would have been beneficial for the GDF team and these curators to exchange notes on their challenges and the strategies they have deployed while organizing festivals that center experimental practices. And second, Indian choreographers participating in Ignite had the opportunity to network with these major players in the

international festival circuit, opening up the possibility of showcasing their productions in other geographical contexts.

In her 2016 article, "Festivals and Local Identities in a Global Economy," Janet O'Shea examines how dance festivals engage with the following intertwined matters: the relationship between scholarship, cultural tourism, and imperial display; the construction of national identities; and the relationship between dance and diplomacy. I argue that Ignite negotiates these elements, often in divergent ways. Firstly, in allying Indian dance with inquiry, experimentation, and modernity, the GDF festival disrupts the colonial display of eighteenth and nineteenth century colonial exhibitions, "World Fairs" and "Grand Tours" in Europe and North America as well as the twentieth-century Indian government practices of cultural tourism (like Festivals of India), both of which boxed and marketed Indian culture as static and traditional. Secondly, Ignite's central goal was to bolster the national contemporary dance scene. In this sense, its focus aligned with the SNA, which might partly explain why the SNA served as one of the festival partners in 2015. Similar to the SNA, the GDF believed that contemporary Indian dance had its own set of culturally specific priorities tied to the history and geography of the subcontinent, which its festival needed to emphasize. Moreover, from featuring transcultural dance productions to including international participants at Ignite, the GDF wanted contemporary dancemaking in India to remain in dialogue with the world. The SNA must have been open to supporting this agenda too, considering that since the latter half of the twentieth century, it had been strategically participating in neoliberal internationalism with regard to the cultural practices it chose to enable. While the GDF had a global orientation, it sought to offset the assumption that contemporary dance in India is derivative of North American and Western European modern and postmodern traditions, a discourse explicitly prevalent in events organized by the MMB in the 1980s.

To circumvent these issues, the GDF framed its festival series around particular concepts signaling the process of dancemaking or the stakes of the practice, instead of structuring it via geographical signifiers. For example, in the program notes for the 2012 edition, the festival team invited audiences to look beyond the term "contemporary dance" and its associations with the West by offering the following recontextualization: "an *encounter* has been intentionally sought, be it between one form and another, between vocabularies that speak of distinct bodies, imaginations, and aesthetics, or between media with the juxtapositions of the possibilities they offer" (GDF 2012, 2; italics by me). While unlike the SNA, the GDF team steered away from nationalism as a framework for Ignite, their thematic choice was concerned with national developments. In the 2016 edition, entitled "Form, Identity, and Dissent," the GDF intended to reflect on and foreground bodily strategies of resistance to oppressive forces, provoking renewed questions about the relation between contemporary dance and politics.[256] The festival team found this theme appropriate as India began to witness large-scale aggressions against and silencing of citizens who chose to oppose the right-wing Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), headed by current Indian Prime Minster Narendra Modi.[257] I want to add here that for the members of the GDF and associated dancers, the notion of resistance was not purely symbolic. Many actively participated in nationwide protests against the rising communal violence and attacks on India's syncretic culture orchestrated by the BJP and its aides, such as "Artists Unite" and "Not in my Name."

[256] In addition to the performances featured during this edition of Ignite, the conference captured the concerns of this moment, with panels dedicated to "Reclaiming the Critical Space," "Imaginations and Iterations: Performance Specters of Freedom in the University Context," and "Activism and Sexuality in Performance."

[257] Modi first came to power after winning the 2014 Indian elections with a considerable margin, despite his prominent role in overseeing the anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat in 2002 when he was the state's Chief Minister. He was thereupon re-elected in 2019 in a landslide victory.

Lastly, Ignite's connection to cultural diplomacy is less obvious. O'Shea notes how governments across the world had established dance festivals as tools of political diplomacy during the Cold War to cultivate relations with the defining superpowers of the time.[258] This practice of using dance festivals to assert geopolitical power dynamics continued into the twenty-first century. But as a non-governmental organization, the GDF saw Ignite as a tool of advocacy tool instead of diplomacy. The festival was part of the institution's mission to amplify the visibility and legitimacy of contemporary dance for the benefit of its practitioners. Nonetheless, the GDF certainly took advantage of the diplomatic missions of foreign government-affiliated agencies, which tend to support modern and contemporary forms in India to consolidate ties between their countries and the subcontinent, a critical global player with the expansion of neoliberalism. Sponsorships from foreign funders helped maintain the international orientation of Ignite. Other than cultural institutes from Europe, the festival was supported by cultural affiliates of Asian governments, like the Japan Foundation and the Singapore Arts Council. These regions have become hubs of the international art market due to their flourishing socio-economic affluence in the twenty-first century. The support of the aforementioned entities for Ignite exemplifies how the neoliberal era has increased the possibilities for Indian artists and cultural producers collaborating with their Asian counterparts rather than only having to seek out the West to catalyze innovations.

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[258] In her article, O'Shea writes that:

> "The arts validated the economic and political positions of the defining superpowers of the time (re: the Cold War): the United States and the Soviet Union. In dance, the United States promoted abstract expressionism, with its celebration of individual accomplishment…..In the Soviet Union as well as China , ballet, despite its imperial history, stood in for collective effort. Countries more marginal to the main power struggle of the era likewise affiliated themselves with socialism or capitalism through forms of representation as well as via political and economic policy" (94).

Addressing the Material Conditions of Dance in Delhi

An additional way the GDF structurally intervened within the dance world was by launching a project focused on revitalizing the physical infrastructure for rehearsals and performance in Delhi, and helping build relationships between dancers in the city, such that they could collectively organize in the future to demand better working conditions.[259] The analysis here is based on my direct experience working on this GDF project between 2012 and 2014. I will interweave my first-hand observations with data from two reports tracking the program's evolution: one of them co-authored by my colleague, Virkein Dhar, and me in early 2014, and the other written in late 2015 by the project members who operated this initiative after us.

This project commenced with a meeting entitled the "Dance Revitalization Project" in December 2011 in Siddharth Hall at the MMB in New Delhi. At this session, the GDF team (represented by Lall, Raikhy, and Abantee Dutta, the then Director of this project) consulted with a group of performers, scholars, architects, and various heads of educational and cultural institutions primarily based in Delhi to brainstorm about the mission and scope of this program.[260] They had a long day of debate about a range of issues that affect the making and dissemination of dance, such as the availability and condition of rehearsal and performance venues, funding opportunities, marketing and publicity of dance, and performance licenses (Dhar

[259]According to its official program brochure, in the early years of its operation, the GDF was trying to build an online database that provided dancers across the country with a list of updated information about rehearsal and performance venues. They also wanted to use this database to intimate dancers about any performance, funding or training opportunities available in India and abroad (*Gati Dance Forum: Performance, Practice, Research,* 2010),

[260] Some of the individuals in attendance included: Robin Mallick (former Director of Programs of the MMB in New Delhi); Farah Batool (Programs Coordinator of the MMB in New Delhi); Anmol Vellani (Trustee of the India Foundation for the Arts), Navtej Singh Johar; Dr. Savyasachi (Professor at the Department of Sociology, Jamia Millia Islamia University); Veena Poonacha (Director of Research Centre for Women's Studies); Anita E. Cherian (Associate Professor at School of Culture and Creative Expressions, Ambedkar University); Takahiko Makino (Programme Specialist for Culture for the UNESCO); Lynne Fernandez (Trustee of Nrityagram); and Gurmeet Rai (Conservation Architect) (Dhar and Singh 2014, 10).

and Singh 2014, 10). At the end of the meeting, the group zeroed in on physical infrastructure as the focus area for the GDF's pilot. Representatives of GDF expressed the need for safe, affordable, and flexible spaces in the city wherein dancers could learn, create, rehearse, and showcase their work. Even though the GDF built and made this kind of infrastructure available for dancers at their Khirkee Extension building, the team wanted to overhaul other venues in the city similarly. The GDF always sought to organize efforts that would have an impact beyond the confines of the space they were creating.

Attending to physical infrastructure was yet another way for the GDF to address an issue that the SNA, for example, had not fully realized. Under its "Grants-in-Aid" scheme, the SNA includes a category of "Building Grants," which constitutes assistance for either voluntary or government-aided organizations to create appropriately-equipped spaces for artists. These include conventional proscenium theatres; training centers and schools for theatre, music, and dance; and flexible spaces like studio theatres, non-proscenium, and rehearsal-cum-performance spaces. Even though this scheme technically exists, the SNA's financial assistance has not gone to infrastructure creation over the years. There was one exception in 1982, when the SNA allocated "Block Grants" to 74 organizations for building and purchasing equipment suitable for performance between 1982 and 1987. However, I found no description of who the recipients were and how the grants were utilized.

The first phase of the project, "Working in Research, Advocacy and Policy" (WRAP) began in early 2012. Dutta, Dhar, Manjari Kaul and I initiated a study to analyze the built infrastructure for dance in Delhi. Due to its interest in developing the local cultural ecosystem of

host cities, the MMB funded this initiative. It remained one of the big supporters of the project until its end.[261]

As part of the WRAP study, we conducted a qualitative analysis of the status and functionality of spaces used for dance in Delhi by assessing the technical specifications of each venue and interviewing venue managers and dancers who have been based in the city for a substantial chunk of their careers. Out of the initial list of 151, we examined 30 performance and rehearsal spaces. This list included public and privately held spaces, either created explicitly for the performing arts or that operated as makeshift venues. We also interviewed 31 dancers, who mostly identified as practitioners of classical and contemporary dance, about their experiences navigating the extant physical infrastructure for dance and documented their suggestions for improving the same. Like most GDF projects, this component—documenting the perspectives of artists—was foundational for determining the future interventions we wanted to make through this initiative. I want to share just a handful of concerns that emerged from our research.

Many dancers revealed that venues in the Mandi House area in central Delhi, considered a major cultural hub in the city and nationally, lack even the most basic requirements needed for dance.[262] India's national elite and state agencies constructed many of these venues in the early and middle part of the twentieth century as part of the movement to rebuild the country's art and cultural resources. But dancers, during our interviews, commonly noted that these spaces were often not adaptable to their aesthetic visions and choreographic requirements. They also wished to see more investment in venues not concentrated in this central Delhi location. In studying

[261] In the previous chapter, I have delineated the multiple roles that the MMB played as a way to enable this project.

[262] The Mandi House area includes a less than 500-meter strip lined with multiple proscenium spaces, open-air theatres, performing arts schools, the three national institutions for the performing arts (the SNA), literature, and visual arts, and the headquarters of the state broadcaster, Doordarshan.

various studios, prosceniums, and open-air theatres sprinkled across the city, we discovered that financial sustainability was a major factor that hindered rehearsal and performance spaces from being upgraded as per the needs of the artists. For instance, many of the managers of public venues we spoke to reported that they hardly received assistance from the government and had to depend on the irregularities of donor engagement. Additionally, many interviewees noted how legal and regulatory frameworks established by the government, such as procuring public entertainment licenses and compliances for events, impinged on what works got produced and staged.

Over the next few months, we shared results from our research through a series of one-on-one and group consultations with GDF mentors, trustees, and funders and decided that for the next phase of the project, we ambitiously wanted to revitalize three venues for rehearsal and performance.[263] We wanted these spaces to be affordable for artists renting them, open to diverse performance forms, styles, and content, and located away from central Delhi.[264]

In quintessential GDF fashion, we believed that dancers needed to play a central role in advocating for changes to their working conditions, including physical infrastructure. Thus the other focus of this GDF project was finding ways to galvanize a sense of collective ownership

[263] For instance, we hosted an "Infrastructure for Performance" working group during the 2012 edition of Ignite to receive feedback on the results of our study and map out the next stage of the project. In attendance included individuals who participated in the first project meeting in 2011, such as Rai, Vellani, Fernandez, Batool and Mallick. New participants invited to the working group represented performers, critics, curators, producers, funders, managers, and heads of important institutions in the dance and theatre world. The invitees included K.T. Ravindran (Chairman, Architectural Heritage Advisory Committee of INTACH); Ashok Lall (Architect); Sanjana Kapoor (Former Director, Prithvi Theatre); Sanjoy Roy (Managing Director, Teamworks Arts Production); Leela Venkatraman (Dance Critic); Jayachandran Palazhy; Leela Samson; Helena Acharya (Secretary, Sangeet Natak Akademi); Anuradha Kapur (Theatre Director and Former Director, National School of Drama); Abhilash Pillai (Professor, National School of Drama); Nisar Allana (Founder, Dramatic Art and Design Academy); Padmini Chettur; Shiva Pathak (Arts Manager and Curator); and Manu Arya and Tone Slenes from the RNE (Dhar and Singh 2014, 18-19).

[264] We arrived at the values and features for our ideal space by carrying out research on preexisting venues for dance and performance in India and abroad, including my 2013 field trip to Ninasam Theatre Institute in rural Heggodu (Karnataka), a world-renowned residential cultural center dedicated to art and theatrical training.

amongst dancers locally. This is why we decided to officially title our initiative "Dance Union" after a staff meeting back in 2013. The inspiration behind the name came out of a discussion about Equity, a UK-based union of more than 47,000 performers and creative practitioners fighting for "fair terms and conditions in the workplace," such as "decent pay, better health and safety regulations, and more opportunities for all—regardless of class, age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation" (Equity, "About"). The work of Equity provoked us to think about what we hoped would be a future possibility for dancers in Delhi: establishing a formalized union. However, first, we felt that we had to do the essential work of consolidating a space for dancers to gather together, express their diverse needs, and collaborate on a collective set of demands for the government and other cultural stakeholders for amending the performing arts context. We chose to keep the term "union" to remind ourselves about what we were activating, and building toward.

The first action we devised in this regard was "Moving Stories," a series of two-day workshops for dancers located in Delhi to be in intimate dialogue with their peers based on principles of Nonviolent Communication, a methodology developed by Marshall Rosenberg. The workshop series functioned as a tool for community building between dancers from different backgrounds in terms of aesthetic affiliation, formal training, age, class, caste, gender orientation, and the neighborhood they were from. As part of the series, artists assessed their needs and challenges while pursuing dance professionally. We designed a second action to complement the workshop series, called "Monthly Discussions," hosted in other dance studios and schools across Delhi, and involved students and artists from these institutions in a dialogue about what kind of intervention they were willing to undertake to address issues impacting their

practice, such as access to space, funding, health and safety measures, and professional development schemes. Dutta's replacement, Persis Taraporevala, Kaul, Dhar, and I managed to organize multiple Moving Stories workshops and Monthly Discussions before some of us departed from the GDF.

To our disappointment, the original mission of this project lost steam amid the chaos of project leadership and the team being reconfigured multiple times.[265] The new group of individuals who took this GDF project forward made some alterations in its scope and direction. What I gathered from a 2015 project report authored by the project's then Director, Bhakti Nefertiti, is that the new team let go of the infrastructure revitalization plan, perceiving it untenable for implementation by a small-scale nonprofit. They continued the work of building community through "Meet and Shares," hosted for dancers affiliated with multiple contemporary dance institutes and studios across the city.[266] Moreover, they added to the project by facilitating capacity-building workshops on grant writing, lighting design, and arts management. But after almost a year of enabling these events, the GDF made the difficult decision to conclude this project in 2015.

I am not aware of the official reasons for this move. What I can offer from my experience is that even though dancers who attended our workshop and discussion series understood the importance and relevance of our project, navigating a financially-strapped field as under-resourced dancers impeded them from consistently offering their time, knowledge, and labor toward a common goal. Bernhard Müller (2013) and Thomas Piketty (2015) have disclosed that

[265] At some point, close to the end of 2013, Dutta left the GDF and Persis Taraporevala was hired as her replacement as this project's new Director.

[266] These included Banjara School of Dance, Sadhya Dance Academy, Musical Dreams, Bhoomika Dance Centre, and Aura Dance Studios.

the recurring implications of neoliberal policies include lowered access to economic and social security. Philip Mirowski (2014) has argued that financial precarity is not an accidental outcome but an essential feature of neoliberal politics because it is meant to serve as a mechanism to compound competition (and productivity). Neoliberal subjectivity places the responsibility for success on the shoulders of individuals, who then are compelled to forage for personal growth and achievement by competing with each other (Scharff 2016). As scholars have argued, this has debilitated broader solidarities and led to the decline of community life (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009, Adams ed al. 2019, and Teo 2018). At the GDF, we prided ourselves on centering dancers in decisions about the orientation and impact of our programming. But in my opinion, this project exposed the limits of our idealism, of what it means to operate under a neoliberal system that actively attempts to decimate the possibility of collective action.

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Between 2015 and 2020, the GDF experienced some dramatic transformations. Over the years, the group developed and re-envisioned projects based on what they heard the dance community needed and found valuable. But financial, labor, and other material shortages also affected the evolution of its projects and the organization's future. Alexander and Fernandez (2020) interrogate how nonprofits' "quest for legitimacy through professionalization and managerialism" under neoliberalism has curtailed their ability to meet their change-making projects (369). GDF's work was often interrupted by the mechanics and contingencies of running a nonprofit that depended on external funding sources and a small (often overworked) staff.

On the one hand, the GDF always found innovative ways of adapting their projects during unexpected crises. The team at the GDF was fueled by an economy of hustle, responding

to precarity with creative solutions. For instance, Dhar shared with me that when the GDF could not keep its original booking of venues for the 2016 Ignite, the festival team decided to pivot toward the OddBird Theatre as the main place for the event (interview, New Delhi, 2017). The team transformed an adverse situation into an opportunity to curate dance in a non-proscenium venue. In other words, the likelihood of having no place to host the festival turned into a circumstance in which the GDF chose a black box to maximize the capacity of contemporary performance to interrogate and challenge its viewers.

On the other hand, the GDF encountered many roadblocks that were not easily resolvable and would eventually compromise the life expectancy of the organization. For instance, raising the entire amount of the proposed budget for the 2015 Ignite had been a problem for the festival team. On December 15, 2014, a month before Ignite's launch, Raikhy sent out an email to the GDF's network of associates and peers (including me), explaining that they needed to raise a large sum of funds to cover the costs of artist fees, venue rentals, and technical equipment hire.[267] Raikhy's message stated: "to make sure the festival can still happen, we have decided to tap into people power! We have started a crowdfunding campaign that will enable us to raise Rs. 15 Lakhs (approx. US $19,275) in 26 days" (Raikhy, "Enabling IGNTE!," 2014). The crowdfunding campaign ended up being successful—they were able to raise their target amount—which is a testament to the reputation and trust the GDF had built in the arts and cultural field across India and amongst international circles (*IGNITE! 2015 Narrative Report*,

[267] The projected expenses of the 2015 Ignite edition according to the official festival budget sheet was around Rs. 63.1 Lakhs (199approx. US $81,360), which included paying for the festival director, administrative manpower, professional services, promotions and outreach, artist fees and per diems, production expenses, technical equipment costs, venue hires, travel, hospitality, local transport, documentation costs, food and beverages, permits, conference fees, and professional fees of festival staff (Dhar 2014-2015).

3).[268] In the assessment report post the 2015 Ignite, the GDF team expressed that they were grateful that the crowdfunding campaign was triumphant, but depending on the community to fundraise for future festivals was an unsustainable plan. The festival team decided to work on a two-year fundraising plan to circumvent this, which included an agenda to build contacts and partnerships for various aspects of the festival all year round (Ibid., 21). Despite these virtuous intentions, we received yet another email from Dhar on September 14, 2016, a month before the fourth edition of Ignite, requesting the "Gati family" to help the GDF to raise Rs. 6-8 Lakhs [approx. US $7,710-10,280] "to cross the end of the finish line in terms of fundraising."

Even though the GDF was fortunate to leverage many different forms of support over the years, keeping afloat was a consistent concern for the organization. One of the regular activities during the GDF staff meetings was brainstorming about diversifying sources of sustenance, such as building internal capacities to generate incomes for themselves rather than solely depend on grants and donations.[269] For many years, renting studios at the GDF building in Khirkee was a main way the institution tried to self-generate income. According to the proposal the GDF submitted to the RNE in 2014, the organization was trying to build a "multi-pronged funding system" for its activities in the future and visualized wanting "to build a corpus and be self-sustainable by 2020" (GDF 2014, 14). To this effect, the GDF even recruited a General Manager, Juee Deogaokar, who had a background in arts management and would fully dedicate her efforts to help the GDF realize this goal.

[268] 130 individuals contributed to the crowdfunding campaign. Contributions came in from New Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Gurgaon, Faridabad, New York, London, Germany, and Australia, to name a few.

[269] Alexander and Fernandez note that "the form of marketization, professionalization, and government regulation" under neoliberalism have caused nonprofits to shift their political roles "from community engagement to establishing organizational legitimacy with funders" (368).

Besides grappling with funding, the GDF consistently had to navigate staffing-related issues. The small GDF staff as always handling many different projects simultaneously, and every individual was functioning at the peak of their capacities. Team members working on specific projects oversaw all its aspects—from ideation to execution—learning multiple skills on the job, which on the one hand, was very enterprising and enriching but, on the other hand, caused many of them to feel burnt out. To complicate matters further, there were multiple changes in critical leadership and roles over the years, including Dutta leaving in late 2013 and Lall exiting the organization in 2015, leaving Raikhy to unexpectedly take over the reins as the head of the GDF. Others were also in and out of the organization (with brief stints of 2-3 years), citing exhaustion, or a difference of opinion on how to run GDF programs, or finding more stable professional opportunities.[270] Many of the team members who were dancers and choreographers found it challenging to balance working at the GDF with their own artistic pursuits. The departures of people began to impact knowledge transfers within every GDF project. Even Deogaokar left a couple of years after being hired as a financial manager, resulting in the GDF's inability to execute its long-term fundraising goals. All these factors curtailed some projects' continuity and the downsizing of others. By the end of 2016, the GDF was re-thinking the scope of its interventions in the dance field.

Around this time, the GDF building in Khirkee Extension began to slowly transform into a new site in response to the breakdown of the democratic fabric of India under the Modi government.[271] Under Modi and his Hindu nationalist BJP government, there has been increased

[270] This is based on my conversations with past staff members of the GDF who requested I do not identify them while citing this.

[271] In its March 2021 annual report on global political rights and liberties, US-based non-profit Freedom House demoted India from a free democracy to a "partially free democracy." Moreover Sweden-based V-Dem Institute was

pressure on human rights groups, intimidation of and attacks on journalists, activists, academics, and cultural workers, and an alarming rise in violence against Muslims and other religious, caste, and gender and sexuality minorities. The current formation of the BJP and its various ideological affiliates envision India as a Hindu majoritarian nation-state, not a secular one, leading to the deterioration of political and civil liberties in the country since Modi came into power in 2014. Beyond being a space that exclusively nurtured contemporary dance, the GDF building became a container for local peace-building efforts and a place to freely engage in discourse about culture and politics. In this way, the GDF was similar to the MMB, which has sought to safeguard freedom of art and speech against government censorship. Artists and civil society actors, who generally identify as progressives, were welcome to the GDF space to engage in conversations and creative research concerning the atrocities perpetrated by the current regime and organize cultural actions to protest against the same.[272] Yet again, the GDF held space for the community to take care of each other and organize around issues the government let them down on.

Designing and Launching a Graduate Degree in Choreographic Inquiry

The 2015 festival had already proved to be a resource challenge for the GDF and thus after the 2016 Ignite (which was smaller in scale compared to the previous year), the GDF team revisited all their projects with a critical eye and re-evaluated their budget and staff capacity, and eventually decided to downsize from carrying out multiple annual programs to putting all their

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more scrutinizing in its annual report on democracy from the same month, determining that India had become an "electoral autocracy."

[272] For instance, between July 20 and 22, 2017, the GDF hosted *Long Nights of Resistance*, an eight-hour performance series, at its studios. This event was inspired by the "Not In My Name" protests a week prior in the capital city against the alarming rise of mob lynching of Muslims by Hindutva vigilantes across the country. *Long Nights of Resistance* mobilized dance, music, and poetry to explore codes and tensions of selfhood and citizenship and find a language to resist the hateful and violent rhetoric of the government in power (Dave 2017).

energy toward one initiative (while keeping a couple of subsidiary endeavors going). Raikhy shared that "we realized that we were carrying weight of different visionaries (project leaders who had already left the organization) into the scope of our activities and under one institutional framework, which was too much to bear" (Deogaokar et. al. 2016, 21). A decision was made to channelize all the GDF goals for building contemporary dance practice through an education program that Raikhy had been spearheading the design of for several years prior. Raikhy described the initial rationale for this initiative in a 2020 interview with *Firstpost* magazine:

> The first conversations on starting a structured programme began in 2012 after finishing a dance residency [GSDR]. Anusha Lall, Abantee Dutta, and I had a conversation about how the residency is a fantastic space for slightly experienced artists, but Indian dance was increasingly starting to look young. It looked like the needs of younger artists were very different, and the model of the residency would not be sufficient to help address these needs. The younger artists seemed to be in search of a lot of inputs, and so we began to feel that we should probably think of putting a course together (Sammitha Sreevastha 2020).

The GSDR and the regular classes and workshops offered by the GDF, to some extent, addressed dance pedagogy.[273] Nonetheless, the GDF desired to build a university-level program for dancers who wished to pursue a professional choreographic career. It is the only organization out of the three case studies that went on to institutionalize some aspect of training related to contemporary dance. According to Raikhy, "a university-affiliated MA would give contemporary dance pedagogy and practice the legitimacy that GDF was seeking" (Deogaokar et. al. 2016, 21-22).

The GDF wanted to mitigate what it considered as an absence of college degrees in choreographic inquiry in India. Dance training in the subcontinent often occurs in spaces that are

[273] The GDF attempted to create a dance appreciation curriculum for middle and high schools in Delhi called "Left Foot Right." Left Foot Right was a dance appreciation module for young people being developed by the GDF team in its early years of operation. The module intended to facilitate an environment for active and joyful learning in middle and high schools, by using dance and movement as tools of social and personal cognition and a source of creativity and imagination (GDF 2013). In my understanding, this project ended before the module could be executed in school settings.

not affiliated with universities or is imparted at independent dance studios. Many of the institutions, either established by dancers or by government (such as the "model institutions" founded by the SNA to systematize methods of practical training in performance) are predominantly dedicated to the learning of one of the eight classical Indian forms (Cherian 2009 and Kothari 2011). Training in these contexts focus on making a student technically sound and not so much about extending their creative horizons. Pedagogy is directed toward the re-production of the national, rather than being driven by the ethic of individual self-expression; it matches how the SNA defines the educational purpose of dance. Moreover, some of these institutes might claim to offer training in choreography, but the latter most often implies the arrangement of inherited works and not so much the composition of original pieces by a self-identified innovator (O'Shea 2007, 11).

India does have a handful of institutes that provide modern and contemporary dance training. Since the 1990s, commercial dance academies like The Danceworx, which has branches across the country, have been the first contact for many to learn institutionalized North American and European forms like "Street Jazz," "Lyrical Jazz," ballet, and contemporary dance. Bollywood choreographer and dance reality show judge Terence Lewis similarly offers classes in commercial forms of contemporary dance at his dance academy in Mumbai. There are other non-commercial institutions that impart training in modern and contemporary dance rooted in Indian aesthetics and encourage students to question and expand the potential of dance, movement, and performance. As I detailed in the first chapter, several of Uday Shankar's students and family members established their own academies across the country throughout the twentieth century, wherein they offer classes that expand on his quintessential dance style and creative method. The Dancer's Guild in Kolkata, founded in the 1980s, continues to transmit the *navanrtiya* (new

dance) methodology developed by Manjusri Chaki-Sircar and Ranjabati Sircar, and more recently, Hrishikesh Pawar opened his own centre for contemporary dance training in Pune. Moreover, some contemporary dance companies that have been around since the late twentieth century, such as Kolkata-based Rhythmosaic Dance Company, Bengaluru-based Natya Stem Dance Kampani and Nrityaruta and New Delhi-based Sadhya: Santosh Nair Contemporary Dance Company, extend training to their members. Yet again, in all these contexts, teaching dancers how to be independent choreographers is not necessarily the priority. It is about immersing oneself in the creative process of the founder and learning their choreographies.

A couple of dance institutions have successfully created curriculums in contemporary dance and choreography that go beyond actualizing a singular artist's vision or the aesthetic priorities of a particular dance ensemble or company. The Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography, established by dancer Dr. Maya Rao in 1964, offers a Diploma in Choreography (Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography, "About"). Attakkalari Centre of Movement Arts also launched a two-year Diploma in Movement Arts and Mixed Media in 2006.[274] These two certificate courses have made noteworthy contributions in imparting training to a great number of individuals over the years, but neither of them is a university-level degree.[275] Many students who graduate from these programs end up pursuing graduate degrees in choreography abroad, provided they can afford it.

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[274] According to the web page about this diploma, students take classes in contemporary dance, ballet, body-conditioning, art history, anatomy, and light design in the first year (Attakkalari.org, "Diploma in Movements Arts & Media Arts"). They also get the opportunity to learn Indian forms at the Department of Traditional and Folk Performing Artis, like "enactment techniques" of dance-theatrical tradition Koodiyatam, the basic vocabulary of folk practices like Devarattam and Silambham, kinetic principles of martial art forms Kalaripayattu and Chhau (Ibid.). The newly introduced second year of the program is dedicated to students' professional development. They receive an education in dance pedagogy, theory and aesthetics, dance therapy, and arts management, considering the diverse careers students might want to pursue after completing the diploma (Ibid.). As part of their specialization, students also undertake independent academic or creative research and design their sample dance lesson plans.

[275] Although Natya Institute is affiliated to Bangalore University.

Very few university-level dance programs are practice-based; most other university degrees in India today focus on the academic study of the performing arts. Dance as a theoretical mode of inquiry exists in specific departments at public universities, such as Jawaharlal Nehru University and Ambedkar University in Delhi, and Presidency College in Kolkata. While individual professors might include a practical component in their courses, these programs require outcomes in writing, such as an M.A. thesis or Ph.D. dissertation. More recently, private liberal arts universities, like Shiv Nadar University (Noida, Uttar Pradesh) and Ashoka University (Sonepat, Haryana), launched performing arts departments offering undergraduate minors and M.A. degrees. These departments might integrate practical and intellectual endeavors into their official core curriculum, but dance is just one arena of study. Learning to make dances is certainly not the degree objective. Lastly, while the central government has established training institutions for theatre, film and TV, and design, there is no such centrally-run institution for dance in India, let alone for contemporary dance.[276] FLAME University, a private institute in Pune, is the only university program I found that seems to offer an undergraduate minor in dance with intersectional training in classical and contemporary dance techniques, improvisation, choreography, as well as dance history.

Keeping in mind this landscape of dance education in India, Raikhy (with assistance from others) designed a contemporary dance degree with an emphasis on choreography, shaped by the concerns around the body and performance in India while also drawing from international pedagogical structures.[277] Like most GDF initiatives, this one also went through a long research

[276] I am referring to the National School of Drama (New Delhi), the Film and Television Institute (Pune), and National Institute of Design (Ahmedabad).

[277] During my conversation with Bharat Sharma, he suggested that many years ago he was asked to design a dance curriculum for Hyderabad University. But, for reasons that Sharma could not share with me, it never saw the light of day (interview, New Delhi, 2015).

and development process. For instance, the GDF hosted a two-day closed working group meeting in April 2012 with an ensemble of Indian and international mentors from the fourth edition of GSDR, intending to build a databank of contemporary dance training methods relevant to Indian dancers engaged in a range of regional and global movement systems, aesthetics, and philosophies.[278] Between 2012 and 2013, Raikhy also received a fellowship called "ArtThinkSouthAsia," which is co-founded by the MMB to professionalize the arts and culture sector in South Asia. This fellowship allowed Raikhy the time to survey national and international curricula in dance, generate a preliminary outline for the course based on consultations with choreographers and dance scholars in India and abroad, and identify research schools or centers in India that could house the program (GDF 2014, 22-23). As part of this fellowship, Raikhy traveled to Germany, the UK, and Belgium to research different contemporary dance programs. The curriculum and pedagogy of the BA Contemporary Dance course at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance were particularly influential for Raikhy, who is an alumnus of the institute. Moreover, in April 2017, the GDF hosted a three-week event called "Dance Laboratory: Pedagogy, Technique, Training" at the GDF Studios with seven Indian contemporary choreographers of note from the current generation to test run the course, which would be launched as a two-year "MA Performance Practice (Dance)" at Ambedkar University Delhi (AUD) in 2018.[279]

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[278] This working group occurred at the Global Arts Village in New Delhi, and was facilitated by Lall, Raikhy, Dutta, and Dave The working group participants included Navtej Johar, Justin McCarthy, Maya Krishna Rao, Rekha Tandon, Urs Dietrich, Shankar Venkateswaran, Padmini Chettur, and Vangelis Legakis (GDF, "Mentors' Working Group, GSDR 2012").

[279] The Dance Lab was co-facilitated by Raikhy, Dave as the new Programs Director at GDF, and Deepak Kurki Shivaswamy serving as a project consultant. In addition to Raikhy and Shivaswamy, the Dance Lab participants included other choreographers representing the new generation of contemporary dancers: Preethi Athreya and Anoushka Kurien from Chennai; Surjit Nongmeikapam from Imphal; Parinay Mehra from New Delhi; and Avantika Bahl from Mumbai.

Out of the 40 applications AUD received, 19 students with different levels of experience in dance were selected as the first batch of the MA, with Raikhy and Dave as its main coordinators and faculty.[280] The official website of the MA notes the course of study integrates a somatic approach to movement training, composition classes, production and performance experience, and seminars in critical theory and dance history (AUD, "MA Performance Practice (Dance)").[281] While I do not have first-hand knowledge of how the MA ran, based on reviewing the curriculum outlined on the website and the 2020 Tata Trusts report, a few things are clear. The courses were taught by Raikhy, Dave, and a host of visiting faculty.[282] The MA aimed to develop the choreographic and proprioceptive skills of students. Visiting faculty with different backgrounds offered classes in movement principles of diverse dance traditions, anatomy, and body fundamentals.[283] They focused on somatic practices that used visualization, sensory awareness, and dynamic alignment to build bodily awareness and pattern new ways to move. I am curious to know whether these classes on somatics were only derived from Western

[280] The minimum eligibility criteria for the MA was a BA degree in any discipline from a recognized university, and a keen interest in critically engaging with dance (AUD Website, "MA Performance Practice (Dance)").

[281] The official curriculum includes a set of core and elective courses, such as "Reading and Writing Dance," "Dance Histories, Ecologies and Identities," "Embodied Practice," "Body, Space, Time," and "Investigating Choreographic Principles, Methodologies and Form" (Ibid.). Interestingly, we can see some parallels between the MA course and the BA Contemporary Dance course at Laban. The main components of the Trinity program included: (1) daily classes in contemporary dance techniques and classical ballet, creative workshops enabling students to cull out their artistic practice and choreographic voice, and opportunities to create and showcase their choreographies, (2) meditating on an array of creative processes and investigating the socio-cultural and historical contexts of movement and dance, such that students can situate their practice within a particular tradition and explore new aesthetic avenues, (3) participating in the creation and restaging of major choreographies through collaborations with leading dance exponents around the world, (4) executing a substantial independent project, with the choice to undertake theoretical or practical research, resulting in a written dissertation or originally created performance, and lastly (5) a degree show that allows the university and general public to engage with the students' works (Trinity Laban, "BA (Hons) Contemporary Dance").

[282] While the seminar classes occurred at the AUD campus at Kashmere Gate, the studio classes took place in GDF's former building at Khirkee Extension.

[283] The list included Mumbai-based contemporary dancer Avantika Bahl, UK choreographer Marina Collard, and Odissi exponent Bijayani Satpathy.

techniques or were there also teachers brought in to lead students in somatic practices rooted in Indian traditions, such as Navtej Johar's BARPS method.[284] Students also had several experiences with devising and performing dances while receiving feedback from faculty and peers.[285]

Students were taught other elements associated with making a dance, such as networking, grant writing, and stage and production design.[286] They were also provided other technical knowledge needed to support or expand their professional pursuits in dance.[287] Theory and history classes, as well as other colloquia, were directed toward generating sensitive choreographers who could critically reflect on how their practice relates to and sits within dance and cultural movements—past, present, and emerging—as well as the larger economy of performance-making.[288] COVID-19 impacted the last leg of the MA, with AUD closing down in the middle of March 2020. But despite the challenges of remote learning, by July 2020, 15 students graduated as the first MA cohort. Since the start, the MA has gone through two review

[284] Dancer and choreographer, Navtej Johar devised the BARPS method, which is a five-step, self-regulatory practice involving bracing, aligning, rotation, poise and stretch. Johar explains the function of the method as follows: "The BARPS method is a means to insulate the practice of asana from the ideas of Yoga…and steer the focus back upon the body which is innately intelligent and endowed with supreme sensitivity and integrity" ("Yoga in the 21st Century: The BARPS Method").

[285] Each semester apparently ended with a showcase of short pieces created by students as their cumulative response to what they learnt during classes with visiting faculty. A six-week engagement with Bengaluru-based contemporary choreographer Abhilash Ningappa led to the creation of the students' first public performance outside the university called *Persistence of Being,* shown at the Black Box Okhla in south Delhi.

[286] These were facilitated by Vinay Kumar, the Artistic Director of Adishakti and scenographer and lighting designer Zuleikha Chaudhari.

[287] Tripura Kashyap and Reetu Jain were invited to introduce students to dance and movement therapy, as a way to expose them to dance adjacent careers.

[288] Raikhy and Dave helped organize a symposium as part of the MA called "Labour Economy Identity: The Precarity of Artistic Practice" between November 14-17, 2019. Through a showcase of talks and performances, students were prompted to deliberate on the economic stakes of making performance, especially in the current political climate under the Modi government ("Annual Symposium on Labour Economy Identity," 2019, 3).

processes, and, at the moment, seems to be on pause.[289] Nevertheless, with the MA, the GDF attempted to create another unique opportunity for dancers in India to explore and experiment with new ideas, fine-tune the craft of choreography, approach dance-making as a process rather than an outcome, learn to self-produce work, and develop the knowledge and skills for the business side of professional dance-making.

Conclusion

In contrast to the SNA and the MMB, the GDF was an institution more prone to being shaped by risks. On the one hand, it was a collective of risk-takers, who created distinctive opportunities and resources for contemporary dancers when there were very few of the like that existed, and experimented with unconventional structures of producing, presenting, and viewing dance. I think this is because the GDF made choices from a place of thinking about what would benefit the creative practice of contemporary dancers rather than being driven by government missions. On the other hand, the GDF was frequently at the cusp of risking failure while navigating the logistics of running a small nonprofit that depended on the evolving contingencies of external funding. The GDF had to officially end operations in 2020. Apparently, the final blow was running into issues related to its Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) license.

FCRA is the legal and regulatory framework that controls the flow of foreign funding to nonprofits in India. This law decides which agency can give money to a nonprofit, which

[289] Apparently, two reviews of the course have been conducted till date to assess its efficacy. In September 2019, a mid-term review was undertaken by contemporary dancers Padmini Chettur and Krishna Devanandan. They highlighted areas of improvement and acknowledged that the MA was a step forward for advanced professional dance education in India (Tata Trusts 2020). Another review was conducted by Jayachandran Palazhy (in his position as Director of Attakalari) and Urmimala Sarkar Munsi (in her position as Associate Professor of Dance in JNU) in August 2020, after the graduation of the first batch. Based on my conversation with Sarkar Munsi, they also drew similar conclusions as the first review committee, emphasizing the need for the MA's continuation.

nonprofit the funds can go to, and in some cases, how a nonprofit can use the received money.[290] The Modi government imposed an amendment to the FCRA in September 2020, which created an arbitrary and complicated set of rules for nonprofits to renew their licenses and the means through which they can receive foreign funding. This new amendment has been challenging for nonprofits already reeling under the burden of scarce resources, causing a series of delays in license validations and, at worst, leading to the license cancellation of some.[291] Moreover, there are mounting restrictions placed by the Indian government on overseas donors and intermediaries who have been funding small or medium-sized implementing agencies like the GDF.

Nonprofits that relied the most on grants by international donors, such as the GDF, have been disproportionately affected by this new amendment, with many having to close their doors. An expert on nonprofits in India, Ingrid Srinath remarked during a 2022 talk hosted by the Indian Development Review that many individuals in this sector view this overall tightening of FCRA regulations as a crackdown on democratic activity by the Modi government and his coterie of enablers, who have been involved in the widespread silencing of arts, education, and social

[290] In an Instagram talk hosted by the Indian Development Review on January 13, 2022, Srinath, the Director of the Centre for Social Impact & Philanthropy at Ashoka University, explains that in an earlier period, NGOs needed to just register once to apply for and receive funds. But since the introduction of the 2010 amendment to the FCRA, non-profits are expected to renew their licenses every five years, or otherwise they are automatically revoked. On Jan 1, 2022 the current Indian government revoked the licenses of 6000 non-profits, one third of who were up for a renewal, including major organizations like Oxfam India, Delhi University, and Jamia Millia University (New Delhi). Srinath shares that although the licenses of these institutions were reinstated after much public furor, so far around 179 non-profits have had their licenses cancelled due to bureaucratic bottlenecks, despite having applied for renewal.

[291] As per the 2020 amendment brought forth by the Modi government, NGOs registered under the FCRA can receive foreign contributions only if they have managed to open a FCRA-designated bank with the State Bank of India (SBI) main branch in New Delhi. Since April 2021, foreign contributions can only be received in this bank account. Many non-profits have struggled to open accounts because the SBI office insists on compliances that are not part of the official standard operating procedures. According to one such inconvenient compliance, every trustee of an NGO has to open an SBI account. Those non-profits who have successfully managed to open bank accounts have to wait for the orders of the Ministry of Home Affairs to operationalize the bank. Moreover, under the new amendment, there is a ban on "onward granting" by NGOs registered under FCRA. This means that non-profits cannot provide a grant or sub-grant to any other institution in India from foreign sources received in a FCRA-designated bank account, even if the sub-grantee is FCRA approved (Centre for Advancement and Philanthropy 2021).

services agencies committed to holding the government apparatus accountable.[292] On the one hand, the Modi government has been lauding the free entry of massive foreign corporations to India and hailed for encouraging liberalized investment flow. On the other hand, it has been increasingly introducing new restrictions on the work of agencies that challenge its populist politics, such as the FCRA. This arm-twisting by the Indian government made it even harder for an already financially precarious institution like the GDF to operate. Ironically, an institution created to counter Indian government influence in contemporary Indian dance had to ultimately discontinue its operations due to government suppression.

Unlike the SNA and the MMB, which have been around for some time and are still operating, the GDF had a relatively short run of about 12 years. Regardless of this, the GDF incubated many vital initiatives for contemporary Indian dance that continue to have ripple effects, and, in my opinion, have been far more impactful. Scholar Sarah Lewis (2014) writes that innovative ideas are often counterintuitive such that they can, at first glance, look like a failure. The GDF might be perceived as having been "unsuccessful" on the surface due to the projects it had to discontinue or could not realize. Nonetheless, the activities enabled by the institution generated one of the most alive points in Delhi's dance history, with larger implications for the practice of contemporary dance across India. As an organization with the sole aim to enable contemporary dance practice and a dedicated physical location for carrying out its activities on a regular basis, the GDF was able to build continuity in growing the culture and community around experimental dance. These features made the GDF different from the SNA and the MMB, which promote many cultural forms other than dance and have usually curated temporary, sporadic events for contemporary dance for this reason. I want to highlight

[292] You can also read more about this in a 2016 *The Wire* interview with Indian human rights lawyer, Indira Jaising titled "Modi Government is Using FCRA As a Weapon Against Dissenters."

the many things the grassroots GDF made possible for contemporary dance that the SNA and MMB, as top-down bureaucracies, did not.

Shifting to its own building in Khirkee Extension in June 2012 helped the GDF generate significant traction amongst dancers and dance enthusiasts over the years. Since then, over 2000 people attended classes, programs associated with the festival and residency series, open jams, reading circles, workshops, and other events hosted by the GDF at this location (GDF 2014, 8). The GDF building became a home and laboratory for hundreds of local performers and those visiting from other parts of India and abroad. It was where contemporary dancers engaged in meaningful exchange about dance and politics and learned and unlearned ideas about the body across cultural and generational differences in a generous, not dogmatic way. The latter had unfortunately been the nature of rhetoric at gatherings produced by the SNA and the MMB. To clarify, the space created by the GDF was not always utopian, where everyone got along beautifully. Differences, dissensus, and friction would emerge amongst team members or dancers participating in the GDF initiatives. In light of this, discussions based on the language of needs and feelings, a method of nonviolent communication, were frequently employed at the GDF over the years to resolve many conflicts. The expectation was for people to speak to each other authentically, sans getting defensive and arrive at reasonable solutions that worked for everyone involved.

Notwithstanding, the joy of creating and moving together seemed endless in the two GDF Studios, where dancers kept their practice going and traded techniques and resources with peers, while also evaluating and reflecting upon each other's dances. It was a space for them to take risks and fail, a necessary part of the creative process. The Studios were not just reserved for GDF operations. They were accessible for any dancer to rent at nominal rates for rehearsals or

teaching classes. Offering this amenity was a way for the GDF to contribute to an independent performer's vocation beyond its curated programming. Moreover, the public library located in the GDF building was an opportunity for visiting artists to learn about dance history and delve into academic materials that could assist their creative research. For dancers, the GDF building was also a refuge away from the toils of everyday life, a space to relax, and catch up with friends in the community at the GDF's famous potluck evenings called "kitchen parties." At Khirkee Extension, "dance and site co-produced a locality that was entirely particular and largely incapable of being transported elsewhere," making it a hub where some of the most exciting experimental work in India witnessed its beginnings (Foster 2019, 73). Today, this culture of making art has been kept alive at the building through "Khuli Khirkee" (open window), a co-rented and self-managed arts cooperative of 28 choreographers and theatre-makers from Delhi.[293]

I have observed the transformation of several dancers into dancemakers due to the many opportunities afforded by the GDF. One such initiative, which I have discussed in this chapter, was the GSDR, a series that nurtured younger artists to learn and refine the craft of choreography. Support for emerging choreographers was always a priority for the GDF, but in the case of this project, it was a central mission. Choreographers at critical junctures in their careers were provided access to time, space, money, a network of peers, and mentorship from senior exponents, to develop original, self-authored works. The SNA and the MMB sponsor the production of new work too, but this assemblage of support for the creative process in particular was unique to the GDF. With the development of the MA at Ambedkar University, the GDF attempted to "make permanent" the offerings of the GSDR.

[293] According to the website, artists can use the premises of Khuli Khirkee for rehearsals, classes, workshops, photography shoots, intimate performances, and rest and recuperation (Khuli Khirkee, "About").

The GDF's Ignite series had many valuable implications, but one of its most vital functions was generating a platform that increased the visibility of diverse contemporary dance forms.[294] There is no real evidence of how the SNA and the MMB might have been deliberately working to generate interest in contemporary dance amongst the Indian public, even though it can be argued that by sponsoring or co-sponsoring events, some of which were open to public, they did somehow try to educate the audience about contemporary dance. In contrast, building audiences for contemporary dance was a key intention. For the GDF, and Ignite exemplified its concrete strategies for doing the same. In its 2015 assessment report, the GDF cited that the number of audience members for Ignite increased from approximately 2500 during the 2010 edition to around 10,000 in the current edition, with almost all performances witnessing full occupancy and some of the smaller festival venues going over capacity (*IGNITE! 2015 Narrative Report*, 17). In a 2015 interview with journalist Priya Kanungo, which aired on Doordarshan National's YouTube channel, Raikhy delightedly pointed to the growth in audiences for contemporary dance between the 2009 GSDR and 2015 Ignite. He commented that during the first residency, he and Lall had to coax their parents, friends, and acquaintances to come watch the showcase. Whereas, the third edition of Ignite brought in an entirely new cluster of people interested in contemporary dance and its discourse.

An aspect of the GDF's work that I did not examine in this chapter is its engagement with research and writing. The SNA claims to provide grants for studies and publications in the performing arts. However, it has done little to sponsor these for contemporary Indian dance. In contrast, the GDF helped produce research and writing projects disclosing the concerns and methods associated with creating contemporary choreography in India. One prominent example

[294] One way that the GDF ensured that the festival was accessible to more people was by pricing the tickets for performances within the range of Rs. 150-300 (approx. US $ 2-4), and keeping all other events free.

of this was the "Gati Reader" project that eventually materialized into the 2016 book, *Tilt Pause Shift: Dance Ecologies in India*, an edited volume featuring essays on myriad topics, like dealing with the creative process, questions of embodiment and aesthetic periodization, the debate of tradition vs. innovation, issues of economic and cultural policy, and the politics of reception.[295] Aligned with most GDF initiatives, this book addresses aesthetic creation in relation to its conditions of production. The GDF continued the work of commissioning new writing through the launch of *Indent Journal* in 2018, a digital publication on the politics of performance and the moving body, joining the likes of Attakkalari which also a few years ago launched its own online journal on contemporary dance called *Ligament*.[296] The GDF hoped publishing would become another channel to broaden public knowledge about the cultural practices of contemporary dancers.

The environment enabled by the GDF, through its various programs and at its site in Khirkee, inspired others to take up similar efforts. For instance, Dave started "Dance Dialogues" in 2011, a Mumbai-based networking initiative for local dancers and cultural institutions. A collective of Bengaluru-based performers established The Kha Foundation in 2013, which facilitates an arts education initiative, a mentorship program in choreography, improvisation and contact jams, and classes in contemporary dance and somatics. Moreover, Dhar, taking inspiration from the work we did as part of the GDF's infrastructure revitalization project, was instrumental in building and designing the OddBird Theatre in 2015, a curated performance

[295] Lall also commissioned me between April and July 2012 to document the creative process of dancers participating in that year's GSDR with the intention to generate a bank of culturally-specific issues and vocabularies of contemporary dance in India. The final product was a visual and textual guide on an online digital archive called *Pad.ma*.

[296] While Indian publications like *Narthaki.com*, *Nartanam Dance Journal*, *Sruti* magazine, *Marg* magazine, and the quarterly journals by the NCPA and the SNA have addressed contemporary dance, *Indent* and *Ligament* have exclusively focused on issues concerning the field and are editorialized with the intent to make the writings accessible to diverse readership.

venue designed as a flexible black box theatre in Delhi, away from the Mandi House area. Until its recent closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, OddBird was becoming a prominent centre for presenting experiments across multiple artistic genres, enjoying a burgeoning audience. A few years later in 2017, Basement 21, a collective of contemporary artists based in Chennai, launched a contemporary dance festival called March Dance. There are many more examples of such efforts started by individuals in their local cities due to what the GDF set in motion and made possible. The GDF was the catalyst and the blueprint.

Unlike the SNA and the MMB, the GDF did not tend to prescribe the aesthetic directions of contemporary Indian dance. Rather, the creative requirements and journeys of contemporary dancers informed its actions. As I have illuminated in my sections on its residency and festival series, the organization promoted a broad spectrum of inquiries. Nonetheless, the GDF rendered specific associations for the practice due to its interventions. Through the GDF, the contemporary found grounding in a particular locale and yet engaged with the global. The institution tied the contemporary to an approach to dance-making that centered the individual simultaneously as it harnessed the collective. The kind of choreographic productions it enabled, linked the contemporary with a democratic and progressive force. At the GDF, the contemporary became a site to critically engage with the creative process *and* the contingencies that make it possible (Pouillaude 2010). The GDF integrated the philosophical goal of connecting art to life advanced by the contemporary dance movement in the subcontinent into the creation of institutionalized structures of support.

Conclusion

In this study, I have demonstrated how the Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA), Max Mueller Bhavan (MMB), and Gati Dance Forum (GDF) have actively shaped, defined, and produced the contemporary in Indian dance—attaching different values to it over time—through their specific institutional actions. I uncovered how their evolving engagements with contemporary Indian dance reflect changes in their organizational missions, administrative and financial structures, and their relationship with the artist, which, in turn, were shaped by shifts within the subcontinent's modern political economy. For all the three organizations, the Indian contemporary has been related to the creation of new dances. To them, it has variably signified innovations within heritage dance practices, developing a new dance language, a field that highly regards individual expression and a self-reflexive approach to dance-making, and a transnational and interdisciplinary genre. In many instances, the three institutions also considered the contemporary in Indian dance as holding the potential of mobilizing progressive politics and a site for expressing minoritarian views and perspectives that question the status quo.

The SNA included the contemporary within its official categorization of Indian dance and thus consecrated it as a form of national significance, even though the agency has principally favored heritage dance practices. The SNA's recognition of the classification as part of its decision to promote diverse forms of Indian expression infused contemporary dance with a symbolic democratic value. The SNA was one of the foremost cultural institutions in postcolonial India to define the contours of contemporary dance at a discursive level. The ideology of nationalist revivalism dictated the SNA's original approach to delineating the contemporary; hence, the institution prescribed that the evolution of new forms derive from aesthetics and traditions that directly connect to India. However, the SNA increasingly

acknowledged the importance of intercultural formations of contemporary dance to express India's modern image and capacity to compete globally in the spheres of culture and economy with the arrival of neoliberalism. In this case, contemporary dance became a medium to crystalize India as an "arrived presence" and the "future" of innovation. Overall, in the case of the SNA, contemporary dance carried a national and international function.

However, the agency has also remained ambivalent about the status of the form. While the SNA on and off hosted or sponsored events on contemporary dance, the institution's long-term investment in developing the practice, such as creating resources and infrastructure for training, creation, and networking, has been lacking. This dereliction is considered by many to be associated with the bureaucratic inefficiency and red tape endemic to many government-controlled institutions in India. Lastly, the SNA's designation of contemporary dance as a distinct genre has made no room for fluidities and complexities within practices of artists who base their innovations on traditional sources. In comparison with the MMB and the GDF, it clearly reflects an institution that generally failed to incorporate artists within its decision-making.

The MMB played an instrumental role in the efflorescence of contemporary Indian dance in the 1980s and 1990s. The German institute has enabled art forms in the subcontinent that, in its perception, potentially hold democratic tendencies. Thus we can assume that as the MMB chose to patronize the contemporary in the Indian dance realm, it carries this value. Over the two decades mentioned above, the MMB was one of the only major organizations in India that created substantial forums dedicated to critically engaging the subject of Indian dance innovations. For the MMB, the contemporary in Indian dance was not a genre per se, but indexed a group of individuals who sought to experiment with the movement and art traditions they had

inherited. Before the grassroots activities propelled by institutions like the GDF and Attakkalari Centre of Movement Arts, the events curated by the MMB offered Indian choreographers the rare opportunity to gather with their peers from across the country and abroad, exchange ideas and strategies for approaching contemporary work, and contemplate the future directions of an emerging field.

Through the activities during this period, the MMB vouched for transcultural experiments as a favorable dimension of the Indian contemporary, which coincided with the SNA recognizing the importance of this particular mode in anticipation of the Indian state opening up its economy as part of neoliberal reforms. For the MMB, a sense of individualism (that allowed choreographers to question traditional and communitarian norms) and an openness to exploration and change were needed to propel contemporary Indian dance forward. But often, the MMB's intention for these interventions was to ordain that the development of the Indian contemporary measure up to Western contemporary dance's aesthetics, ideals, and professional structures, reflecting the consolidation of power imbalances shaped by the Cold War and Global North-South relations within the cultural sphere. The institution's suggestion, reflecting historicist thinking, assumed the West as the originator of dance modernity and framed the contemporary in Indian dance as a "deferred horizon" while marking Western contemporary dance as its "future."

The residues of this particular dynamic still show up today in certain programs initiated by the MMB. But with the dawning of a multipolar world in the twenty-first century, the MMB tried to adopt a more culturally-sensitive approach to diplomatic patronage, guided by the local concerns and conditions of Indian artists instead of enforcing a Western cultural agenda. The MMB continues to initiate cross-border exchanges of knowledge between Indian choreographers and their counterparts in Germany, but they have increasingly given Indian artists the authority

over how to organize events. By deciding to play a supporting role while supplying monetary and non-monetary aid to initiatives designed by contemporary dance and dance organizations to evolve their creative practice and surrounding performance ecosystem, the MMB has proven to be more effective in the field's growth.

Intentionally founded to nurture contemporary dance in India, the GDF made the most impact in realizing resources, opportunities, and systems required to advance the field than the other two organizations. As a grassroots project led by dancers themselves, the GDF exemplified the adeptness of artists in acquiring multiple sources of support to build an alternative institutional practice that nurtured contemporary dance without being coopted by state, foreign, or market interests. It was a monumental example of artists organizing themselves to generate a creative ecology that reflected their needs, motivations, and desires for practice. In little over a decade that the GDF existed, the institution established a formal network for previously scattered and isolated contemporary dancers so they could dialogue, debate, and trade choreographic and professional tools with each other in a community setting. The GDF attempted to standardize structures conducive to the learning, production, and dissemination of contemporary dance and was able to amplify public engagement with the field. All these efforts assured that contemporary dance no longer operated in the margins, but performed a central role in Indian cultural praxis. What limited the GDF, however, was navigating the financial and regulatory contingencies of running a nonprofit (under neoliberal and fascist conditions) and the exhaustion of a small collective chronically working to mobilize ambitious projects for contemporary dance while also trying to attend to their individual creative pursuits. Even though the GDF had to eventually close doors, its cultural footprint has been massive, encouraging the inception of

similar organizations and programs that ensure contemporary Indian dance continues to proliferate as a valid form of expression in the twenty-first century.

For the GDF, the contemporary in Indian dance implied originally-devised choreographic inquiries, which is what the institution was committed to cultivating. Unlike the SNA and the MMB, the GDF did not try to fix the cultural-geographical boundaries for the aesthetics, ideas, and principles that choreographers could distill to produce contemporary work. The GDF accepted the transnational reality of contemporary Indian dance production in the age of neoliberal globalization. Based on observing the productions that the GDF presented and helped to incubate, it seemed that the institution distinguished the contemporary as a critical lens that drives choreographers to interrogate the body, social and political subjects, as well as the relationship between dance and society. The contemporary also became a springboard to address current structural issues surrounding dancers' creative output. Through the activities facilitated by the GDF, contemporary dance was also interwoven in the political project of maintaining the democratic fabric of India. While the institution supported individual creators, it also contributed to building the contemporary in Indian dance as a collective and collaborative practice.

The SNA, MMB, and GDF respectively embody the interventions of a national government body, a foreign cultural agency, and a grassroots arts nonprofit. Their examples can help us understand the actions of similar organizations involved in patronizing contemporary Indian dance. At the same time, the three case studies are distinct and situated within a larger landscape, alongside many other institutions that have engaged in the making of the contemporary in particular ways. For instance, I am curious about how contemporary Indian dance has featured within the discourse and practice of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, an organization established by the government in 1950 to cultivate international diplomacy. As

foundations set up by multinational companies like the Tata Trusts have become critical incubators of contemporary Indian performance, I am also interested in researching how the latter interfaces with the former's particular interests in Indian modernity and "corporate social responsibility."[297]

There are also different environments in which contemporary Indian dance is continually being constituted—in screen dances, social media spaces, private studios, galleries, museums, and so on. While my dissertation has focused on contemporary concert dance, there are commercial/competitive dance contexts, such as dance reality shows, where contemporary dance appears as a distinct genre. Contemporary concert dance and contemporary commercial dance may appear very similar at the level of movement vocabulary; however, their aesthetic and political motivations are highly opposed to each other (Kwan 2017, Foster 2019).[298] At the same time, many choreographers fluidly move back and forth between these two worlds while navigating the current market-driven performance economy in India. I would like to investigate

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[297] According to the information on the webpage titled "About Tata Trusts," the body is amongst India's oldest, non-secretarian philanthropic organizations which owns two-thirds of the stock-holding of Tata Sons Limited, the apex company of the Tata group of companies. The wealth that accrues from this asset supports a variety of causes, institutions, and individuals in a wide spectrum of fields, including the performing arts. As per the institutional logic, the profits that Tata companies earn, go back to serving the communities they operate in. Through grant-making, direct implementation, and co-partnership strategies, the Trusts, for many decades, have "focuse[d] on supporting artistic practices that are emerging, underrepresented and neglected within the spectrum of theatre, music and dance" (Tata Trusts, "Arts and Culture – Performing arts"). In addition to funding the GDF for the pilot run of the MA, the Trusts have also provided institutional support to Attakkalari to establish training and practice of contemporary dance in India (Ibid.). Between 2011 and 2020, Godrej India Culture Lab, founded by another major multinational conglomerate from India, the Godrej Group, curated a series of programs and opportunities across different art mediums "to challenge existing notions of culture and encourage dialogue and experimentation" to explore issues and themes related to contemporary India (Godrej India Culture Lab, "About Us").

[298] For instance, contemporary commercial dance often emphasizes the commodification of the female subject to forward commercial interests. Whereas some contemporary concert dance practitioners' rejection of the Brahmanical patriarchy permeating the form and content of many Indian traditional dances has led to this field's association with a feminist praxis (Chatterjea 2004, Chakravorty 2017, Sarkar Munsi 2017). Moreover, contemporary dance on dance reality shows promotes an "anything goes" attitude, paying no homage to any aesthetic tradition or historical lineage and instead performers use whatever movement idioms that will help them to entertain their audiences and win the competition (Kwan 2017). Practitioners of contemporary concert dance might also cross-pollinate different movement idioms, but most often they are overtly conscious of the way they advance or subvert the forms they inherit.

how contemporary dance is cast in these contexts that signal India's shift to consumerist modernity and becoming technologically-savvy since economic liberalization in 1991 (Chakravorty 2017). In recent times, spaces in India typically associated with the exhibition and circulation of visual arts, such as the Experimenter Gallery (Kolkata), Devi Art Foundation (Gurugram) and Kochi-Muziris Biennale, have become productive sites for contemporary choreographers to expand their formal explorations. Presenting at these spaces has helped them magnify the visibility of their work through access to large volumes of capital and a new audience base attached to the contemporary art market.[299] Studying this phenomenon is a promising venture for future research, and explorations of this subject will contribute to a growing scholarship on the aesthetic and political-economic implications of contemporary dance entering "white cube" institutions in the twenty-first century.[300]

Since 2014, under the Modi government, India has witnessed the descent and decimation of public institutions that were established to cultivate the arts, encourage innovation and conservation of traditions, and strengthen the country's vibrant plurality.[301] The current ruling establishment glorifies a monolithic view of culture based on Hindutva, an ideology seeking to

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[299] There has been a spectacular expansion of commercial art fairs, international art exhibitions, private auction houses, museums, and galleries in India as a consequence of the explosion of wealth and growing riches ushered in by the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s. To read more about this, see: Meiqin Wang (2008), Manuela Ciotti (2012), Geeta Kapur (2013), and Sonal Khullar (2015).

[300] For detailed discussion on dance and museums, read: Douglas Crimp (2008), Shannon Jackson (2012 and 2014), Claire Bishop (2011, 2014, 2018), Gabriele Brandstetter (2015), and Thomas DeFrantz (2018). The 2013 digital project initiated by *Critical Correspondence* and 2014 issue of *Dance Research Journal* edited by Mark Franko and André Lepecki also focus on this subject. Additionally, mainstream news and online platforms have engaged with issues related to this topic, such as the articles of Claudia La Rocco (2010), Gia Kourlas (2014), and Hilarie M. Sheets (2015) for *The New York Times*; Sara Wookey's 2012 article for the *Dance Magazine*; Caroline Elbaor (2017) for *artnet news*; and Siobhan Burke (2019) for *Art and Education*.

[301] To read more about the misuse, deterioration, and collapse of public institutions under the Modi government, see the following press articles: Ananya Bhattacharyya (2015), Sangeeta Barooh Pisharoty (2016), Vikram Singh (2018), Ashok Vajpeyi (2018), Rahul Mukherjee et al. (2019), Vidya Krishnan (2021), Anjana Rajan (2021), and Shuddhabrata Sengupta (2022).

establish the hegemony of Hindus and Hinduism in India. To attain this objective, it has interfered within the arena of arts, driving diversity in creativity and imagination to the margins.[302] The Modi government has additionally proceeded to erode India's democratic fabric, bridling artistic freedom, along with other kinds of freedom, such that those who stand opposed to its agenda are being targeted through various forms of coercion (from personal threats, stringent FCRA regulations, censorship on the pretext of religious sentiments hurt to ruthlessly deploying sedition law). When critical thinking, dissent, pluralism, and secularism are under grave threat within the public institutional framework of culture, I ponder over what the future holds for contemporary dance praxis, a discipline which historically has embraced and advanced these ideals in the realm of the Indian performing arts?

[302] As I disclose in my chapter on the SNA, government-supported or funded cultural institutions, tend to operate under government pressure and often align with its politics and policies. But the current government has exercised aggressive control, including appointing loyal political candidates to head arts institutions who would unquestioningly propagate its ideological agenda.

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